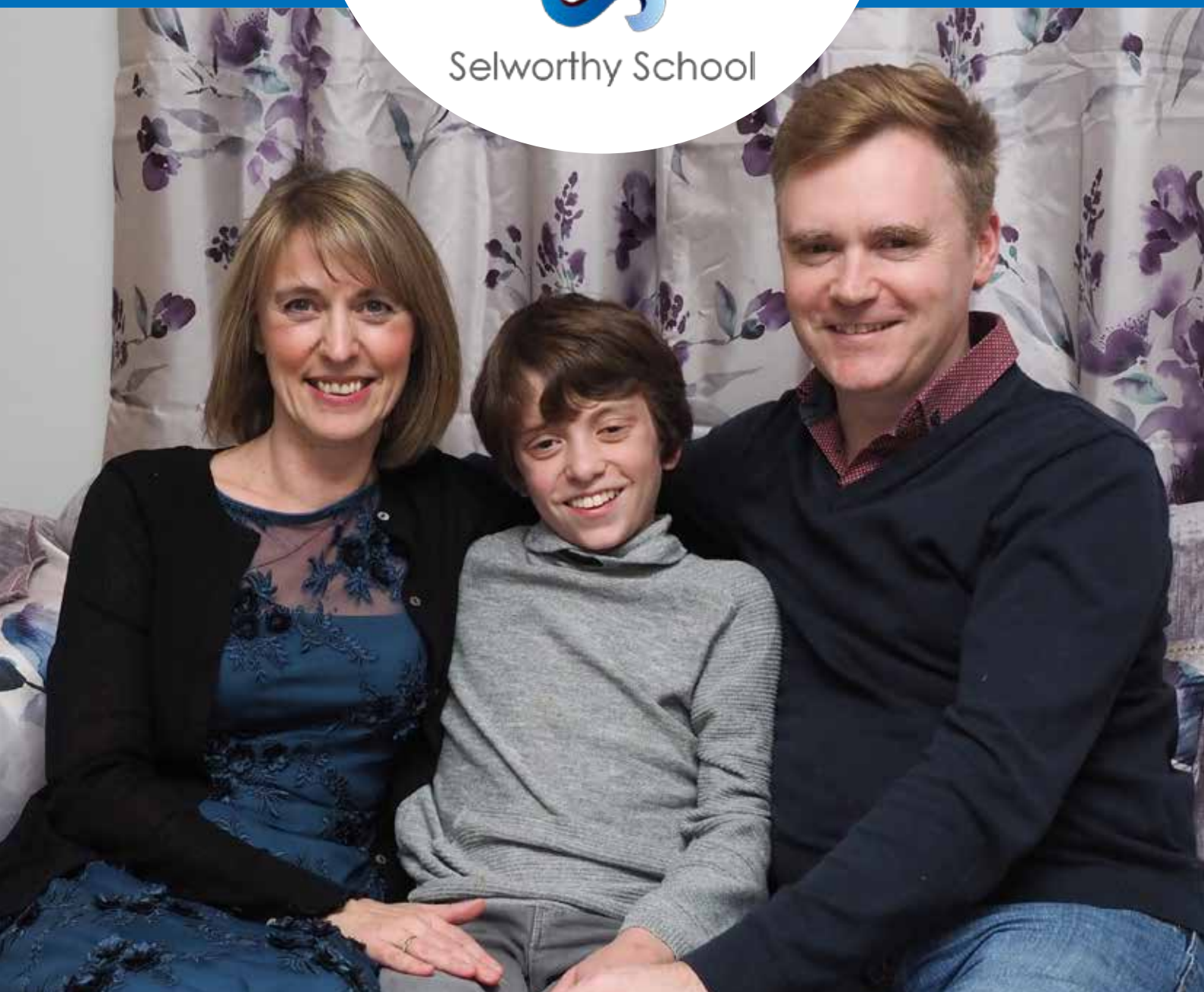




Selworthy School



Darren and Lorraine Haggerston live in Taunton with their son James, who is 13 years old.

Lorraine and Darren know that their son has potential, and through the intervention of Selworthy School that potential is being realised

A need for change

James has been a pupil at Selworthy School for four years, having previously been educated in a mainstream primary. For a while this worked fairly well but as he got older it became evident that the setting was not right for his needs. James suffers from Noonan Syndrome, which affects many areas, including fine motor skills, growth, congenital heart defects and developmental delay; he also has epilepsy, and is on the autistic spectrum. James experiences extreme anxiety in certain circumstances and it was largely this that convinced Darren and Lorraine to enrol him at Selworthy.

Warm and inclusive

"Selworthy had been recommended to us when we moved to the area and when we first visited we were immediately convinced," says Darren. "We didn't need to look elsewhere; it felt warm and inclusive and we knew James would be accepted for who he is. What was absolutely wonderful was that James obviously felt the same – when we were talking to the teachers he started singing, which we had never seen when he was with people he didn't know. He will only open up like that when he feels completely safe and that had become a rarity, so there was no question in our minds that we had found the right place for him."

Upward progression

James settled in straightaway and for 18 months his social and emotional development was excellent. Starting to make peer friendships for the first time, he enjoyed being at school and was cleverly encouraged by his teachers to engage in areas of the curriculum in which he was less interested. His sometimes volatile behaviour became less of a problem and Lorraine and Darren were relieved that they were no longer being called during the day to collect him early, as had occurred many times at his previous school.

Never give up

Unfortunately, James's epileptic seizures were becoming more and more regular and he had to undergo emergency brain surgery. "There was no option as the seizures were becoming life-threatening," Lorraine explains. "He understood the importance of the procedure and went ahead willingly, and although, thankfully, it has stopped the seizures, it caused unforeseen difficulties later."

The trauma of the operation, the subsequent three months off school and the withdrawal of his epilepsy medication brought a recurrence of his acute anxiety and this prompted a recurrence of his behavioural problems. "We went through a very tricky time, both at home and at school," says Darren. "When he feels safe and secure, James is a charming, loving and charismatic child, but he became very aggressive and unhappy. What further proved to us that Selworthy is a remarkable school was the way they never gave up on him. They knew that the real James was still inside there somewhere and did everything they possibly could to support him and us at this time."

Partnership

James's teachers and support staff have worked tirelessly to help address his crippling anxiety and bouts of low self-esteem, says Lorraine. "The lessons in emotional intelligence using his love of Lego are helping him to overcome his inability to express himself and to communicate his feelings. He is learning to understand himself and other people, and the way this issue has been handled has been fantastic. We feel that they know him almost as well as we do, and that they appreciate him and love him for who he is. We bounce ideas off each other to find out what works and what doesn't. It's a partnership."

Realising and building on potential

Lorraine and Darren are certain that, had James had his operation before he went to Selworthy, things could have been very different. "If he hadn't been at Selworthy we probably wouldn't have seen what James is capable of at school. He had started to blossom and show a great deal of promise, and because his teachers realised his potential they were prepared to try anything to restore it. Because of their willingness to see through his behaviour, he is now going from strength to strength, at school as well as at home. Perhaps for the first time we are beginning to hope that he might have a chance of some level of future independence."

A challenge worth taking

It is probably fair to say that James has challenged even the experts and consummate professionals at Selworthy, despite their vast experience, but they never lost faith and never gave up on him. "It is wonderful to see our creative, imaginative little boy coming back to us again. We knew his lovely personality was there all along but were afraid we might lose it. We feel that we have the 'real' Jamie back and will always thank this fantastic school for helping us achieve this."



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