

Understanding, compassion and sheer commitment to the pupils of Saxon Mount Community School gave Caroline's son the second chance he needed



Caroline Lawrence lives in Hastings with her sons Jake, 17 and Joshua, 16.



Success story - prologue

Caroline describes Jake as one of Saxon Mount Community School's greatest success stories and although he has been one of the school's biggest challenges, the outcome has been a triumph both for Jake and for the school.

A very difficult start

Jake was offered a place at Torfield School when he was eight years old, having been at serious risk of permanent exclusion from his mainstream primary school because of his erratic and sometimes aggressive behaviour. Although Caroline had been aware from the time Jake was about eighteen months old that there was something amiss, it was not until he was eight that they eventually received a diagnosis of Tourette's syndrome and associated learning difficulties. On gaining a Statement of Special Educational Needs he moved to Torfield and subsequently to Saxon Mount Community School.

"Jake settled fairly well into Torfield but when he moved to Saxon Mount we had real problems," she says. "It wasn't that he didn't like the school – he did, very much, and was happy there – but as he grew older he became less able to control his temper and how he responded to situations he found frustrating. Because he could not express himself verbally his reactions were physical and that sometimes got him into trouble with his teachers and classmates. The staff were incredibly supportive but there came a point where they had to question whether Jake needed more help and guidance than even they could provide, and Jake remains one of very few children ever to have faced possible permanent exclusion from the school."

A chance for rehabilitation

The possibility of exclusion from school was a huge shock to Jake and Caroline believes that this was something of a turning point. "Jake's condition doesn't make him a 'bad' person, in fact he is very kind and caring but he can't always control himself. His teachers addressed his behaviour by talking with him, giving him certain responsibilities and by showing him he was trusted, and he responded very positively to this. The insight and understanding they demonstrated show what lengths the school will go to to rehabilitate children who need a different approach. They saw something special in Jake and were prepared to give him another chance – and the strategy has worked."

Back on track

Jake is now in college, having passed sufficient GCSEs to take a course in agriculture. "It's only through the sheer hard work of the teachers at Saxon Mount that he got through his exams," says Caroline. "They kept him on track, and because

he had by that time formed a close bond with some of them, he desperately wanted to make them proud of him and that, I think, is something which will stay with him for the rest of his life. They have stuck with him through thick and thin and he wants to repay that trust."

Success story - conclusion

If Caroline had one word to describe the ethos of Saxon Mount School it would be 'Compassion'. "Jake pushed boundaries like no other student, but his teachers have always been there for him throughout and continued to believe in his potential. Even now, he knows his 'favourite' teacher is still at the end of a 'phone with ongoing support – despite having a few extra grey hairs on Jake's account! In any other school environment he would have got lost in the system but because of Saxon Mount he stands a real chance in life."

Children say

Jake is no longer a child but a very well-spoken, polite and objective young man. He fully acknowledges that he has caused his family and his school many difficulties and is apologetic for having done so, even though he is not totally at fault as Tourette's syndrome affects people in ways they cannot always control. In his own words:

"When I first went to Saxon Mount School I was a nasty and aggressive person. I didn't know how else to behave, it was just the way I was. I know my mum struggled to care for me and that I put her and my teachers through absolute nightmares. They never ever gave up on me.

"It is because of Saxon Mount School I am the man I am today: able to hold down a college course which I love and look forward to something even better. The care and compassion I was shown there is nothing short of magnificent and I owe my teachers a massive debt and they will always have a special place in my heart.

"The reason I am speaking out now is that I want people to know what Saxon Mount can do for people like me or for any child with learning disabilities or mental health problems.

"Saxon Mount School kept me out of jail. That's it, basically. I couldn't control my behaviour because I have Tourette's but I am not using that as an excuse. It was how my school helped me accept my condition and to live with it that made the difference."

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