

Winston's transition to school

I have to come clean and say even thinking back to the lead-up to Win starting school is still quite hard. Such a lot was going on for us regarding his health and wellbeing and it was a very scary prospect to be sending him into school.

Win had been struggling at nursery as his physical differences were becoming more apparent. Soon after his diagnosis he began to struggle with anxiety around the more confined spaces in the nursery and he worried about knocking other children over. So the idea of sending him into a whole school full of children felt really daunting. I can remember countless conversations with Anne from the A-T Society as I struggled up the hill to nursery with the buggy – she was always so reassuring and comforting. I would call thinking I had a few quick things to mention and end up bending her ear for the whole walk and without exception she always made the time to talk things through and ease my mind.

When the time came to choose a school, I couldn't be sure what would be right for Win. Would he be better in a school with a Special Needs facility that was fully accessible? Or should we follow our instincts about Win's personal needs and send him somewhere a little smaller and more focused on community? Anne gave me helpful pointers as to what was important when viewing the school buildings, as well as sending us the Information for Schools pack which we could take with us to give the settings a better understanding of Win's needs. But perhaps more importantly, she also gave us the confidence to trust our instincts, and the assurance that the A-T Society would be with us and would support whichever school we chose to make the transition as smooth as possible.



At this time we were undergoing the process of obtaining Winston's EHCP. A multi-disciplinary meeting was called and Anne travelled to Hastings to attend. I was so relieved she was there and full of admiration for the way she engaged in the meeting. She gave such concise, thoughtful information and helped keep the conversation on track. She pushed for the best for Win throughout and was able to make a stand for him through her expertise and commitment that even we as his parents would have found difficult. Unfortunately, I had to take Win's case to appeal and again she and Kay were beside me, giving me all the options and encouraging me to make myself heard. Win now has his EHCP in place and has a wonderful Individual Needs Assistant.

When we had finally selected the school we wanted and he gained a place, Anne suggested I liaise with his teacher and request a few visits so he could come to the classroom when it was empty, get used to the space and meet her properly.

By this time the class teacher had been given all the information provided by the A-T Society and was thinking along the same lines – offering Winston some sessions after school, which he loved. We took photographs of him playing with the toys and printed them, and he remembered where the toilets and coat pegs were. We were lucky enough that the school had a Headteacher and staff who went out of their way to support Win in starting school. Combined with the unwavering support of Anne and the A-T Society, by the time Win's first day came he was a bundle of excitement who couldn't wait to put on his uniform and leave the house. At the start of the process I couldn't have imagined it would ever have been this way.

Win had a hugely successful first week at 'big' school! They arranged for Winston to attend their morning breakfast club so he could avoid the hectic, crowded playground. In true Winston style, he bowled in on his first day and had the year six boys in stitches from the word go! We are so proud of his positive attitude. To top it off he now has a new best buddy called Logan!

Soon Kay and Anne will travel back to Hastings to give a talk in school to give staff a better understanding of A-T. We are delighted for the school to be so well informed and ready to receive Win as he moves through the school. Plus we're really look forward to seeing Kay and Anne, too!