



Shelley Rahman lives in Widnes with Tasmin 17, Shakeel 14 and Shafiq, 11.

Children grow in confidence and families feel fully supported at Cavendish High Academy, says Shelley

Choosing Cavendish

Shelley went to view several schools for Tasmin, but none felt right until she visited Cavendish High Academy.

"Some schools looked a bit institutional and didn't feel right," says Shelley. "When we went to see Cavendish the atmosphere was cheerful and jolly, the teachers were friendly and welcoming and it catered for a wide range of disabled children who all seemed happy and well cared for."



One-to-one support

Like many other children at Cavendish, Tasmin is severely disabled and totally dependent on others.

"Tasmin needs a great deal of physical and emotional support," says Shelley. "She has no communication and needs one-to-one support as she can't do anything for herself. She is in a special class of six or seven children who all have limited communication skills."

Sensory stimulation

Students are all assessed individually and the curriculum is adapted to cater for their needs.

"The staff at Cavendish are very good at assessing the capabilities of children and finding out what stimulates them and makes them interested," says Shelley. "Tasmin needs a lot of stimulation otherwise she switches off and won't get involved."

Opening up possibilities

Tasmin has attended Cavendish since the age of three, but Shelley is still surprised by things the staff find she is capable of.

"The staff recently told me that Tasmin had enjoyed a really good day with the iPad," recalls Shelley. "I'd no idea she could use an iPad but the staff had downloaded a programme for her and with the help of a special holder that put the iPad in her line of vision Tasmin was able to track what was on the screen with her eyes. I couldn't believe it. You get so many brilliant ideas like this."

All wired up!

The staff work very hard to include all children in fun activities. On one memorable occasion both Tasmin and Shelley completed a zip wire ride!

"The school took the children to a residential activity centre called Bendrigg in the Lake District," recalls Shelley. "The staff didn't want Tasmin to miss out so they invited me too, so I could help with her medical needs."

"It was amazing, and the children did things like canoeing, caving and archery. Tasmin even scored a bull's eye! Being in a wheelchair and unable to hold stuff doesn't stop these children from doing things. The equipment is all specially adapted, and seeing Tasmin on the zip wire was brilliant and brought a tear to my eye. Then the staff made me do it!"



No worries

"The children have access to so many facilities that they don't have at home," says Shelley. "Tasmin loves the hydrotherapy pool and rebound trampolines. They also have a brilliant school nurse so I know Tasmin is in very safe hands, which gives me the confidence to let go and not worry."

Parental support

It has not all been plain sailing for Tasmin, who has endured many lengthy hospital stays, but throughout the tough times Shelley has always felt fully supported by the school.

"There have been times when doctors have told us to prepare ourselves for the worst," admits Shelley. "During these times the teachers and staff helped me so much. Cavendish doesn't just support the children, it supports the families as well."

From caterpillar to butterfly

So how would Shelley sum up Tasmin's experience of Cavendish? "It's not all about learning," she says. "At Cavendish they help the children to grow and to socialise in their own ways. They bring these children out of their shell, and it's like watching a caterpillar turn into a butterfly."

"You think nobody else can care for your child like you can but at Cavendish they develop an emotional attachment and they really do care. Tasmin absolutely loves it."

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