

Denise Ross's daughter, Jade, is a student at Essa Academy.

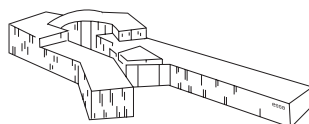
Jade knows the value of **working hard and is **happy** that Essa Academy makes it **fun****

Settling in

Jade Ross is eleven years old and in her second term at Essa Academy. Although she and her parents had a number of secondary schools to choose from they decided on Essa for a variety of reasons. "Essa offered loads of opportunities for me, more than anywhere else we could think of," explains Jade. "it was great that I came to Essa with several of my friends from Primary school but as soon as I joined I made lots more and that has helped me to settle in so well."

Denise admits that for various reasons Essa wasn't her first choice, but she is now very pleased that she was offered a place there for Jade. "The most important thing to my mind is that she is so happy there," she says. "If she didn't enjoy school she wouldn't be doing as well as she is, academically and socially. She's always up early and ready to leave in the morning, and one of the last to leave at the end of the day, and that speaks volumes."

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A gentle transition

Another reason why Jade now feels so at home at Essa is the way Year 7 students are integrated into their new environment gradually through the New Basics curriculum. Coming from a relatively small first school to a much larger setting can be a daunting experience, so new students are largely taught in 'pods' – groups of 60 children in their own dedicated area of the Academy. "I really like the New Basics lessons," says Jade. "I think it has made me much more confident about being in a bigger school because we are all new and it's not as overwhelming as if we had to suddenly fit in with lots of people who are more used to it than we are."

Denise agrees with the gentle transition method. "The way the Year 7 students are gradually integrated into the Academy is clever and effective. It means that they can start on a new level of study without the added pressure of being thrust straight into a new and unfamiliar environment. I think it works really well, and it has certainly suited Jade."

Opportunities for all

One of the other opportunities which Jade identified as being important in the Academy's provision is the regular trips offered and which have for her so far included a visit to Chester Zoo and to Manchester Art Gallery, with a visit to the Lake District coming up shortly. Jade sensibly recognises that these events are something which might not readily be possible for some other children. "It's lovely to be able to go somewhere different with the Academy and it is fun and educational," she says. "It would be quite expensive to do just for a family but the Academy doesn't charge very much so everyone has the chance to go."

As a parent, one of Denise's main priorities is Jade's overall care and she has never had any cause for concern about her daughter's wellbeing and safety. "I have absolute trust in the Academy's approach to the children's interests and know that if either Jade or I had anything that worried us we can always address this with the staff. I believe that the parent/teacher relationship is critical and at Essa it is a close one, and that puts my mind completely at rest."

An interesting and effective way to learn

Jade has thoroughly enjoyed taking part in her 'Rich Task' of British National Identity – one of four topics scheduled throughout Year 7. "We learn about what being British means and we get to talk to local people, write about what we hear, make a film, visit lots of different places and then put it all together in a presentation. It's a really interesting way to learn about the world we live in."

Denise feels that, however the lessons are presented, they are making all the difference when it comes to her daughter's enjoyment of school. "All I am concerned about is Jade's engagement with the Academy and because she has such a great rapport with her friends and her teachers she is getting as much as possible out of the whole experience at Essa. A child who actively enjoys school will achieve, and Jade is meeting every target."



Well worth the effort

Jade is obviously very happy at Essa Academy and appreciates what it is doing for her and her friends. "I feel confident in myself because of the friends I have here, my teachers who are helpful and kind, and because of everyone around me at Essa. I have also realised that working hard is a very important thing to do as soon as you get to Year 7 but because I enjoy my lessons I don't mind the hard work; I know the effort will be worth it."

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