



Sally took a gamble by sending her son to a new and unproven school, but Baston House has paid off for the whole family in many ways



BASTON HOUSE SCHOOL
DEVELOPING LEARNERS' SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Sally Pettitt has three children, the middle one being 13-year-old Harry who was among the first six students at Baston House School.

Limited choices

Harry was diagnosed with autism (PDD-NOS) when he was four years old but was fortunate enough to be able to attend a mainstream primary school, which was more than able to adequately address what Sally believed were his needs at the time. However, when the time came to consider his secondary education, Sally had to reassess the situation, especially in light of the fact that their Local Education Authority offered only a limited choice of settings.

"His primary school had served him very well but they accepted that Harry needed more than a mainstream school could provide at the next stage," Sally says. "The only option we were given by the LEA was not geared specifically to children with autism and, as a child who is very able on the autistic spectrum, we felt that Harry would plateau academically if he was not given the right opportunities."

"I had heard that a new school was being started up, one which I subsequently discovered would focus only on children similar to Harry, and when I eventually went to look around I realised that we had found precisely what we needed."

Huge steps forward

That school was Baston House, officially opened by Samantha Cameron in 2011, and although Sally had to challenge the decision of the LEA, twice she was triumphant at tribunal. "It was a bit of a gamble as the school had only recently opened but I liked the ethos and what they promised, and I was right to take the chance. Not only does Harry have a smile on his face every morning, he is learning, achieving and much more socially adept than before. That in itself is a huge step forward."

A dramatic change

Whilst Harry is currently out-performing for his age in some areas and likely to take some recognised qualifications, other aspects of his disorder were potentially holding him back from a more rounded life, as well as restricting that of his own family. "In common with many autistic children, Harry has sensory processing disorder which affects his ability to maintain normal interaction," Sally explains. "He is extremely sensitive to noise and texture, for example, which means he finds it difficult to function in a supermarket or restaurant so it was always difficult to take him shopping, or to go out for a family meal as he had a very limited diet. Since being at Baston House, he has learned to try, and enjoy, a much wider range of foods and he is a great deal more confident around people outside his immediate family. The change has been dramatic."

A major impact on learning

Sally believes that it is the approach of Baston House which has effected this change in her son. With a complete understanding of each child's individual needs, the teaching and other trained staff members are able to tailor the curriculum to every student. "Harry needs speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and the availability of a psychologist, all of whom are always on-site and provide regular input."



These resources, along with the small class sizes, have almost certainly had the biggest impact on Harry's learning and achievement, and given him a far greater chance to reach the potential he undoubtedly has."

Addressing the challenges in the most effective way

Autism is a disorder which presents each child it affects with a varying range of challenges. At Baston House, believes Sally, every child is recognised as a person in their own right and treated accordingly. "All these children have something to offer and should be given the chance to shine. Whether Harry will be able to capitalise on his academic or other achievements in the future we don't know, but at least he has been given the chance to make the most of his abilities. As far as I am concerned, I will know that by enrolling him at Baston House I have done the very best I can as a mother."



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