

Penny **believes** there is more to a **good education** than academic achievement alone, and that Sandbach School goes the extra mile



Sandbach School
Opportunity, Achievement, Excellence



Penny Smith lives in Congleton with her son Sid, who is 13 and daughter Daisy, 10.

Relying on instinct

Having looked at several possible secondary school options for her son, it was Sandbach School which Penny identified as being the right one for Sid. "Although it was out of our area, when I visited I was struck by the atmosphere of mutual respect I saw between the students and teachers," she says. "When they passed each other, the pupils would automatically stand up straight and would be greeted by name by the staff members. It was something I couldn't quite put my finger on at the time but I instinctively liked the way the school felt to me."

Going from strength to strength

Penny feels extremely fortunate that Sid was offered a place at Sandbach School on appeal. "My first impressions were 100% correct, and ever since he started there he has gone from strength to strength in many ways. Although he is not especially academic, he has had so many opportunities to excel and is flourishing because of the school's approach to the individual. His classwork has improved beyond expectations but aside from that, he's been given much more in other ways."

Appropriate boundaries

Many parents would agree that teenage children need boundaries in every aspect of their lives and that school plays an important role in this way. Penny has been impressed by how Sandbach School addresses this fact: "All the students are made aware of what is expected of them and that if they flout the rules they will have to take the consequences," she explains. "They know that they will be rewarded for good behaviour or performance, but also that they will be penalised by a detention if they step out of line, and that gives them an excellent grounding. The boys understand and respect that and certainly Sid is prepared to accept fair discipline."

The importance of home/school communication

As a working parent, Penny greatly values the home/school communication via the Insight website, enabling her to check up, if necessary, on Sid's work, behaviour or wellbeing. "It is very useful to have information upfront in case there is anything which might escalate," she says. "Sid is fairly good at telling me about his day but occasionally there might be something I need to know which he's not been completely open about – in both a good and not-so-good way! It's such a useful way of keeping in touch with what is going on in school!"

Proud mum moment!

Although Penny did not have strong feelings about single-sex schools prior to choosing Sandbach School, she does appreciate the fact that at an all-boys school the pupils may have less distraction and fewer inhibitions. "Sid was the Year 8 Rugby Captain and had to give a post-season speech in front

of the school. He was understandably nervous but was hugely supported by his sports coach and managed extremely well; shortly afterwards, he and some of his rugby team mates took part in a dance performance and to see the uninhibited contrast was a revelation to me. They all enjoyed themselves in both sport and dance, and it was a wonderful thing to witness."

Strict but sensitive

Despite the fact that the Year 8 group is relatively large, Penny has seen how each and every child is nurtured individually, and that no student is judged by academic performance alone. "The teachers really try to bring out every child's own talents and interests and it's 'not a one size fits all' approach. They seem to go to great lengths to make sure all the students are given every chance to succeed, and that includes instilling values and good manners. The school takes no prisoners in terms of behaviour but is very sensitive in applying commonsense when there is a reason for doing so."

A holistic approach

As far as Penny is concerned, it is not just a question of getting good grades in class which is important, it's the way a school gives its students guidance in terms of social skills, morals and self-confidence. "I wish I had been able to attend a school like this when I was younger," she says. "I honestly could not wish for anything better for my own children."

Children say

Asked what he thought about Sandbach School, Sid said: "I'm happy. I don't know why, I'm just really happy." And perhaps that says it all.



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