



Lee and Jane McDermott live in Widnes with Josh, 15.

Children at Cavendish High Academy are happy, safe and loved, says Jane

Safe and secure

Josh moved to Cavendish High Academy in 2009 when his former school changed its admission policy. Jane was extremely worried about how the move would affect Josh.

"We were very anxious because Josh had been in his other school for many years," says Jane. "Josh has classic autism and sensory issues and moving to another school was a massive change. However, I needn't have worried because the staff are great and it's a very safe and secure environment so he made the transition really well."



Meet and greet

Jane drives Josh into school each day, but is always impressed by what happens when the other children arrive by bus.

"Every morning I see the head teacher waiting outside the school to meet and greet the children," says Jane. "There are not many other parents there to see this, so she does it because she wants to. I always have a big lump in my throat because as every child walks past they go and give her a hug. You cannot make children with special needs do that. They love her to bits - even my Josh gives her a 'thumbs up!'"

Providing reassurance

Knowing that the staff always have time to talk provides a lot of reassurance for Jane.

"The staff are very aware that parents can become anxious," admits Jane. "What might seem like little worries to outsiders can seem massive to us, but you are never made to feel stupid and the teachers always make time to listen. I like to walk Josh to his classroom every day and hand him over to his teacher and I'm never made to feel that he's too old for me to be doing that, which means so much to me."

Picture perfect

Because Josh does not communicate Jane is provided with regular updates on his daily activities.

"Josh has no speech so I can't ask him what he's done," says Jane. "It's important for me to know, so sometimes the staff take pictures, or little videos and I can't put into words how much that means. For example, they recently took the time to video him swimming half a width and another day when Josh waited for a little girl so they could sit together at lunch they took a picture of him waiting for her because it was such a breakthrough that he chose to sit next to someone."

Making progress

Since attending Cavendish Josh has made excellent progress.

"Although Josh is severely autistic, there have been significant changes," says Jane. "There are seven boys in his class and to some degree they all have language, which helps to bring Josh along. He's trying really hard and lots of sounds are now coming out. He's also beginning to integrate with children outside of his classroom, which is fantastic."

Calming techniques

Jane says that the staff use skilled and innovative techniques to calm Josh if he becomes upset.



"At times Josh can be quite aggressive if he's not handled properly," she says. "However, he is also very tactile and likes to go for reflexology. At the school they have a foot spa in the classroom and if they need to calm him down they will get that out and put his feet in it, or give him a hand massage. These are all things that I would do and I am so impressed."

Price of happiness

"The staff at Cavendish are all very dedicated," says Jane. "Every day I think how lucky we are to have this wonderful school for our children. It's truly an amazing place. You cannot put a price on knowing that when you drop your child off at school they will be safe and happy, but that's what happens at Cavendish every single day."

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