



Franziska Yaw-Ankamah has two children. Clement is 13 and Felix, 11.

At Hawkswood Primary School no child will ever be rejected, however challenging their behaviour or however long it takes to turn their lives around

Bright, intelligent but disturbed

There are various reasons why children may be referred to Hawkswood Primary but it is fair to say that many have behavioural issues which have impacted on their mainstream education. Academically, both Clement and Felix were bright and intelligent boys who nevertheless had emotional problems that other schools had been unable to address, and that is why both were offered places at Hawkswood.

Franziska was amazed by how her children's lives were improved through the care they received at the school. "Clement and Felix were very different but they were both very difficult to handle, especially by their teachers," she remembers. "If they hadn't been able to go to Hawkswood I don't think they would have been able to stay in education but they have both returned very successfully to mainstream and are doing well. It has made a huge difference to us all."



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Trust

Felix started at Hawkswood when he was six and attended the Nurture Group. Marie Gentle is Assistant Headteacher and explains what the group is designed to do. "It is largely about restoring trust and confidence in children who have found it hard to form effective attachments with their peers or with adults," she says. "Within the small group we provide a nurturing, family atmosphere where the children know they are valued but also that they are expected to adhere to certain rules. We rigorously maintain boundaries as this helps children to feel safe and therefore to moderate their behaviour."

Shaky start

After only two terms, Felix had responded so positively that his reintroduction to mainstream primary was very successful. However, when Clement later joined Hawkswood at ten years old, his teachers had a greater challenge on their hands. "Clement was a very, very angry young boy and impossible to control in class," says Franziska. "It was not surprising that his teachers suggested he be moved to Hawkswood but even then, things did not go smoothly to begin with. No-one knew what the cause of his behaviour could be, but it was obvious he needed help and in the end, he got it."

However long it takes

Marie is very clear about the Hawkswood approach to particularly challenging children. "Firstly, we are all absolutely passionate about what we do. We will never give up on a child whether it takes days, weeks, months or longer, because there is always a reason why a child behaves in a certain way and it is our job to find out what it is. When we got to the root of Clement's problems, he changed almost overnight into the lovely boy he is today and he has never looked back."

A place of safety

The key to unlocking a child's deep-set problems is again, says Marie, the establishment of complete trust. "Once a child knows he is in a place of

physical and emotional safety he can begin to move forward, but he needs to do this at his own pace. With Clement, progress was slow but we were aware that his violent behaviour was a form of communication and that we needed to understand what he was trying to tell us. We would never push a child to disclose to us anything he was not ready to tell us but perseverance and patience pays off and in the end, Clement was able to open up. He knew we were completely on his side and we could and would do everything it took to help him."

Every child an individual

Treating each and every child as an individual is only possible in a smaller setting, such as the classes at Hawkswood, where a teacher has the chance to see beyond anti-social behaviour and into the triggers which cause it. "The change in Clement especially is wonderful," says Franziska. "He is doing really well at his new school and is so much happier. He wants to put everything else behind him now and because of Hawkswood, he can."



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