

Camille is convinced that Saxon Mount Community School has turned her daughter's life around and shown her that there is a brighter future



Camille and James Morris have three daughters: Alex is 18, Georgia 14 and Lily is 12. Lily has recently joined Saxon Mount Community School and is in Year 7.



Difficult decisions

As every 12-year-old child knows, the move from primary to secondary education is a major rite of passage. Most are fortunate enough to move up with their peers and friends for support but some, like Lily, do not have that advantage. Lily's learning difficulties mean that she is around four years behind in her development and Camille knew she would not be able to cope in the mainstream without the support she had enjoyed in her primary school.

"Once we got a Statement of Special Educational Needs for Lily she was more or less able to manage as she had additional help in the classroom, but however well the school tried, they did not have the facilities to deal with her emotional needs," Camille explains. "We wanted her to stay there because it was a lovely, small, local school and she had her sister's support for four years and we thought we were doing the right thing; when she finished year 6 she was almost a broken child."

A safe and calming environment

Camille and James were at first reluctant to consider a 'special' school for Lily, unwilling for her to run the risk of becoming stigmatised. "We looked at all the mainstream options but it was obvious that none of them had the appropriate resources. It was only when we eventually went to look at Saxon Mount that our eyes were opened and we saw why it had been recommended – it was perfect for her."

It was the tidiness and organised layout of the school which was one of the things that initially struck Camille: "Like a lot of children on the autistic spectrum Lily can't bear mess or disorder so the whole environment is very calming. Everything is designed to reduce anxiety and the children feel safe and confident in the surroundings, as well as cared for by their teachers. I love the wholly different way of teaching – every child is assessed and then they learn from their own level, at their own pace."

Amazing turnaround

Even though Lily has only been at Saxon Mount for a few months her teachers already know her so well that the outbursts which used to be a regular occurrence are now a thing of the past. "It's amazing how her teachers can recognise the signs which indicate that Lily is building up to a meltdown and that they know exactly how to diffuse the situation," says Camille. "Lily has also learned how to control these episodes herself which is a great step forward. It is an amazing turnaround in her life."

Hindsight is a wonderful thing

Camille is perhaps most grateful for the fact that Lily now has the chance to live a far more fulfilling life than she might otherwise have been equipped to do. "Saxon Mount has unquestionably given her a new lease of life, and is bringing out the very best in her both as a person and in an educational sense. Socially, she is much more able to form friendships as she is amongst others with similar issues so she doesn't stand out as being 'different'. She is so much happier and I wish I had known earlier how much difference a school like Saxon Mount can make."

A smoother road ahead

There were times, Camille remembers, when she would almost dread going to collect Lily from school, or answering the 'phone, in case there had been an incident during the day but now she feels able to relax in the knowledge that Lily is not only happy to be at school but that she is completely safe. "I can say without hesitation that sending Lily to Saxon Mount was the single best decision we have ever made. She has been on a long and difficult journey but the road ahead is much smoother now."

Children say

Lily: "I like Saxon Mount because of the adventure playground, doing science experiments and the teachers are kind and understand me."



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