



## **Theresa and Steven have appreciated the way that Thorpe Acre Infant School has effectively and sensitively addressed their son's particular needs**

### **Boys will be boys?**

Whilst Theresa and Steven never had any worries about Olivia, who sailed easily through Thorpe Acre Infant School, when it came to Owen things were a little more complicated. Owen has recently been diagnosed with dyspraxia which means he has difficulty with co-ordination, affecting his mobility and his ability to write clearly. "We started to have a few concerns when he was about three," says Theresa. "We had hospital assessments to try and find out what the problem might be but in the end we put his behaviour down to the fact that he was a boy! It hadn't been a major issue so we weren't overly concerned before he started school."

**Theresa and Steven Ball live in Loughborough with their children Olivia, twelve and Owen, seven.**



## Extra support

Although they had more or less decided that Owen was probably just more than usually active and a bit clumsy, Theresa and Steven weren't altogether surprised when Owen's teacher brought up the subject. "It was the school which really picked it up; obviously they are used to seeing a large amount of children and in a position to realise when something isn't quite right and so we eventually had the diagnosis of dyspraxia. Fortunately, the condition doesn't affect him too badly but he does need a certain amount of extra help, and we are so pleased that Thorpe Acre has offered that support."

## A practical and sensitive approach

One of the first measures the school introduced was a range of pencils, especially designed to be easier to grip and so to help Owen with his writing skills. "Writing is difficult for him, particularly as he also has very bendy joints in his fingers, so he gets physically and mentally tired because of the effort he has to put in," says Theresa. "The new pens helped a lot and it was great that the school were prepared to find ways to address the situation, and they also allocated him additional time with a Learning Support Assistant to make sure he kept up with the others."

Theresa believes that it's not just the practical measures the school has put into place but also the way Owen is treated by the staff which has helped to make sure he is not stigmatised by his condition. "All the teachers treat each child as a person in their own right and address any issues appropriately and sensitively," she explains. "All the children are made to feel special, whatever their capabilities, and are encouraged to do their best, and this approach has certainly given Owen more confidence in himself and increased his self-esteem, which is so important."

## Encouragement without pressure

Although Owen is still not especially keen on handwriting practice - like many children! - Theresa is confident that his teachers will let her know if they have any concerns and in the meantime, Owen continues to make excellent progress.

"The emphasis is on encouragement without pressurising and it is certainly working for Owen," says Theresa. "He genuinely enjoys school, is doing well and has lots of friends and I have no reason to believe that he would get better support elsewhere."

## Different children, same opportunities

Even though his dyspraxia affects both his fine and gross motor skills, Owen is a keen participant in PE lessons and is currently a member of the lunchtime Cross Country Running Club. "Again, with the emphasis on encouragement, Owen would not be let off certain lessons but given certain allowances, such as wearing trainers instead of plimsolls to support his ankles. I am very impressed with what the school has done for both my children, but especially with how they have been happy to make sure that someone like Owen, who has additional needs, is given just as many opportunities as everyone else."

## Quietly confident

With Owen due to move up to the Junior School next year, obviously Theresa has some concerns but is very hopeful that his transition will be handled carefully. "I already know that his teachers will pass on everything they know about his condition so that the new school setting will be ready to address his needs. Everyone at Thorpe Acre has always been very understanding and accommodating so I am quietly confident they will do what they can to make sure he will continue to be supported when he moves on."



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