



Shermaine Tuitt and her family live in Waltham Forest, where her son Omarie is a student at Hawkswood Primary.

## **Shermaine refused to believe her son was just badly behaved, and at Hawkswood Primary she has been proved right**

### **Difficult choices**

It was not until he was seven years old and in a mainstream primary school that Omarie was identified as having significant learning difficulties. Unfortunately, his problems were seen as behavioural and he was excluded on several occasions. When it was suggested to Shermaine that Omarie should be referred to Hawkswood she had reservations, but realised that if Omarie was to stay in education it might be her only choice.

“I found it hard to accept the view that Omarie’s problems were seen as a behavioural disorder but it is true that he found things difficult at school and sometimes caused trouble in class,” she says. “What was very reassuring was that when he joined Hawkswood, his teachers soon realised that his behaviour was caused by his learning difficulties, which his previous school had not picked up on soon enough.”



Hawkswood Group

**Hawkswood Primary PRU  
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## Building communication

When Omarie started at Hawkswood he was selectively mute, meaning that although he was physically able speak he would or could not do so in situations he found stressful. His class teacher Leah Mwaniki explains how she addressed Omarie's predicament: "Omarie could neither read nor write and if given a task to do in class which he didn't understand would just get up and run from the room. Because he did not have the language skills to express himself, that was the only thing he could do to remove himself from something he found impossible to take on board. We provided speech and language therapy as well as other interventions so that we could start to build some communication, and the change has been outstanding."

## Remarkable progress

Although it has taken a considerable amount of time given Omarie's particular learning difficulties, the progress he has made during the last three years has, says Leah, been nothing short of remarkable. "From a child who never spoke, he has turned into a major chatterbox!" she says. "Once he felt confident enough to start talking to us we realised what a wonderful sense of humour he had and how much talent, talent that had been locked away. He can draw really well, is a great sportsman and is good at maths but no-one realised this before because he was too withdrawn."

## Understanding the child

Since starting at Hawkswood, Omarie's behavioural issues have lessened considerably, to a degree that he is almost always happy to apply himself to the classwork expected of him. This is a great comfort to Shermaine: "I always maintained that Omarie was not a 'naughty boy'; he was just frustrated when he couldn't do something he was asked to do and he reacted by getting angry because he didn't know how to explain that he was struggling. This is what has been so good about Hawkswood – he is now with people who completely understand and who know how to help him."

## Allowing children to reach their potential

Leah Mwaniki has worked with children like Omarie for a long time and is aware of their very individual needs. "Children with learning difficulties are all different and our approach to each one of them reflects this. In Omarie's case, I have very high hopes that he will go on to live a successful and independent life because he now has a much greater belief in his capabilities. He fully understands his own limitations but does not see this as a hindrance and he is very resilient, which he did not used to be. This is what we aim to do at Hawkswood: give children a realistic belief in themselves and their potential."

## Giving children a chance

In all her years working with children with additional needs, Leah says she has rarely encountered anyone like Omarie: "His progress through Hawkswood has been amazing and if Omarie can achieve as much as he has, so can other children. This is why I love what I do; I would never give up on any child because I know that very often they have much more potential than they may have been given credit for. They all have something to offer and we try to make sure they have the chance to do so."



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