

London's leading
day school
for specific learning
difficulties

Fairley
House



...if they can't learn
the way we teach,
we teach the way
they learn.





'I can't...'

Two words that are agonisingly familiar to most children who come here to Fairley House.

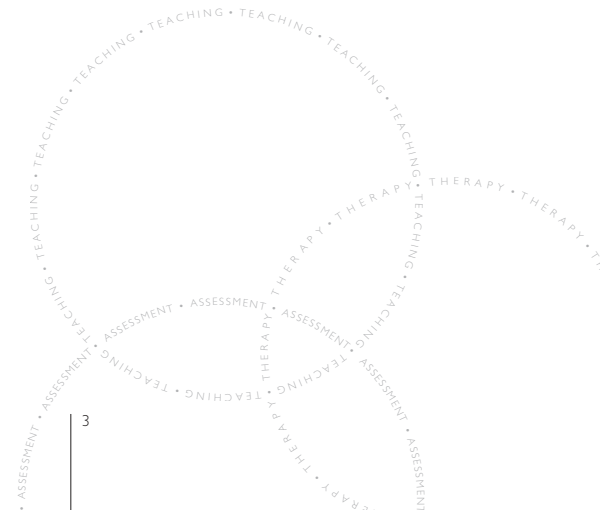
Two words that sum up a world in which reading or writing or adding up, tying a shoelace, hitting a ball or riding a bike, are things other people do.

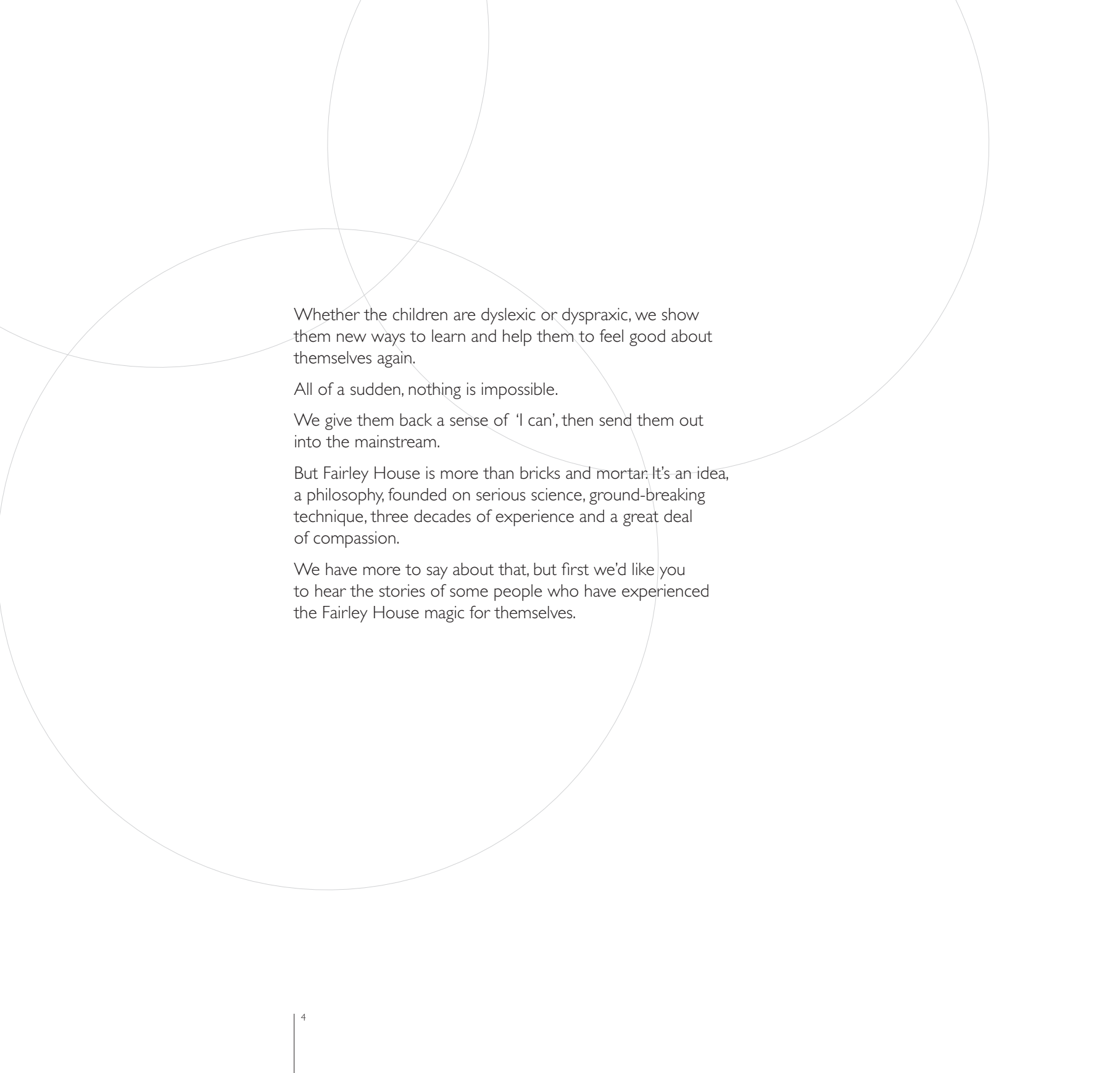
Two words that are fraught with failure, with the prospect of lives half-lived.

But it needn't be so.

Here at Fairley House we find out what children can do – and teach them accordingly.

If they can't learn the way we teach, we have to teach the way they learn.





Whether the children are dyslexic or dyspraxic, we show them new ways to learn and help them to feel good about themselves again.

All of a sudden, nothing is impossible.

We give them back a sense of 'I can', then send them out into the mainstream.

But Fairley House is more than bricks and mortar. It's an idea, a philosophy, founded on serious science, ground-breaking technique, three decades of experience and a great deal of compassion.

We have more to say about that, but first we'd like you to hear the stories of some people who have experienced the Fairley House magic for themselves.





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Assessment

To really help the children who come here we have to know exactly how they tick. Before we take them on we assess them thoroughly. Then we pull together everything we've found out about them into an individual education plan (known as an IEP).

This will typically involve an educational psychologist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, and teachers.

Every one of the children here has his or her own plan – no two are the same. Throughout their time here we fine-tune progress against their plans in regular meetings with parents, staff and the children themselves.

Over the years we've learnt an enormous amount about dyslexia and dyspraxia. We bring all that knowledge to bear in our understanding of, and planning for, each individual child at Fairley House.





Teaching

Once we've understood what they need, it's the unique Fairley House combination of teaching and therapy that allows the children to overcome their personal obstacles.

All the evidence – and we have a lot of it – tells us that multisensory learning achieves what traditional learning methods simply can't. So if getting to grips with maths means chucking tennis balls round the classroom, that's what we'll do. If it takes press-ups to understand Shakespeare, down we go.

People who teach here have to be creative. There's no room for chalk-and-talk, no sitting behind a desk in a silent classroom. Our teachers need boundless energy and bags of enthusiasm to develop the tricks and strategies that give children the self-confidence and framework they need for learning.

Thanks to functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and genetic research, today we have more insight into the distinctive pattern of brain functions that come with specific learning difficulties. Our teachers are knowledgeable about this because they learn about it here on the national OCR accredited course we now run.

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Therapy

Full-time speech and language therapists and occupational therapists play just as important a role at Fairley House as teachers. Therapists and teachers work together and plan classes together. They tackle individual children's needs together.

Learning becomes not just visual and auditory but tactile and kinaesthetic. Therapists learn about the curriculum. Teachers learn about the therapies. And children learn as much from rolling on giant balls or swinging in slings as they do from counting with sweets or spelling with dinosaurs.



Sarah Lederman

'I have a really strong memory of Eddie Izzard coming to Fairley House wearing eye-liner and a dress,' says artist, Sarah Lederman. 'It was quite shocking, but it was also really nice because he explained about being different so well, and he told us how clever we all were.'

Today Sarah paints watery, dreamlike pictures of female figures that have won her much acclaim for one so young. A graduate of Chelsea College of Art, she was 2009 winner of the Catlin Prize for up-and-coming young artists, and today she is one of five resident artists at the Centre for Recent Drawing, in Highbury.

But when she first went to Fairley House, aged seven, she was on a completely different planet to other people. 'I was living in a world of total fantasy. And I just couldn't comprehend how people could read and write.'

She laughs a lot at the memories now, though they were probably less funny at the time. In fact, she had difficulty relating to other people in any conventional sense at all. Nevertheless, Fairley House worked its magic. 'The teachers managed to get onto my wavelength,' she explains. 'They understood that we were bright and could express ourselves in different ways – through acting or drawing, for example. They had such a different way of teaching, pitching the classes at our level of ability, not our age, and helping us relate to the curriculum through the things we were good at. I remember learning about the ancient world by making pots and being really inspired by that rich Egyptian blue.'

Sarah believes she owes a great deal to the school. 'Thanks to them I understand what dyslexia and dyspraxia really are, and I'm so lucky to have been taught a different way of going about things. Best of all, they kept telling us we were clever. It helped my family, too, because they're all dyslexic. They learnt a lot about things in their own childhoods through my experience at Fairley House.'



Gareth Austin

A first-class law degree, articles with one of the big City law firms, and now a job as a compliance lawyer with one of Europe's largest energy producers – not the kind of career progression that most people would associate with a dyslexic person.

Yet Gareth Austin remembers a time when he was in an almost constant daydream. 'That was the way I experienced dyslexia as a child,' he says. 'If I didn't understand things my mind just drifted away.' Gareth was one of twins. Both were diagnosed with dyslexia and, aged 11, enrolled at Fairley House. It was a life-changing move. 'The classes were much smaller so you couldn't just hide at the back and dream,' he recalls. 'It was also a very safe environment. They were enormously patient. And I began to realise that there were different ways of learning.'

After Fairley House, Gareth moved on to secondary school. 'There were many more people there and much less one-to-one teaching. It was a bit of a culture shock at first,' he remembers. 'But I did well at GCSEs and although I didn't quite get the A-level grades I wanted, I still got a place at London Guildhall University. Fairley House definitely laid the foundations for that.'

It was only at university that Gareth discovered his real capacity for hard work. Realising he was going to have to pull out all the stops to qualify for law school, he set himself the goal of a first-class degree and the rest, one could say, is history.

Now, since his real work is thinking and analysing, the vestiges of dyslexia cause him no real difficulties. 'My time at Fairley House was absolutely crucial,' Gareth reflects. 'It gave me the confidence to feel that the way other people approach things may not be right for you – and to understand that the method isn't the most important thing, anyway. It's the result that counts.'





Harry Warren

Harry Warren has a full day ahead of him at Fairley House Junior School. He'll be helping with Maths and PE classes. He brims with enthusiasm for his role as a teaching assistant, helping other children deal with the challenges he himself faced not so many years ago.

Harry first came to Fairley House aged five, after one year in the reception class at another school. 'They didn't know what to do with me,' he recalls. 'I couldn't read or write and I could barely speak – I couldn't pronounce consonants and my older brother had to interpret for me. I was angry all the time.'

At Fairley House, the tantrums and frustration soon subsided. 'It's a safe environment,' he says. 'Bullying is non-existent and you don't get told off. You can try loads of different things till you find the one that works for you.'

Within a short time his confidence and reading ability had increased to the point where, aged seven, he gained a place at Dulwich College Junior School. Today he is 19 years old and has recently left Dulwich College with excellent A-level grades in History, Politics and Theatre Studies. He plans to study history and politics at university.

Harry believes one of Fairley House's greatest strengths is that children are encouraged to go at their own pace and discover things for themselves. 'It means that whenever someone makes an improvement, however small, it's a bonus – and that's a terrific boost to people's confidence.'

Fairley House magic

Children who cannot read and write as easily as their peers can feel they are stupid, lose confidence and self-esteem and so give up. Children feel stigmatised when withdrawn from class for extra help at their existing schools, or discouraged by doing easier work than others.

At Fairley House, we believe the solution is to give your child a level playing field; a school where everyone has similar difficulties. Through succeeding, some for the first time in their schooling, children can recapture their self-esteem and confidence.

The majority stay for two to three years but some with a greater level of need may stay onto Key Stage Four. Time and again I have seen the combination of insightful assessment, individual teaching and specialised therapy work its magic on our children. Through this, the trajectory of their lives is altered. What once seemed impossible is no longer so. Having worked for over fifteen years in the field of dyslexia and dyspraxia, I understand just how wonderful that is for parents and children alike.

Michael Taylor
Headmaster







...and all of a sudden, nothing is impossible.



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