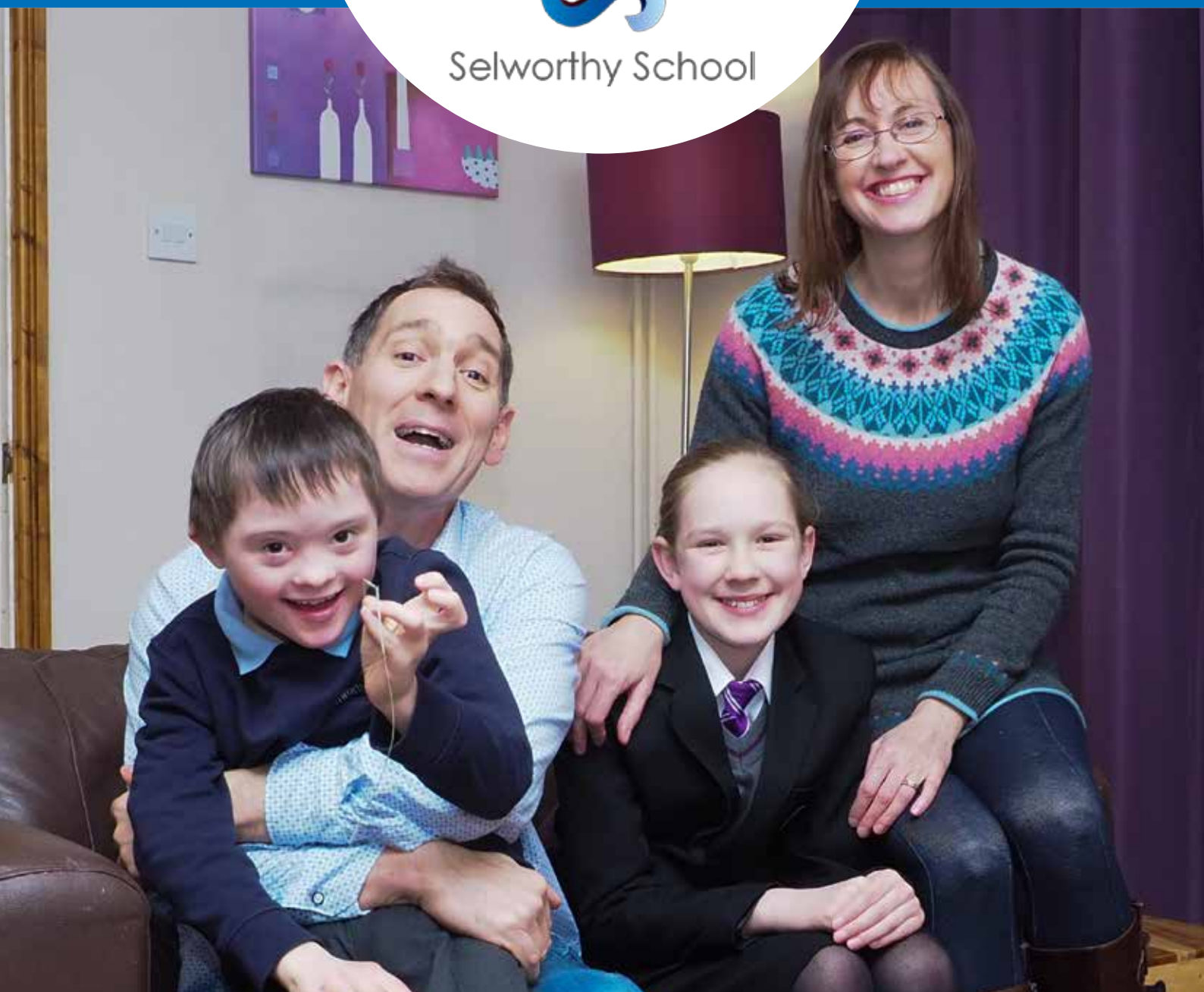




Selworthy School



**Michelle and Phil Bristow live in Taunton with their two children - Jemima, 12, and nine-year-old Daniel.**

## **Michelle and Phil have discovered what makes Selworthy Special School so special**

### **Specific and expert provision**

Dan has attended Selworthy School since the age of five and, although Michelle and Phil had originally hoped he would be able to join his sister at her mainstream primary, they appreciated, early on, that the decision to place Dan at Selworthy was by far the right choice, offering him the very specific and expert care that his particular needs require.

# A genuine commitment to each and every child

Born with Down's Syndrome as well as some physical disabilities, Dan might nevertheless have been able to cope with a mainstream setting if provided with additional support, and both Michelle and Phil were initially concerned that a special school might not give him the stimulation and encouragement they wanted for him. However, they very quickly realised that Dan's special needs would be better addressed at Selworthy and that has proved to be the case, especially as he was later diagnosed with autism.

"Many children with Down's can benefit greatly from mainstream education, but Dan's additional and fairly complex needs would have singled him out," believes Phil. "What immediately strikes you about Selworthy is the caring, nurturing ethos and the fact that all the staff are genuinely committed to the children, not just doing a job of work. They recognise and cater for the individuality of each child, providing a bespoke learning and care plan for every pupil, based on their particular needs. This holistic approach means that Dan is receiving an education which addresses his own capabilities, and it's working really well."

## Resources and innovations

Michelle agrees: "Dan has come on in leaps and bounds; he regularly surprises us with unexpected achievements and we maintain confidence that his progress will continue. The resources and innovations the school has put in place for him have considerably improved his quality of life – the hydrotherapy pool and sensory room are wonderful – and his ability to communicate has been enhanced by his ProxTalker, which was suggested by the school's Speech and Language Therapist. Crucially, he is happy at school, and that is largely because he knows he is cherished and valued by all of the staff."

## Invaluable support for parents and families

The Learning Support Centre has been a great asset to the family, for practical help in dealing with the bureaucratic requirements associated with additional needs, for equipment and written resources, and sometimes for a sympathetic ear on a difficult day. "Having a child with complex needs can be

challenging and frustrating, so being able to drop in for a cup of tea and a chat with someone who understands is really welcome," says Michelle. "I've hugely appreciated not just the advice and information on offer but also the emotional support and empathy, and that's invaluable." The school also offers the support of the FAST Team, a group of parent/carers who aim to support parents in helping their children to make the most of their school experience.

## Tuning in to the individual

Small class sizes and a high staff/student ratio mean that the children are given the individual attention they need in order to capitalise on their time at school. "Because the teachers and support staff get to spend a lot of one-to-one time with each child, they are in a better position to identify and understand their various personalities and needs. That is really important for a child like Dan, who is very tuned in to feelings and emotions and responds positively to people who he knows care about him."

## Life skills

"Whilst Dan may never be in a position to live independently," says Michelle, "he will attain many valuable life skills, which are incorporated into the curriculum at Selworthy. "He loves his cookery class, and enjoys the social interaction within the community, which is promoted by the school. I like the fact that children at Selworthy regularly venture out of the school premises and are encouraged to play an active and visible role in the surrounding community; in doing so, they are welcomed and accepted, and their presence is helping to change preconceptions about people with additional needs."

## A special place in the world

No-one can tell what the future holds for Dan but one thing of which Phil is certain is that Selworthy is giving his son the best possible opportunities. "Every person has something to offer this world, and every person has a place in this world. I believe that Selworthy School will help Dan to reach his own unique potential, whatever that may be, because they recognise, appreciate and foster my son's very special Danielness."

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