



Lisa and Jonathan Bobbett live in Rayleigh with their three children. Alisha and Harry are in their teens and Oliver is seven years old



Because her son is so very special Lisa wanted a very special place for him, and she found it at Castledon School

Very specific needs

When Oliver was about four it became evident that mainstream education could no longer address his needs and so Lisa and Jonathan began the task of finding a suitable alternative setting. Having investigated several options it was Castledon School they felt to be the most appropriate and they applied for a place. "Unfortunately, not everyone agreed with our choice and we had to work hard to convince the authorities," explains Lisa. "Whilst the other schools we looked at were good in themselves, we felt strongly that only Castledon offered the right approach as far as Oliver's specific condition was concerned. Having finally gained agreement to send him there, I know that we were right to stand our ground."

Castledon could help

As well as having autism and ADHD, Oliver has been diagnosed with a global developmental delay and it is this, says Lisa, which most impacts on his ability to learn. "When we first had the GDD diagnosis I assumed it meant that he would just take a bit longer for him to catch up with his peers but I now know that is not likely to be the case... As his parents we know him better than anyone and instinctively knew that Castledon could help."

The value of life skills

Lisa describes Oliver as someone who rigidly compartmentalises his life, meaning that home is home and school is school. But where there is something of a crossover is in the life skills which the school promotes and which Lisa and Jonathan encourage at home. "Helping the children towards a measure of independence is a big part of what Castledon does, and is probably one of the most valuable things it offers to Oliver. They are taken into the town and to shops and cafes where they are encouraged to choose, ask and purchase, and familiarise themselves with everyday life. Even though I would not expect Oliver to be able to live completely independently in the future, these skills will enable him to look after himself to a degree and that is a great deal better than nothing."

Constant improvement

Oliver is making progress in many ways. His speech has improved considerably since starting at Castledon and his concentration span, hindered by his ADHD, has also increased. "His classroom workstation area helps to avoid distraction and he is learning how to complete a required task, which he struggled to do before," says Lisa. "He is learning about cause and consequence, and no longer needs the constant supervision which had previously been necessary."

Understanding the individual

Although Oliver has always been a sweet-natured, happy child his social skills were compromised and Lisa often had to prompt him to engage with other people. Since starting at Castledon, however, this is another aspect of his behaviour which has improved. "Everyone he meets now becomes his best friend! Perhaps he can be a bit too trusting with strangers and that is a potential worry but it's lovely to see how his confidence has increased in the last few years."

Lisa believes that Castledon School has been instrumental in bringing about such a positive change in Oliver's achievements and his potential. "You can't just tick boxes with children like Oliver; you need to completely understand the individual and Castledon does that. It has given me the peace of mind I needed for the welfare of my son."



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