



Saoirse is now starting to fulfil her academic potential in the total communication environment of St Mary's School and College



Patrick Hanlon and Suzanne O'Hara live in Surrey with their son, Eoin, who is 18, and daughters, Maeve, who is 15, and Saoirse, who is 13. Saoirse has been a boarder at St Mary's School for nearly two years.

Specialists in communication

Patrick and Suzanne are very pleased with the improvement in Saoirse's speech production and her progress academically since starting at St Mary's. Suzanne says: "We always knew Saoirse was a smart girl but her difficulty in language production can disguise this and

hold her back. After moving to a specialist speech and language primary school her language improved. We chose St Mary's because it is one of the few specialist secondary schools for children with speech, language and communication needs and could offer a total communication environment. Since starting at St Mary's, Saoirse has made another big leap forward. After the first

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

month there was a marked improvement in her speech production. Relatives who don't see her very often have been amazed by how much her speaking has improved."

Fulfilling potential

Although Saoirse is verbal and can understand most of what is said to her, she signs as well as speaking. Suzanne says: "St Mary's is a total communication environment and the staff also use visual clues when they are teaching. Saoirse signs as a fallback if she can't make herself understood verbally. Now communication issues aren't a barrier to her learning, she is fulfilling her potential academically and she enjoys all the subjects she is learning at the school.

Making friends

"Saoirse settled in well and loves the school. Because she has separation anxiety she is a bit upset for a few minutes after I drop her off on Monday mornings, but we have been told that she is fine again quickly and this is apparent in how she is making friends and flourishing at St Mary's. When she's at home she tells us she misses the school and the friends she has made there.

Loving learning

"She likes English lessons and working on story telling and comprehension. She loves Maths and has made great progress with her times tables. She astounded us with her knowledge of fractions recently and her mental arithmetic has improved. She also enjoys science. They have been looking at the heart recently, which she has found fascinating.

Integrated therapy

"While some speech and language schools are ill-equipped to deal with disabilities outside of those related to communications, St Mary's has a range of therapists in house. As parents, one of the key attractions of the school was the way therapists work side by side with teachers in the classroom, as well as inputting to the life-skills teaching programme within the residential setting. Saoirse has speech and language therapy input during lessons and in a one-to-one and small group setting. Saoirse also struggles with her mobility, stability and coordination, so physiotherapists and occupational therapists work on skills with her during the school day, encouraging her to do physical activity and improve her capabilities. We have been completely satisfied with St

Mary's and have found the staff very supportive."

Becoming independent

Suzanne admits the family did have reservations about Saoirse living away from home. "We are a very close family so ideally, we would have loved her to be able to go to school during the day and come home in the evenings. St Mary's is too far away for her to commute daily but in the end we agreed it is such a good school for her, she has to be a residential pupil Monday to Friday. Every child has a key worker who teaches them life skills and how to become more independent. Saoirse has learnt how to put on washing and load the dish washer. They teach them road safety and internet safety and encourage them to try different activities. Saoirse has had a go at horse riding and drumming and enjoys doing arts and crafts and karaoke. They have a supper club where they all cook together in the evenings and she goes out shopping and into the local community.

Tailored education

"Saoirse is very sociable and has made some good friends. She likes to be helpful and look after some of the more vulnerable children. She also gets on well with the older girls, who are further ahead with their education. We are pleased Saoirse is now able to access learning in an environment where there are students with similar issues. The learning is tailored to the children's individual requirements and aims to improve their confidence. We know we made the right choice because of the wonderful progress Saoirse has been making at St Mary's."



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