



Selworthy School



Sophie and Andy Horsman have three children. Gabrielle is 17 and twins James and Charlie are 15. The boys both attend Selworthy School.

It was a challenging task to find the right place for Sophie and Andy's boys but when they found Selworthy School they knew they were home and dry

Need for change

It took nearly five years for Sophie and Andy to feel they had finally found the right school for their twin boys. Although they had initially settled fairly well in their first setting, when a new management regime was put in place things started to unravel quite quickly. "Charlie and James don't get on together very well so separate classes were important," says Sophie. "When that changed at very little notice, the boys took to it very badly and we knew we had to find an alternative."

Limited options

James and Charlie have autism and learning difficulties, are generally non-verbal and can display challenging behaviour; and mainstream schooling was not possible. Unfortunately, the family found that there were very few options open to them at the time and they struggled on for a while until Sophie and Andy felt compelled to remove them and home school instead. "I have worked with children with special needs before so I felt equipped to cope," Sophie explains. "Actually, I was quite excited about it and for a while it was ok."

However, the boys' behaviour started to further deteriorate and after a year, Sophie and Andy decided the arrangement was no longer working. "We started to get worried as very few schools were equipped to deal with their needs and we were determined not to consider residential care. Thankfully, at the eleventh hour Selworthy found places for them, and they started on a part-time basis."

Short-term intervention to long-term solution

Even at Selworthy, things were not ideal at first, but Sophie is full of admiration for how the school addressed the issues. "There wasn't the facility for the boys to be in separate classrooms but they were each allocated two Teaching Assistants and were taken out for lessons in local community rooms as a short-term solution and then an outbuilding in the school grounds was converted to provide additional classroom space. We were amazed at how determined the school was to provide what the boys needed and to accommodate them, and they constantly reassured us that they were on our side and would do everything possible to help."

A marked improvement

Since that time, Sophie and Andy have noticed a marked improvement in both boys, particularly in terms of their behaviour. "The patience and skill of the staff is second to none and their behaviour management techniques are fantastic. Charlie and James are big, strong lads and at one point they were constantly hitting us and each other, as well as hurting themselves but these episodes have decreased greatly since they have been at Selworthy. They like and trust their teachers and respond to them, so life has calmed down a lot!"

Close relationship

Despite their often difficult behaviour, Sophie says that the boys are funny and likeable, and she knows their teachers are genuinely fond of them. "Many of the teachers and support staff have been with them all through their time at Selworthy and have got to know them very well, and that consistency makes a big difference. They understand them, appreciate their best points, and know that they are trying their best, even when they are having a bad day. It's lovely for us as parents to know that they are being treated so empathetically."

Small steps to independence

In addition to classroom lessons, which are mostly sensory-based, the boys have PE sessions, music therapy and practical training in things such as personal hygiene, dressing and cookery, and Sophie was recently taken aback when Charlie put on his own shoes for the first time. "It felt like such an achievement! Even small moves towards independence are so encouraging and it proves that Selworthy is keeping the boys on track, and that's all I want for them."

A positive attitude

Sophie and Andy can rest safe in the knowledge that their sons have another four years at Selworthy and that it is without doubt the best place for them to be in order to maintain the progress they are making. "Even if we have to consider residential care at a later date, we know that Selworthy is doing everything possible for them at the moment. The positive attitude has made their placement a great success and a fantastic difference, and we could not be more grateful."



Selworthy School

Selworthy School, Selworthy Road
Taunton, Somerset, TA2 8HD

Telephone: 01823 284970

Fax: 01823 336519

Email: office@selworthy.somerset.sch.uk



Selworthy School