



Elisha and Michael Newton live in Widnes with their children Mark, 13 and Allana, 16.

Security and support were major priorities for Elisha and Michael, and Cavendish High Academy provided Mark with all he needed

Safe and sound

Elisha and Michael were keen to find a school for Mark that provided support, safety and security.

"Mark, who is autistic, had previously been in both a mainstream and special needs primary school and was due to transition to senior school," recalls Elisha. "Our main priority was to find a small school that could provide him with strong support. It was also very important that the school was safe and secure and offered a good education. This is the case at Cavendish High Academy, as Mark is currently working towards Key Stage 3."



First impressions

Elisha was instantly impressed by the school's size and the friendliness of the team.

"I thought the school was very bright and cheerful," she says. "I also liked the size of the school, which is smaller than some of the others we saw and everything felt very safe. I could see that Mark would be restricted about where he could access. I also thought everyone was very friendly."

Nurturing approach

Mark's transition to his new school was very smooth.

"Mark settled in straight away," says Elisha. "He was put into a nurturing group that was all in one classroom so it didn't feel like a huge change from primary school. There were seven children in his class, with one teacher and two assistants. As Mark began to accept the changes to his environment the staff gradually scaled up the transition. This nurturing approach worked very well."

Providing feedback

Mark is unable to communicate verbally and Elisha was reassured by the feedback about his progress.

"It's a big decision to trust someone else with the care of your child," says Elisha. "As Mark can't communicate I liked the fact that the staff would call to let me know how he was settling in and if he was having a good or bad day. That was very important."

Reward and motivation

Skilled staff use a range of motivational tools to help children achieve the best that they can.

"Mark loves jig-saws and to get Mark on task and give him focus he was rewarded with time to play with jig-saws," says Elisha. "This is a very effective tool and really helps with his learning."

Tears of pride

Mark has achieved many great things at Cavendish, but his parents are particularly proud that he overcame his fears and learned to swim.

"When something happens to Mark that hurts or upsets him he regresses strongly," explains Elisha. "Six years ago he went into a cold swimming pool and became absolutely terrified of water. The staff persevered and gradually broke down his fears and much to everyone's surprise he learned to swim."



"When Michael and I took him swimming recently and Mark swam in the pool we cried with pride."

Accessing activities

Although Mark doesn't like to socialise, Elisha is delighted that he has access to afterschool clubs.

"The afterschool clubs are fantastic," she says. "If you have a child like Mark who doesn't understand about being friends and is not interested in anybody it is so nice for him to be able to access activities with other children in an environment where he feels safe."

Feeling loved

Elisha is very confident that Mark loves going to school and recommends Cavendish to any parents who are considering a special needs school.

"I absolutely recommend Cavendish," she says. "I know Mark gets the support he requires and seeing him happy to get on the school bus every morning shows us as parents how happy he is there. When we speak with the staff we know they are just as thrilled as we are when Mark makes a new step in his development and this shows us he is loved there too."