

Claire was close to despair because of her son's learning difficulties but Sacred Heart Voluntary Catholic School has reinforced her faith in the power of care and commitment

Claire Cummins and her partner, Christopher, live in Leicester with their children Tamara, 13, Kayden, nine and Jace, who is eight years old.

The extra mile

It is fairly obvious that Claire did not choose the Sacred Heart Voluntary Catholic School for her children because of its location. Twice a day, she walks the two miles there and back but believes it is worth every single step. "Although there are other schools which are much closer, for me, Sacred Heart has been and continues to be my absolute rock. Without the support it has given our whole family I am not quite sure where we would be; certainly not in the happy place I feel I am now."

A Christian ethos

There were two main reasons why Claire applied to Sacred Heart: firstly, its excellent reputation which was borne out by the experience of family and friends, and secondly its very strong Christian ethos as Claire's faith is of the utmost importance to her. "Those two factors in themselves would have drawn me towards Sacred Heart but there is so much more about the school that I have come to value greatly," she explains. "The atmosphere is lovely and the staff are nothing short of amazing. For very different reasons, all my children have flourished there."

Debt of gratitude

Now at secondary school, Tamara is a high achiever and Claire attributes this largely to the strong academic grounding she was given at Sacred Heart. Kayden has also increased in confidence through the sensitive approach of his teachers, but it is perhaps because of Jace that Claire feels a huge debt of gratitude to the school. "I had known for quite a while that Jace was not achieving the milestones expected for his age but I turned a blind eye, thinking that he would catch up when he started school. However, when he was in Year 2 his teacher gently suggested that his problems were greater than we had thought and I began to fear that the school might suggest we consider a specialist setting for him."

Determination to help

Claire's fears were unfounded, and even before Jace received an eventual diagnosis of ADHD and severe learning difficulties, the school put a range of measures into place to ensure he could stay in mainstream education. "They set the ball rolling immediately, offered extra tuition for him as well as one-to-one classroom support, and they were incredibly understanding in terms of his behavioural problems. What I found most impressive was that everyone was so determined to help, not just Jace but our whole family, as Jace's condition presented us all with major challenges."

Vital support

When the children were late arriving at school because of the problem involved in getting Jace up in the morning, their teachers provided catch-up lessons to make sure they didn't fall behind with their work. They also, says Claire, offered vital support to her when she was

almost in despair. “It is hard to describe the extent to which our lives were affected by Jace’s condition but his teachers completely understood what we were going through as a family and have been there for us every step of the way. They have not only very effectively supported Jace in his education but they have wiped my tears on many occasions, and become wonderful friends.”

Beyond expectations

During the last twelve months in particular, Jace has progressed beyond Claire’s expectations. “He is reading now, able to count and is starting to understand colours and shapes and although that might sound like a small achievement, for Jace it is brilliant. Because of the dedication of the teachers and their commitment, Jace’s prospects are so much better than I could have hoped.”

A genuine commitment

Claire’s next concern will be when Jace transfers to secondary school but she has absolute trust in Sacred Heart to guide and advise her. “I will take everything they say on board because they know Jace inside out and what will be the best thing for him. They have never let me down and never will – I know they genuinely care about us all and that means so much. From the bottom of my heart, I thank them for what they have done for our family; this school has helped me grow as a parent, and helped my children to grow in their own, individual, ways.”

Children say

Kayden: “Sacred Heart is the place where I found all my friends.”

Tamara: “The teachers were always fair and always did what was best.”

Jace: “I like my teachers, a lot.”