

As the father of a disabled child, Steve is so grateful that his daughter's school cares for her as much as he does himself



Steve Ketteringham and his partner, Joanne, live in Newcastle. Their youngest child, Lily, is six years old and a pupil at Kingston Park Primary School.

Access to mainstream education

Steve moved from Doncaster two years ago to join Joanne and her children in Newcastle and one of his first priorities was to find a suitable school for his daughter Lily. Lily has cerebral palsy and is diplegic, suffering from severe mobility difficulties which require the use of a walking frame. Although ideally Lily would have attended the same school as her stepsister, the facilities there could not have addressed Lily's needs and the family were recommended instead to Kingston Park Primary.

"We had the option of a specialist school for children with disabilities but I felt that Lily was more than capable of managing in mainstream education as long as she was able to access the appropriate care," says Steve. "What I saw at Kingston Park seemed to address everything we needed in every way and in retrospect, I cannot think of any other setting which could have so perfectly answered our requirements."

Active support

Kingston Park sets aside a number of dedicated places for children with special educational needs and was prepared to allocate one of these to Lily. "Apart from the professional and reassuring welcome we were given, I liked the whole atmosphere of the school," Steve remembers. "From a practical point of view the layout was accessible for a child with limited mobility, but in addition we were made to feel that Lily would be actively supported in every way."

On-site medical care

It would be an understatement to say that this has proved to be the case. As Steve explains: "There is a dedicated Physiotherapy Suite where Lily has regular sessions with qualified practitioners, an Orthotics Clinic which can cater for when she needs new support for weak joints, and we have regular meetings with NHS staff, the school SENCO and Nurse, and with her teachers. All this ensures that Lily is receiving the medical care she needs without having to attend hospital appointments, and that her educational needs are being addressed at the same time."

No compromise

Because Lily has to spend a significant amount of her school day in therapy, the school makes sure she doesn't have to fall behind in her classwork. "Lily has a great deal of challenges to overcome and it was not surprising that she had some catching up to do academically," says Steve. "At Kingston Park she has been given one-to-one sessions to make sure her schoolwork didn't suffer and she is now back up to target. What I find impressive is that Kingston Park takes the needs of children like Lily very seriously, concentrating on both their physical and academic welfare and making sure neither of these are compromised. Most importantly, Lily has never been made to feel out of place; the policy of complete inclusion means that she feels comfortable and at home, and no different to her friends in the ways which matter."

Complete trust

As far as Steve is concerned, having the complete support of his daughter's school is beyond price. "For the parent of a disabled child life is hard enough but being able to trust your child's school is half the battle. Lily is able to join in with virtually everything the other children do, whether with PE lessons or the school disco, because her teachers are prepared to make the effort to help and include her. Lily may have her own special needs but she is also one of the class, just like any of the others."

Effective and sensitive

Lily is in the process of recovering from pioneering surgery in America which has significantly improved her chances of being able to walk unaided. Her rehabilitation is being facilitated by Kingston Park Primary as her teachers are adapting to her physical and educational requirements. Steve says: "She is being given extra tuition to make up for the time lost in class, and she has on-going support for her mobility issues. I am hugely comforted that my daughter is being cared for in such an effective and sensitive way and believe that Kingston Park is the best possible environment for her. I am proud of Lily, and proud that she has been fortunate enough to experience this very special school environment."



Children say:

Lily: "I love going school, reading, writing and making up stories. My teachers are really good and look after me. I am really excited to be speaking in the nativity play again this year!"

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