

Fiona's Story



Underley Garden

Name:	Fiona
Date of Birth:	November 1994
School start date:	September 2011
Local Authority:	Cumbria
SEA:	Complex Needs

Before Fiona came to Underley Garden she was described as *"one of the most complex young people"* specialists had cared for.

Previous educational placements had broken down and Fiona found herself as an inpatient at a centre for young people who're suffering from extreme mental health problems.

Fiona’s complex diagnosis meant she required a very carefully planned and well structured transition to Underley Garden School so that she could cope happily in her new environment.

Her parents have been hugely supportive of the move to Underley Garden and are amazed at the progress – educationally and socially – that she has been able to make with clearly defined support, a bespoke health care programme and other innovative strategies to help her.

Her support has included successful sessions with Underley Garden’s holistic team of an occupational therapist, educational psychologist, cognitive behaviour therapist, two nurses, and an independent consultant working alongside her full time teachers and key workers.

“At Underley Garden she has been able to do things safely and her health is responding. She’s no longer just a number and there is definitely huge progress that I can see in her,” said her Mum Susan.

Fiona’s progress has meant she has been able to access an educational curriculum in a way her parents feared might never be possible.

“The staff at Underley are just extraordinary people,” says her Mum. “They really get to know the children and care about them. They have great personalities and they really work with the students to bond with each individual and speak to them in a friendly manner but professionally. Then they can teach them and make progress.”

“I can see that she is very happy there. I realise now, looking back, that she has been through some very difficult days.”

Every six weeks there is a clinical review to try to ensure that her health improvements continue. If anything needs to be tweaked, the team will do so.

“I could see right from the start that she was happy to go to school,” said her Mum. “She hadn’t been there very long when she told me ‘Underley Garden is the school for me.’

“Fiona is really doing well now with Maths and English. I put it down to the skills that the teachers apply in the classroom. She’s pleased that she is going to be able to take exams and she has already done Level One in Catering”.

“She is now getting a social life that she couldn’t have had elsewhere. I think the social progress has been even more important for Fiona than trying to catch up academically.”

She’s popular with her flatmates, and they go out as flatmates together and get the chance to try new things together.

“Life feels more normal for her and I think it’s so important for her to feel like that.”

“I had to try really hard to ‘let go’ and accept residential care for her at Underley Garden. When I did, the progress for her has been so much faster. You can see that they really do care about the children and young people. It’s not just a job to them.”

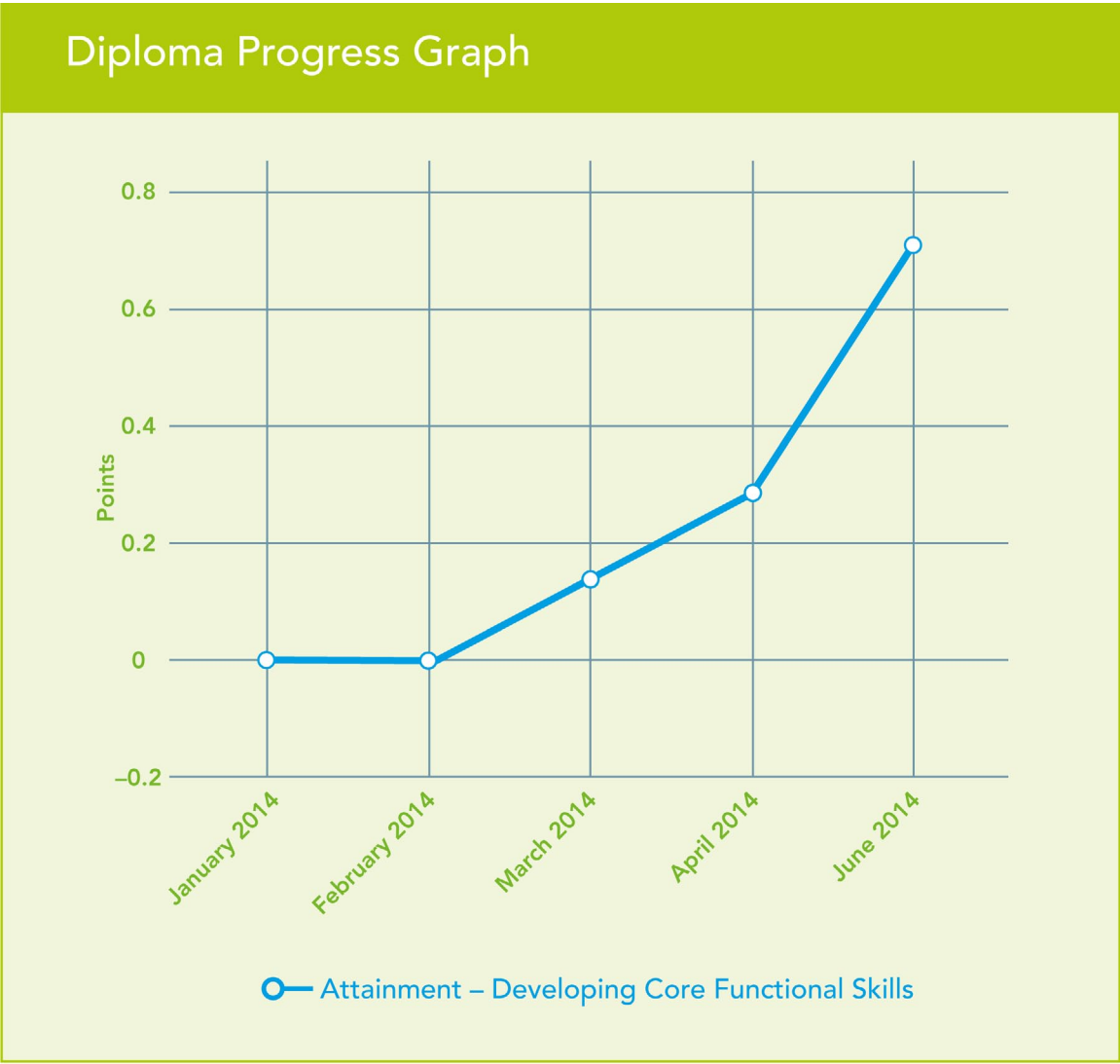
The family is also very happy with the flexibility shown by the school with home visits.

“Fiona used to come home on a Friday evening and go back on Monday morning. We realised it would make much more sense for her to go back on a Sunday night, ready for the start of the new week. I worried about making the change, but it wasn’t a problem at all for school.”

“School is very structured in its approach but they’re so flexible within that structure.”

Fiona now tells me about the things she has enjoyed at school and I know that she loves the activities and trips. She particularly enjoyed the trip to the cheese factory and she loves doing girly things at school like hair and beauty.

“At Underley Garden she has been able to make up for some of the time as a teenager that she had lost. She is very happy at Underley Garden and that’s obvious to me.”



We are delighted that Fiona has made huge progress at Underley Garden School.

Due to the time that she had been out of full time education, her confidence was at a very low level. A very gradual introduction to the school worked very positively for Fiona and gave her time to adapt to all aspects of school life.

The rise in her confidence has been huge and she is a highly successful and very popular student. The educational programme that she has followed has been rich and varied and has had an increasing emphasis on life, independence and vocational skills.

I feel very confident about the future life Fiona will be able to lead. **Head of Education**

School Progress

Accessing the Curriculum

2011

Fiona followed a gradual introductory programme to Underley Garden School. She had missed a large amount of her KS4 education and had lost confidence as a learner.

Her ability to access the curriculum was delayed due to her speaking and listening needs. A Speaking and Listening Assessment and high level of staffing proved effective for Fiona to access the curriculum more effectively.

The amount of time she stayed in lessons increased.

Fiona was entered for GCSEs in Maths, English, ICT and Art, which she completed in her first year: a great achievement.

Her exams gave her the proof she needed to show that she was going to be able to make up for the substantial time she had lost in education.

2014

Fiona is reaching the end of her three year college programme.

She has achieved qualifications including an Entry Level Diploma titled Core and Vocational Skills in Hairdressing and Catering.

Fiona has completed a Level 1/2 course entitled Core and Leisure Skills: Certificate in Skills for Further Learning and Employment (QCF) and a Functional Skills English Level 2 Award.

The experiences and qualifications Fiona has achieved will equip her well for adult life and independent living.

As well as continuing with her core education of English, Maths & ICT, Fiona has gained a great deal of vocational knowledge and skills.

Through the Life and Leisure Skills programmes, Fiona has grown in confidence in using public transport, handling money, budgeting and improved her social skills.

Social Skills

Fiona started as a friendly member of class but sometimes was over-friendly towards some young people which they struggled to deal with.

It became apparent that Fiona lacked confidence in social conversation skills. Support was given to encourage her to chat to other young people in less formal situations, for instance at breaks or at lunch times.

Observations of Fiona socially interacting with her peers showed that sometimes she became overly excited with her friends leading to some negative behaviour. She was not always able to follow staff advice.

Fiona has made a great improvement since she started at Underley Garden School in her ability to participate in group activities in class.

Fiona's confidence when interacting with others has grown enormously which will be a help to her in other environments.

Fiona has been working with our Occupational Therapist to develop life skills by running the Garden School Café for one afternoon a week.

She has made great progress with her willingness to try out unfamiliar activities which will stand her in good stead when looking to interact with people independently in the future.

These activities have included planning and undertaking trips on public transport, understanding the skills required in the catering and hospitality industry and managing a budget.

Health

Fiona has complex needs including a diagnosis of treatment resistant schizophrenia which was managed through medication.

Fiona also presented with a number of sensory processing difficulties, centred around her listening and response times and around her reaction to and aversion of various food textures.

Fiona has been supported to become more independent in how she manages her anxieties around food, both in terms of her dietary controls and any obsessional behaviours this leads to as well as her aversion to differing food textures.

Fiona has gradually displayed a more mature attitude towards managing her food and although she continues to require reminders, she is aware of the importance of a healthy diet and most importantly the fact that she needs to take increasing responsibility for ensuring she follows one.