



John and Julie Mayle live in West Mersea with their son, George, aged 18, who has attended Lexden Springs for seven years. George has autism, severe learning disability, limited speech, a rare chromosomal abnormality and epilepsy.

## George is gaining valuable skills after moving up to the post 16-19 department at Lexden Springs School

### **Making progress**

George has progressed in leaps and bounds since moving to Holly Lodge, a building about half a mile away from the main school that has been converted for the use of a group of post 16 students. His Mum, Julie, says: "George loves what he is doing at school now. It took him a while to get used to it because he hates change, but he has settled in and become more confident. He used to struggle to make friends but he has started to understand that he needs friends and is developing social skills."

## Experiencing work

George is learning valuable life skills at Holly Lodge. Julie says: "They are teaching him things like shopping and cooking and how to travel somewhere by bus. They are getting him ready for when he leaves Lexden Springs when he is 19. He likes going out from the school to do work experience. He works at a café in Colchester that is geared up for people with special needs and really loves it there. He also enjoys working at a farm near the school. He likes mucking out, collecting the eggs, digging the ground and feeding the animals. The farm is run by lovely people and he enjoys going there."

## Team work

George has made a lot of progress since he started at Lexden Springs at the age of 11.

"He used to attend another special needs school for children with mild learning difficulties but they couldn't cope with him. We moved him to Lexden Springs but when he first started he didn't adjust to it well and things were difficult. However, we worked as a team with the school to try to help him and between us we have sorted him out," Julie says.

## Improved behaviour

"The first sign that his new school was having an effect was when his behaviour at home got better. He started to do things without kicking off too much. The staff took an interest in him and one of his class teachers, Caroline Gore, who is now the deputy head, seemed to really

understand him. It was a turning point for him when he went into her class.

"Now George has developed some verbal communication. We can understand what he is trying to say to us at home, although other people probably wouldn't be able to, but it is real progress. But he still uses Makaton signs to talk to us some of the time and gets frustrated because he can't make us understand what he wants to say," Julie says.

## Winning awards

"Generally speaking he is more compliant at home and I can tell he looks forward to going to school. We never have trouble getting him in the taxi because he likes both the driver and the escort. A couple of years ago he won an award for the most

improved pupil in the school, which made us very proud and last year he won one for making an effort to make friends."

## Happy environment

"I like the lovely, relaxed atmosphere at Lexden Springs. The teachers let the children and parents call them by their first names and they are all very friendly and have a good sense of humour. Everyone seems happy in their work and I am confident they will do their best for George," Julie says.

"I would recommend Lexden Springs and the work they do with post 16 students to other parents. I was worried how George would cope when he moved up to Holly Lodge but amazingly, thanks to the staff, he has taken it all in his stride."



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