



Dr Dipti Patil and her partner, Paul, live in Gateshead with their son, Neil, who is six years old.

Dipti's professional insight convinces her that only Riverside Primary Academy could have so effectively addressed her son's special educational needs

Transformation

"Neil has only been a pupil at Riverside Primary Academy for less than two years but in that time he has," says Dipti, made more progress than she could possibly have hoped for. "I am quite sure that if it were not for Riverside, Neil would not be the happy, outgoing and confident little boy that he is today. When he first joined the Reception Class he was very withdrawn, sometimes displaying attention-seeking behaviour, and would try to hide himself away. All that has changed, and I have enormous gratitude to his teachers who have helped bring about such a wonderful transformation. He has been described as a success story by the school and other professionals, and that is very encouraging for a parent."



An Amazing Level of Support

Although he was born in the UK, Neil lived for some time in India with Dipti's parents. When the family returned, it was clear that Neil was troubled and in need of support but despite her expertise as a Psychiatrist, Dipti was unable to obtain a diagnosis. "At first I thought he might be on the autistic spectrum but because of the strides he has made in the last six months or so I now think that is unlikely. The most important thing was that Riverside was prepared to take him and give him an amazing level of support, and it is that support which has made so much difference."

Commitment to Special Educational Needs

Neil was provided with one-to-one classroom support under the supervision of the school's Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDCO), together with both speech and language and occupational therapy, and Dipti believes it was this which helped to integrate him effectively into school life. "The SENDCO was excellent, very understanding and prepared to do whatever it took to help and support Neil. Between us, we put measures in place to make him more comfortable in his surroundings and this included help with his personal care as well as his behavioural difficulties. We had applied to get a Education Health Care Plan but during the process, Neil made so much progress that the local authority decided it was unnecessary."

Communication is the Key

Dipti has now come to the conclusion that many of Neil's difficulties stemmed from his lack of effective communication skills, skills which have been greatly enhanced by the care he has received from the school. "Because he couldn't express himself verbally he would try to attract attention by physical contact which the other children didn't understand, and this behaviour could have isolated him socially. Through careful and sensitive handling, he has learned how to interact more appropriately and he's now a very popular, extremely well-behaved member of the school."

Slowly and Surely

From a chaotic and fearful child, Neil has blossomed into a well-rounded achiever who now relishes change and

adventure. "Riverside Primary Academy was careful to give him the structure and routine he needed in a way which was most appropriate for him," Dipti explains. "When he started there, they allowed him to gradually build up the time he spent at school rather than insisting that he attended full-time straightaway, slowly encouraging him to the extent that he now gets excited at the prospect of a new challenge. I have nothing but admiration for how the school and his teachers have turned his life around. He's a different child, in the best possible way."

Moving On

Dipti and Paul now face a challenge of their own: for family reasons they are shortly to relocate out of the area and Neil will have to move to a new school. "Through my work as a psychiatrist I have visited many schools and seen how they accommodate children with developmental needs. I have found nowhere which does so as well as Riverside and so count myself very fortunate that Neil has been able to spend time there at such an important time in his life. I have no doubt at all that he has gained in every way because of the kindness and compassion he has been shown, and that this will help him to move successfully to his new setting."

A Parent's Verdict

"Riverside Primary Academy is the best school I have ever known in its approach to children like my son. The staff built upon Neil's strengths and did not let his weaknesses compromise his happiness or education. This is a school I would recommend above all others."

Children Say

Neil: "I like school because I like reading, writing and maths and playing with my friends. And I like after-school club."

