



Sophie has blossomed and become more confident in the supportive atmosphere of St Mary's School and College



Marion and Jeff live in East Sussex with their son, Jack, aged 21, and daughter, Sophie, aged 18. Sophie is a day student at St Mary's School and College.

Individual attention

As Marion and Jeff look back on Sophie's seven years at St Mary's they are amazed by what she has achieved in that time and how much staff at the school have helped her get there. Her Mum, Marion, says: "It is lovely to see

Sophie more confident now and I think that is down to the ethos of the school. At St Mary's it is all about the individual child, not about everyone learning the same thing at the same time. All the children receive an educational programme that is tailored to their needs.

Providing specialist educational therapy and residential care for pupils and students with speech language and education needs.

Good recommendation

Sophie has a speech and language disorder and moderate learning difficulties and had a traumatic time when she was at primary school because she suffers from anxiety, Marion says. "She attended a mainstream primary until she was in Year Three and then moved to a mainstream primary with a language unit. She was anxious about going to school and did not progress well. We found a speech and language tutor for her, who also worked at St Mary's. Her tutor thought the school would be a good fit for Sophie when it was time for her to move up.

Integrated therapy

"Sophie started at St Mary's when she was 11 and settled in surprisingly well, considering her previous anxiety about going to school. She benefited from the small class sizes and was also helped by the wellbeing team and their psychology input. We were quickly reassured we had got her into the right school and were pleased that the therapists were there all the time."

Speech improvement

Jeff says: "The first progress we saw was with Sophie's talking and the increase in her confidence. She has never been good at socialising with family and friends but we gradually saw an improvement. Her speech became better because she learnt to sign when she couldn't find the word she wanted. Now she doesn't need to use signs to speak but it is a useful additional tool to help her communicate.

Developing skills

"We work as a team with the school because we help her at home and the staff liaise with us about her progress. We had been trying to teach her to tie her own shoe laces for years, but after we mentioned it to the school, they had cracked it within weeks and she could tie them. We had tried to teach her to ride a bike but the school have helped her become much better at it."

Experiencing work

Marion says: "Sophie's anxiety issues had been a major barrier to her learning but we have seen real progress since she has been at St Mary's. Now she is attending the college she is learning many new things. She enjoyed hairdressing and working in the college café and she is

studying IT. She sometimes works in the school kitchen because she loves cooking and she also enjoys baking at home.

Building on strengths

"Sophie gets a lot of pleasure from sport. St Mary's have a swimming pool and they taught her to swim. She has represented the school, competing against other children in her age group. She also loves running. The staff encourage her to do the things she is good at and she now enjoys music therapy and drumming."

Making friends

Jeff and Marion are grateful for the support they have had from St Mary's over the years. "We know we can always ring up and tell them if Sophie's worried about something and that they will deal with it. We have found all the staff to be very approachable," Jeff says. "St Mary's has been a big part of Sophie's life and she now has some good friends there."



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