



Selworthy School



Ria Borrett and her eight-year-old son Travis live near Taunton. Travis is a pupil at Selworthy School.

Ria knows that her son is special and unique, with a great deal to offer, and so do his teachers at Selworthy School

A mother's instinct

Ria had visited several special schools before deciding that it was Selworthy which could best address the needs of her son. Although each school had its own merits, it was Selworthy which stood out in terms of provision and ethos. "It was an instinctive thing for me; I loved the attitude of 'we won't make your child change, we will change for your child', and ever since Travis started there I have seen this in action. Even though Travis' condition is extremely rare, they assured me that they would treat him according to his own needs and capabilities and this has been the case since day one."

Living life on his own terms

Travis is one of only 16 children worldwide diagnosed with Temple-Baraitser Syndrome which causes epilepsy, extreme hypermobility, compromised muscle tone and global delay, and Ria was given a diagnosis only two years ago. "In some ways it was a relief to have a confirmed diagnosis but the most important thing was for him to be given the right help for his symptoms. No two children are alike whatever their condition is called and at Selworthy, they look at the whole child and their individual needs. Travis gets exactly what I want for him – if he won't be able to learn maths, science and geography, he's learning about social interaction, how to feed himself and enjoy life on his own terms."

Instant response

Because Travis tires very easily, often quickly and without warning, the staff keep a constant eye on him and make sure he has ready access to the sensory room where he can take time out to recover, and he spends much of the day there, often taking his schoolwork with him. "Everything is very flexible and his teachers are aware that if he flags he needs to be able to recuperate straightaway. Although he is non-verbal and his communication skills are limited, they are totally switched on and understand what he needs, when he needs it."

A two-way street

There are various ways in which the school is helping Travis' ability to communicate, including picture cards, Eyegaze, signing and Proxtalker but, like many other eight-year-old children, Travis has come up with his own way of expressing himself. "What is so lovely about Selworthy is that they know him very well and the staff have learned as much as I have how to interpret him," Ria says. "I have learned from them as much as Travis has and they also listen to me. It's very much a two-way street."

Accelerated progress

Travis has regular sessions in speech and language, occupational and physiotherapy, all of which are paying dividends. "His co-ordination is improving and he can now feed himself pretty well, and he is starting to say a few words, but for me, the best thing is that he is getting much closer to being able to walk unaided because of the dedication of his physiotherapist, who has worked with him tirelessly and

greatly accelerated his progress. Seeing him take his first steps with his K-Frame walker was a serious Proud Mummy Moment!"

The same opportunities – and more

Children with special needs are undeniably different from those in the mainstream but are no less capable of appreciating many of the same things. This is why the children at Selworthy not only have the chance to go horse riding, swimming and on educational visits, but participate in school productions, after-school clubs and other events, just like other children take for granted. "All Selworthy children have opportunities like anyone else – perhaps even more so," believes Ria. "I sometimes think that Travis has a more privileged education because he is not being obliged to fit in with a fixed curriculum in a class of 30 children, but has access to what really works for him."

A different perspective

Ria is obviously passionate about her son and about the care of children like him, and says that her perspective on life has completely changed since Travis was born. "My understanding of human nature is so different now. I have learned for myself, and Selworthy has reinforced my views, that no-one should be put into a box and labelled. Travis has his difficulties but he is still a very special person to whom people are drawn because he has his own beautiful, unique personality. I am so fortunate that Selworthy School recognises and appreciates that as much as I do."



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