



Chris and Claire Gordon-Thomas live in Halifax with their daughter, Megan, who is seven

Chris is proud to be able to make his own sporting contribution to Whitehill Community Academy



The right place at the right time

Like most parents, Chris and Claire investigated several schools when looking for the right place for their daughter, and also like most parents they had open minds about what they wanted. It was when they went to look round Whitehill Community Academy that they found what they still feel was completely the right choice. "There was something about the atmosphere of the place which really appealed to us," says Chris. "It's not easy to pinpoint anything particular but our gut instinct told us that this was where we wanted Megan to go."

Enthusiasm

Currently in Year 3 Megan is, according to her delighted parents, achieving very well. "At seven she's already reading books aimed at much older children, and we have absolutely no concerns whatever about her progress in that, or any other subject," says Chris. "What's more, she thoroughly enjoys the whole learning process and that is down to the teaching staff who are all enthusiastic and very involved with the children. Achievements are praised and celebrated by awarding certificates for good work and good behaviour, and the children respond by wanting to do their best."

Listening to parents

Whilst Chris and Claire have never had any particular concerns about any aspect of Megan's welfare at school, they are confident that if a problem did arise they would be actively encouraged to discuss it. "It's very much an open-door policy," explains Claire. "Parents are given every opportunity to be involved with the life of the school and are always listened to. The fact that we have never had any issues with Megan's work or her happiness says it all."

Helping parents to help their children

The close relationship which Whitehill maintains with families is fostered in several ways. Regular Open Days where parents can see at first-hand what their children have done in school, a weekly assembly to which parents are invited, and Workshops which show parents how their children are being taught all offer the chance for parents to be fully involved. "The Workshops show us the teaching methods used so that we can apply the same techniques when we support the children at home," Claire explains. "It keeps us in touch, and helps us to help our children."

Family participation

There is another way the school encourages family participation and is something which is very close to Chris's heart: "The After-School Clubs, run by both staff members and parent volunteers, are a big part of the school's offer and a very valuable one," he says. "There is something on every afternoon, and Megan herself does Yoga, Running and Football - which is a good thing as I run the Girl's Football Club!" Chris was approached by the Headteacher's son to join him in running a club which had been set up specifically for the girls, and last year the Whitehill Girl's Team won a local tournament. "The all-round enthusiasm of the teaching and administrative staff is infectious," believes Chris. "It makes everyone want to take part and, in my case, want to give something back to a school which has done so much for my daughter."

A pleasant learning environment

It is quite clear that Chris is completely committed to Whitehill but he did have one minor concern when he first went to visit.

"If I'm completely honest, I wasn't very impressed with the look of the building which seemed a bit bleak, so I have nothing but admiration for the way the Caretaker has transformed the grounds. He has worked so hard to make a lovely and attractive environment which the children respect by helping to keep it clean and tidy. Pleasant surroundings certainly play a part in making a successful learning environment, and it's clear that this is recognised by the school."

Children say

Megan herself has a very positive view of Whitehill: "I love learning stuff, I love PE, I love my After-School Clubs and I love my teacher."

And with Claire observing that: "Every day, Megan surprises and delights us," it would seem that Whitehill Community Academy is doing something very good for parents in Calderdale



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