

Amanda and Paul were concerned about the **ability** of a mainstream secondary school to meet the needs of their profoundly deaf sons, but Sandbach School listened to them and rose **excellently** to the **challenge**



Sandbach School
Opportunity, Achievement, Excellence



Amanda Barker and her husband Paul live in Sandbach with their sons Josh, 15 and 12 year old Dom.

Taking a gamble

In the same way as most children moving up to high school from primary, Josh was keen to go to the school the majority of his friends would be attending but for Amanda and Paul this potentially presented a problem. Both Josh and Dom are profoundly deaf and for this reason have needed additional support throughout their school lives. "Although they have cochlear implants which give them an acceptable level of hearing in perfect circumstances, a noisy classroom can be a challenging environment for them," explains Amanda. "We had to decide

whether Sandbach School would be able to address Josh's needs without compromising his education but because Josh was so keen, we went ahead and took a gamble."

Positive and welcoming

The fact that they were also happy to send Dom there three years later proves that the gamble has paid off. "We got in touch with Sandbach School early on in Year 5 to brief them in advance, and although the school had never before catered for a profoundly deaf student they were welcoming and very positive about taking Josh on. They admitted to having little knowledge about what

to expect but have always been very receptive to advice from us and other professionals, and they handled the transition into Year 7 very efficiently. Ever since then, they have put in place several measures to accommodate the needs of deaf pupils and I believe that perhaps only a specialist school for the deaf could have been a more effective setting. As that option would have been detrimental by separating the boys from their established friendship groups, we have absolutely no regrets about our choice."

The lesson comes over loud and clear

Measures taken by Sandbach School include extra support in lessons where necessary, with a Teaching Assistant to ensure the boys have fully heard and understood instructions. The school has also installed Soundfield systems in certain areas to improve the acoustics and amplify the teachers' voices. "A hearing impaired child has to concentrate much harder on what is being said and that is very tiring," Amanda says, "so having someone to take notes in class for them, for example, helps a great deal and takes some of the pressure off. Neither of the boys has suffered academically; they are both thriving and very happy at school."

A two-way learning experience

It is only rarely, says Amanda, that she has encountered any problems connected with the boys' disability and on each occasion the issue has been sorted out quickly and effectively. "Given that this has been a learning curve for the school, it is not surprising that sometimes something doesn't quite go according to plan. Because the boys are doing so well it is easy to forget that Josh and Dom aren't exactly the same as all the other boys so once in a while I've needed to remind someone that they do need special consideration and may need more time to complete homework or an assignment. My concerns have always been quickly addressed and the Learning Support Department staff actively welcome the chance to learn from the experience."

Embracing the challenges

So successful has Josh and Dom's integration into the school been that they and their parents have helped to pave the way for other hearing-impaired students who have subsequently joined the school, and some who are considering doing so. "In some ways Josh and Dom have been the guinea pigs who have helped improve the school provision for hearing impaired children so it has been a mutually beneficial exercise. I have been impressed by how the school has approached the boys' needs and by the way it has embraced the challenges associated with their disability."



Sandbach School
Crewe Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 3NS

Email: enquiries@sandbachschool.org
Tel: 01270 758870
Fax: 01270 764787



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