

Sara wanted Jessica to develop skills to help her live an independent life

Sara Payne lives with daughter Jessica, age 18, in Brislington, Bristol.



Approaching adulthood

Finding good post-16 education for children can be a worrying time for parents.

"Jess has Down's syndrome and started at New Fosseway in September," says Sara. "She will be here for two years and will then go to a skills college for another three years."

Smooth transition

New Fosseway endeavours to make the transition from secondary school as smooth as possible.

"When I visited I thought Jess would like it and the staff were very friendly and welcoming," says Sara. "The children seemed happy and Jess has fitted in well and seems happy too."

Welcome meeting

As part of the transition process students are invited to attend a few days of summer school.

"Before school started the school invited the new pupils into their holiday scheme, which was brilliant," recalls Sara. "This was for five days at the start of the summer holidays and provided a really gentle introduction. Jess met some of the staff and other children, which helped to prepare her and she's had no problem making friends."

Non-uniform

Students are encouraged to think of themselves as young adults.

"They can wear a uniform, and initially Jess wanted to but a staff member explained that she was a young adult now and Jess decided it would be nice to wear her own clothes," says Sara. "Now she really enjoys getting ready every day and wearing different things."

Life skills

Jess is learning many skills to help her in later life.

"She does things like going out into the local community, catching buses, taking part in a walking group and has also tried new things such as canoeing. Jess does the after school cookery club and will try other activities such as dance club.

"There is a little shop at the school and at break time the children are involved in counting out the money. They also go to the library, plan meals, walk to the shops, cook meals and learn other important skills that young adults need."

Friendly approach

Sara and Jess say the staff are very friendly and approachable.

"Everyone is absolutely lovely, very friendly and the children are encouraged to call them by their first names," says Sara. "If I ever needed to discuss anything I feel confident I could do so."

Fantastic feedback

Sara enjoys reading the daily entries into Jessica's home diary and learning what she has been doing each day.

"Communication is great," says Sara. "Parents receive newsletters and Jess also has a home-school comments book, which goes back and forwards every day and the staff don't just write a sentence, they write quite a lot about what Jess does every day. For example, a recent entry told me she had done some measuring to make a chocolate cake, and she was making jewellery for the Christmas fair, which was to raise money for their Christmas meal. It's so nice to get this kind of fantastic feedback on what she's been doing."

Care and support

Sara is very happy with Jessica's experiences at New Fosseway and says: "It's a really lovely school, the staff are very caring and supportive and I totally recommend it."

Jess says:

"I like college because it's fun and we do lots of different things. I like going shopping to buy ingredients to cook our own lunch. We do Zumba and go on trips. The staff are really nice and helpful. I have made lots of new friends and we all help each other."

