

# Linda knew the time had come to move her son to Torfield School, where he has thrived ever since



Linda Helsdown and her partner Graham live in Hastings with their son, Nathan, who is 10 years old and a pupil at Torfield School.



## A step in the right direction

Linda is not the only parent to wish she had moved her son to Torfield School earlier than she did. Nathan had struggled in his previous school, not only because he found it difficult to keep up academically but because he found the environment of a mainstream setting intimidating and hard to cope with. Although initially he had been supported by a Teaching Assistant, this provision had been withdrawn and Linda felt she had to look elsewhere.

"An emergency review was called because it was obvious Nathan needed far more support than his school was able to give him," Linda says. "He needed a consistent and stable atmosphere which could address his particular problems and I was so glad that, following assessment, he was given a place at Torfield. The school handled the transition very carefully and although it took him a little while to settle in, the difference in him now is marked. He is so much calmer than before and has made huge progress in every way; it has been a very positive experience."

## Small steps, big progress

Many of Nathan's behavioural problems have been largely overcome through a range of strategies, tailored to his interests and capabilities. His dislike of buttons, clips and uniform had been a big problem and Linda had been unable to persuade him out of his favourite tracksuit. When he started to accept a proper polo shirt and school trousers, she felt it to be a huge step in the right direction. "It was just one of those things he had a big problem with, and it was so lovely when he decided he would wear the school uniform," she says. "A lot of the things which had ruled his life became less of an issue and in the three years he's been at Torfield he has made so much progress."

## Leaps and bounds

The much smaller class sizes at Torfield are particularly beneficial for Nathan and academically he has, says Linda, come on in leaps and bounds. His spelling and reading have improved greatly and he is more able to accept rules and boundaries. "He wasn't able to cope in a large classroom with lots of people around him, and if he had a tantrum he was sent out to sit by himself so it made it hard for him to learn properly, or to make friends. He faced the risk of permanent exclusion and that is why I am so grateful that Torfield was there for us."

## Rewarding hard work

One of the main principles at Torfield is to treat every child according to their own individual needs but one strategy which works for most is the Smiley Face reward system. Children earn Smilies for good work or behaviour or for effort and can either save or spend them on treats or prizes. This not only motivates the children, but helps to teach them about how to handle money. The children have to work hard

for Smiley Faces and it says a lot for Nathan's progress that his total is now well into the hundreds!

## A move towards independence

The school also places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of life experiences, such as visits to the zoo, theatres, museums and shopping centres. Whilst these are a part of the curriculum, they are given as further rewards for achievement and help to broaden the children's interests and towards independence. Linda was amazed at how Nathan has benefited from this approach: "Last Christmas he took part in the school's carol concert, standing up in front of an audience to sing a solo. It was also one of the first times he wore the proper school uniform. I have his performance on a CD the school made for me and it was wonderful to see how well he performed. It was completely out of character and took a great deal of courage; I was so proud of him."

## Back on track

A recent review has indicated that Nathan has made such good progress he might be able to return to mainstream education at secondary school but Linda is determined that he should make the natural progression to Saxon Mount Community School. "Everyone at Torfield has worked very closely with me and supports my view," she says. "Between us, we have got Nathan back on track and that's where we want him to stay."

## Children say

Nathan: "I think I've done really well. I like my school, I am happier here and I have achieved a lot."

