



Oscar is learning valuable life skills and his self esteem has been boosted in the friendly environment of St Mary's School and College



Steve and Emma Gray live in Essex with their three sons, Elliott, aged 15, Oscar, aged 14, and Stanley, aged nine. Oscar has been a boarder at St Mary's School for two and a half years.

Fulfilling potential

Steve and Emma are delighted that staff at St Mary's are encouraging Oscar to finally fulfil his potential. "He loves life as a residential pupil, he is making good progress and is being given lots of opportunities to try new things, to help him become the best he can be," Steve says.

Useful recommendation

Oscar had attended a special school since the age of five but it became increasingly obvious the school wasn't meeting all of his needs. Emma says: "We have never been given a definitive diagnosis for Oscar's communications difficulties but we have monitored the

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

situation over the years. When Oscar had a speech and language assessment at the age of ten, it was suggested St Mary's would be a good school for him because being a total communication environment with integrated therapies and SSE signing meant Oscar would be given speech therapy and taught signing in an environment where the children and adults can all communicate with each other.

Nothing else compares

"After we had been to see St Mary's we knew it was the right environment for Oscar. We looked at similar schools nearer to where we live, but there was nothing that compared to St Mary's. We had seen that the teachers clearly understood the children in their care and we knew it was where Oscar had to go. We felt so strongly we were prepared to fight to get him there. It was well worth the battle as Oscar hasn't looked back since starting. He has thrived and is now the Oscar we remember when he was younger, who was happy, sociable and continues to be motivated to learn.

Amazing progress

"When Oscar first started we eased him in gradually, with two nights a week as a boarder and by the end of term he was doing a full week. Oscar has progressed amazingly and is now much more vocal and uses a number of words, which can be understood. His signing skills have advanced significantly and he also uses gestures to help him communicate.

Skilled and passionate staff

"We live a long way from the school so we can't just pop in and ask questions, but all the staff are really good at communicating with us with phone calls and emails. When we read Oscar's reports it is obvious the staff really know and understand him. What they write about him mirrors how we feel about him. They know when he is capable of achieving more and how to bring the best out of him. They are patient and give him the time to communicate. All the teachers and therapists are specialists who are highly skilled and passionate about what they do. Oscar is making progress in small steps, but each achievement is massive for us."

Confidence building

Steve says: "We get very good feedback from the staff about Oscar. They say he is attentive and focused in class and copes well in the school environment. It is a total communication school and they use a range of approaches to help the children develop their skills. The staff are really dedicated and can all sign. When Oscar was at his previous school he became insular as he was not understood, so it is lovely to see him happier and more confident now."

Becoming independent

Emma says: "Oscar has got used to being at school during the week and at home at the weekends. He loves doing things with his brothers and immerses himself into family life. You can tell he is used to looking after himself at school because he transfers his independence skills to the home setting and likes helping others. He is much more vocal now and you can tell his self esteem has been boosted.

Above and beyond

"He likes going back to school each week to see his friends and play football and he has a wonderful key worker who goes above and beyond to help him, taking him out shopping and on trips. St Mary's are not just giving him an education they are helping him become independent and learn valuable life skills. I think Oscar would say he likes going to school because of his friends, his teachers and the chance to try new things," Emma says.

A bright future

"In just two years the staff have gained Oscar's trust, made him more confident and helped him move forward. He has made some lovely friendships with other children because they all understand each other. St Mary's have given us back our Oscar and we feel the future is bright for him."



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