

James' Story



Underley Garden

Name:	James
Date of Birth:	December 2003
School Start Date:	September 2013
Local Authority:	Cumbria
SEA:	ASD with anxiety which has impacted on learning
Type of Provision:	DAY pupil

"His social worker had never seen him smile until he went to Underley Garden. It's just been fantastic for him."

James' Mum

"James is a totally different child since he started at Underley. He'll talk to people more now, whereas before he wouldn't even look at you. His confidence has really grown since. His social worker can't believe the difference in him. She can see that his confidence has really grown. He used to hide from her under the table!"

James’ autism wasn’t diagnosed until he had started school. His late speech development was put down to his hearing difficulties. When ASD was mentioned by his speech and language therapist, the family was devastated. Their immediate reaction was: “We don’t want him referred, we don’t want him labelled.”

“Actually,” his Mum Val admits “it’s what you have to do. I have five kids and I just thought I’d got a naughty one, but you have to face up to the fact that this is never going to go away.”

Prior to Underley Garden, James was in a mainstream primary school with large class sizes of more than thirty children. James needed constant one to one help in the classroom which caused its own problems.

His Mum Val explained: “The other kids started name calling. Because the other kids were picking on him, he refused to have help. He swore a lot, he’d hit out, kick out and would end up in isolation. I don’t really think his old school had the knowledge or expertise to know how to handle him. He wasn’t allowed to play outside with the other children; he had to play out on his own. They’d give him just two minutes to calm down and it didn’t work.”

James was moved to another, smaller, village school but James couldn’t cope and the placement lasted only a couple of weeks.

“I think social services realised that he needed specialist education or was going to get left behind. He had started self harming which I think was his frustration. Social services asked me to look at another school, but I was concerned that it wouldn’t be right for James and that his behaviour would get worse, not better.

When I went to look at Underley Garden, I could see straightaway that it is a fantastic school because they understand the children there. The atmosphere was so calm, the children seemed to be happy there and the staff really understand each child.

I can’t believe the difference in James. He used to hate school. His social worker asked James to give a mark out of ten for how much he enjoys school and he replied ‘20 out of 10!’ It was fantastic to hear him say that.

Until he went to Underley Garden his social worker had never seen him smile, and she remarked on how lovely it is to see him smiling.

At Underley Garden he can see other pupils are having help as well, and so he willingly accepts it.

James knows he is autistic: we’ve always been open with him. Now he understands that he’s not on his own and that other children have problems as well. He is absolutely fantastic there now.

At his mainstream school he didn’t have any friends, which was heartbreaking. At Underley he has already made friends and it’s wonderful to see.

He still has his moments: but the school has taught him how to anticipate them and how to control his feelings of anxiety. They have taught him strategies. Now, he’ll tell me he’ll be OK and he’ll start his breathing exercises. He’ll calm himself down.”

Teachers have also helped James come to terms with a recent, and sudden bereavement in the family. For children with autism, questions at such poignant times can be direct , inappropriate and seem cruel in their approach. Underley Garden has helped James and his family cope with being able to deal with that.

“They’ve spoken to James about it a lot, and really helped him try to understand what has happened. He knows that there is a support team around him and that there is always someone he can talk to at school. I’ve been grateful for that, because I don’t think he’s really been able to process what’s happened.”

Val is also impressed with the school communication “Home Link” books.

“At his old school, messages home were all about what James had done wrong; I never knew anything about what he’d done at school.

At Underley Garden, they tell me everything. Every day, I know exactly what he has been doing at school that day, what he has achieved, and if there have been any problems and how they have been resolved. I even know what he has had for his school lunch and whether he has eaten well, because that’s another problem area for James. Now I know if he’s eaten and what he’s eaten.

They couldn’t have been more supportive. We have regular meetings at school and he is progressing now with his school work. Progress wasn’t measured at all at his last school: his school report just said ‘could try harder’.

The approach is so much better. They make the lessons more enjoyable. He tells me his favourite lesson is English which used to be his worst subject! He’s still not very good at it but he’s enjoying it which is amazing. He’s starting to read

things now at home and I can see the improvement in his reading. He’s never done that before. Life at home is much calmer now. He used to lash out at his elder sister and at me and my husband on a daily basis, but his wobbles aren’t as prolonged as they used to be. When he started there there would be daily outbursts and they could last for hours. Now, it might be one a week and they’re much shorter in length.

James being happy at school has helped the whole family. After the family holiday last summer things were at rock bottom, and he wouldn’t let his Dad out of his sight. Things are so much more settled for all of us now.”

James travels to school by taxi, with an escort for company. His Mum remembers: “I was absolutely dreading him going in a taxi, because I didn’t think he’d cope. On the first day, we followed the taxi to school in our car, just in case. But he goes into school with one of his friends, and he’s absolutely fine.

He’s never first out of the door at home, and has to go through his routines of touching and counting before he leaves the house, but he copes with it well now.

Underley Garden has been fantastic. The communication is very good and that is the key. They really do understand these children, and they bring in additional professionals as necessary. He has seen the school’s educational psychologist and has had access to the speech and language therapist. He didn’t have any of that before.

It’s just fantastic. He has settled in and made progress incredibly quickly. I can’t believe how quickly he has settled. It’s given him more than we dared hope for, and most importantly, I know he feels safe there.”

School Progress

Accessing the Curriculum

2011

James struggled to participate in all lessons, due to his sensory issues.

In Food Technology he struggled with the strong smells of different foods and having to wear protective clothing.

He refused to enter the art room for several weeks because he did like the smell or look of the room.

James found it difficult to attend some classes. Staff worked with him closely to share his anxieties and develop strategies to overcome the issues.

Social Skills

James was a very quietly spoken member of the class and showed delays in his expressive language.

James has difficulties understanding long and complex sentences and uses strategies such as watching other children and visual clues to help him.

Initially he relied on his Teaching Assistant to communicate his needs to others.

He would spend break time with staff rather than other pupils.

Health

James has many sensory issues. He is very sensitive to noise and has routines he has to follow.

This impacted on his ability to attend some classes in Food Technology, Art and PE.

He preferred to spend time one-to-one with his Teaching Assistant in a neutral classroom with very little stimulation.

2014

James now attends all lessons and participates fully.

He is able to access a full and varied curriculum.

He is showing good knowledge in a range of subjects, and is English, he has worked diligently on improving reading and handwriting skills.

James now shows real enthusiasm for Food Technology lessons and enjoys producing a range of cooked foods.

James always attends art lessons and he is showing great talent in the subject.

James has made a great improvement in his ability to participate in group activities in class.

He has formed lots of strong friendships and relationships with his peers and staff which has helped his confidence and self-esteem.

He is a member of the school council and can express his point of view and, with support from his Teaching Assistant, can gather opinions and needs from the other students to feedback with confidence to the group.

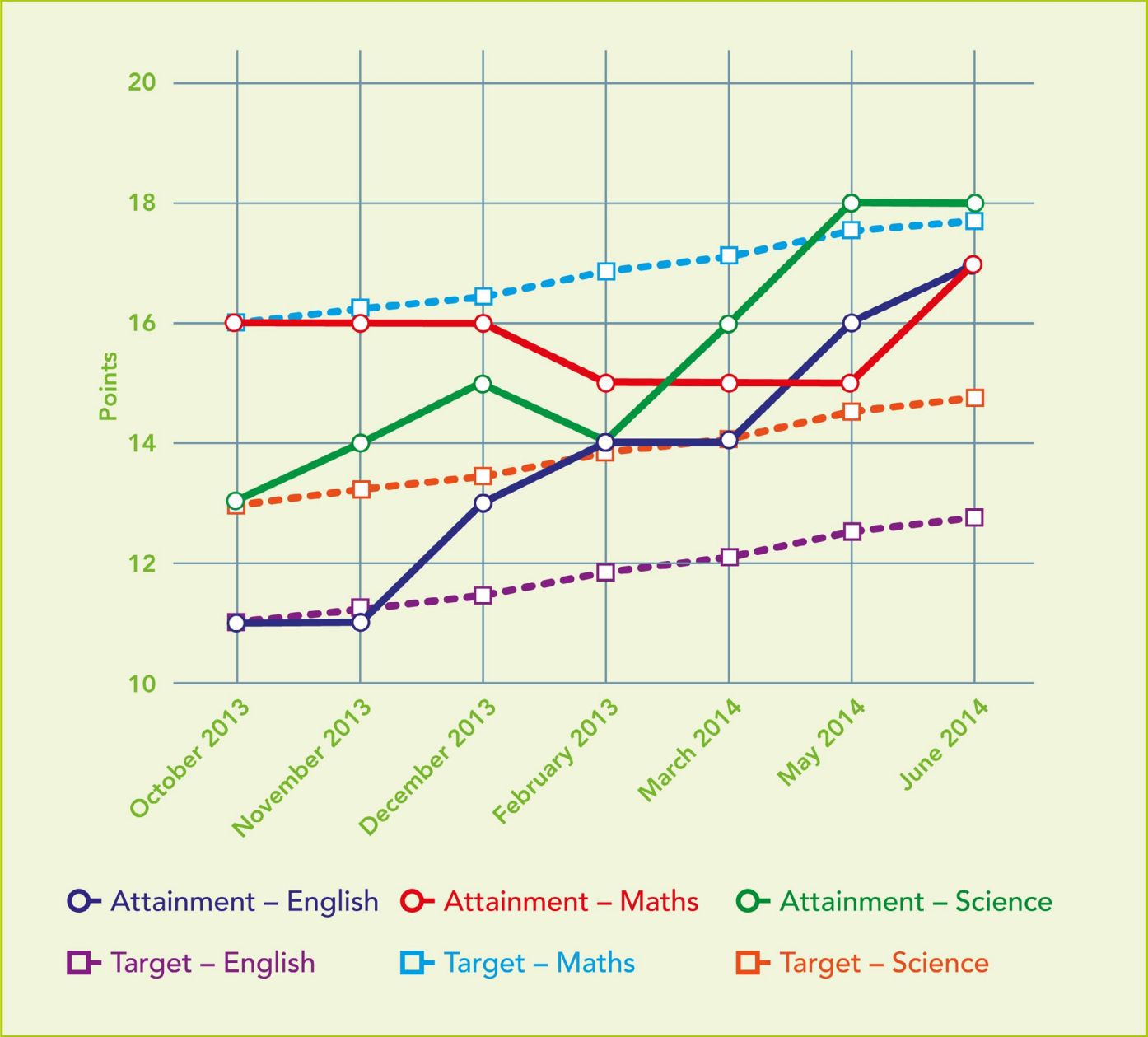
Through the school council, James requested football nets for the playground. He helped construct them with the PE teacher and now enjoys playing football in most break times with all age groups and staff.

James is a member of the school football team. He is a good team player and competitive. At away matches, he is confident in new settings with unfamiliar young people and staff.

With support and encouragement James has conquered his fear of certain classrooms that have a distinctive smell and now attends all lessons.

James can stay in lessons that might be noisy and has developed strategies to block out the noise of others and get on with his work.

Core Subject Progress Graph



James is now fully engaged in all aspects of the curriculum and is making tremendous academic progress.

He has benefitted from the multidisciplinary staff team, especially linked to his sensory needs. Having a range of therapists on site means that the education staff can liaise with and ensure the most appropriate strategies are embedded within young people’s programmes. James has also made excellent social progress, developing positive friendships which have impacted on his life in and out of school.

Head of Education

