



Four children, four different personalities, one school to address each individual need. That's what Mark and Helen have discovered at Dronfield Infant School

Helen and Mark's three daughters have all attended Dronfield Infant School. Lily, 12, Darcey, nine and Phoebe, seven, have now moved up to Junior and Secondary school, and Jude, five, has just started in Reception.

Stand out choice

Only Jude is still at Dronfield but having been delighted with their older children's experience of the school, Helen and Mark know that he will benefit in the same way as his siblings. "We moved to the area mainly because of the schools, and having visited several, it was Dronfield which stood out for us," says Mark. "There was an overall impression of warmth and we felt sure it was a good environment for our children."

The whole child

Helen agrees: "The emphasis is not solely on academic achievement but on provision for the whole child. We have no complaints whatsoever about their education, but what we really appreciate is that every child's own needs are addressed and catered for effectively."

Support

Mark and Helen cite instances where this approach has been invaluable to their children, including when Phoebe was struggling following the upheaval during the Covid pandemic. "Phoebe was quite badly affected and for a while was unable to speak with adults, but the school helped a great deal with her social development. Now, you would not know that she had had any problems at all, and she is back to her happy, sociable self." Additionally, both Darcey and Lily received speech and language support in Reception, which has made a big difference.

Overcoming challenges

Like every other school, Dronfield had major challenges to face during the pandemic but Helen and Mark were impressed with how well the school coped. "They sent us worksheets as well as videos the staff had made themselves so that the children still felt engaged and able to keep up with their learning as far as possible. I really don't think the children suffered too much, despite all the difficulties."

Physical wellbeing

As a sports coach, Mark is aware of the value of physical education and although Dronfield has limited outside space, he acknowledges the school's commitment to exercise and sport provision. "They make sure that the children have access to off-site facilities such as the local leisure centre and the English Institute of Sport, and they make the most of the school yard to provide an adventure trail and play equipment. I'm happy to see that the children's physical wellbeing is prioritised as well as everything else."

Positive results

In the same way as some other parents, Mark and Helen had reservations about the introduction of mixed-year classes, but are now convinced that it has had an unexpectedly positive effect. "It's great for the little ones, who look up to and learn from the older ones, and those in Year 2 like to take the Year 1 children under their wings. The system means that their friendship pool is enhanced and they often play together outside school, too."

Believe in instinct

As well as attending Dronfield herself for a short while as a child, Helen has also had a career working in schools, so she has a personal insight into what she wanted for her own children. "It comes down to gut instinct, really," she says. "We both knew straightaway that Dronfield was the right place for our children's early education, and we were right."