



Struggles at mainstream school are a thing of the past, and Maira's children are thriving at Heathlands

Finding the right environment

When Maira moved her children from mainstream school two years ago she made a list of priorities for an ideal educational facility. The list included the right language environment, low class numbers and an ability to make lots of friends. Maira decided that Heathlands suited all her children's individual needs.

"We always use BSL at home, and so it was very important for me to find a school with a BSL environment, as it is my children's first language" explains Maira.

Maira and Jaan Laumets live in London Colney with Ervin 10, Roger 7, and Marfa, three.



Heathlands School

Nursery, Primary & Secondary Provision, Day & Residential

Overcoming challenges

Maira's sons had faced massive challenges at mainstream school, leaving them feeling lonely, isolated and confused.

"The class sizes were too big and although the school had a deaf unit this wasn't enough," says Maira. "There was much more speaking at that school, and not many deaf children.

"The natural language of my children is BSL, but at their former school the signing of the communication support was quite basic.

"One day we visited the school to listen to a teacher talking about homework and the communication support who signed it for me obviously found it difficult to translate from English to BSL. We realised how this was affecting our children, which is why we moved them to Heathlands."

Improved skills

The move has proved highly beneficial for all of Maira's children.

"There has been a massive improvement in Roger's signing, as well as his reading, maths and communication skills," says a delighted Maira.

"Initially he needed me to sign for him from the storybook at bedtime, but this is changing, and he is now very interested in reading by himself. I am so impressed with that. This is why BSL is of huge importance for deaf children.

"Ervin is also much more expressive than he was and his reading and writing skills have really improved.

"I am so happy with the relationship the boys have with the staff. It's very

easy for them to talk to staff if there is a problem. They have also both made lots of lovely friends."

Enjoying a strong deaf community

Teachers at Heathlands are quick to address concerns and provide support.

"The staff are extremely helpful and supportive," says Maira. "If they are concerned about anything they will write me a note or catch me when I pick the children up.

"Life for my boys at mainstream school was undoubtedly difficult. They became lost in the system, but now there is a very strong deaf community for them to enjoy.

"Heathlands provides an excellent educational base through BSL, and if they wish the boys can adapt this to become bilingual. I think it is important for them to have total communication with English and BSL.

"Everything at Heathlands is very visual and the sounds and the words are always linked together. At a mainstream school they would just

be given the word to learn and would miss out on other steps, but staff at Heathlands have a better understanding of the needs of deaf children and know how to engage with them.

"It is also much better for the children to have their teacher signing directly to them rather than through an interpreter, as it provides better interaction and makes learning easier.

"Little Marfa is really benefitting from starting her education in a BSL environment. She can already sign and her character and confidence are coming through. She loves nursery and can't wait to start school in September."

Children say

"I like school because it's interesting to watch the storybook with our teacher," says Roger. "I also like to chat with my friends and play football."

Ervin also enjoys having fun and chatting with his friends and adds: "It's easy to learn because there is always signing."



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