

# Mark's Story



Underley Garden

Name:	Mark
Date of Birth:	April 1996
School start date:	September 2011
Local Authority:	Lancashire
SEA:	ASD with complex needs
Type of Provision:	Day pupil to residential (weekly)

Mark started at Underley Garden when he was 15 years old after being excluded from seven other schools and pupil referral units. His needs are complex, and his mother says no two professionals have ever agreed on the same diagnosis. He has problems processing words and his memory is poor!

*"He was a wild child, I realised that by the time he was only 12 months old!"*

Mark's Mum

## The family's route to securing a place for Mark at Underley Garden was a five year fight with the authorities which left his Mum exhausted and bitter about the 'system' for children with complex needs.

By then Mark had been to seven schools, spent three years at home, and his mother felt that some schools were not even able to keep him safe. "This is a child who was first excluded from preschool because he ran riot," she said. "When he was excluded from the village primary school, I had to carry him out of school with the Headmaster and the local vicar. It was humiliating for all of us. It hasn't been easy."

"Underley is the only school which has been able to cope with Mark. I'd been trying to get him into Underley since he was about ten years old because I knew of its reputation for dealing with complex children," said Christine.

"Being a parent of a child with complex needs feels like you are trying to look after your child whilst walking on the shifting sands of the system. The "system" doesn't seem to work for anyone: it doesn't work for the parents, the schools, the social workers, or most importantly, for the children. Sometimes, it feels as a parent as if you're taking on the whole world and fighting everybody. It can be very lonely. As a mum, it's hard enough being responsible for a young person with complex needs, without having that battle."

"Eventually, I got him a place almost by default: because he'd been tried everywhere else.

"When Mark was finally given a day place at Underley Garden, my local authority tried to end his educational statement which left me no choice but to go to tribunal again, and again we won.

"Life has been so much better since he went to Underley Garden. Underley Garden is the first school that has coped and actually made improvements with him.

They have a very good understanding of complex children, and what these children need to be able to achieve. I don't just mean educationally, the staff at Underley Garden know how to enable these children to function.

"If he's having a bad day, they just go along with it, on the basis that tomorrow might be a better day. They have spent a lot of time with Mark getting to really know and understand him.

"It's incredibly important to make a strong professional relationship with these children so that they can support them.

"Many of these children have been let down so many times (in previous placements). Now, he is happy and I know he is safe and looked after,"

"He's doing quite well on the school side and I'm pleased. But he's just happy there and that's worth far more.

"The reason that Underley Garden works so well for these children is because they have such a large professional team with excellent specialists on board such as the educational psychologist who has been brilliant with Mark."

"The health team at Underley is brilliant: the whole holistic approach is because they want to find

solutions for Mark. I appreciate it hasn't all been plain sailing for them but I do truly believe they are doing their very best and I am very thankful for that.

"I have a wonderful relationship with the school. I have always found them very easy to talk to. They inform me of things and I have always found them very approachable.

"I can be frank and honest with them at Underley Garden and I will get the same back from school staff. That's important to me. With someone like Mark, it's tough enough and I need people to be honest with me. That often hasn't happened before. I've no illusions about what Mark is like, and what he is capable of doing, and now it feels as if we are facing it together with honesty and openness to be able to move forward. Underley Garden and the whole team of professionals there have always been excellent at that."

"I feel I can trust them with Mark and that's a first for me. Communication is key, and Underley is so good at it. Previous schools have listened but then say 'well, we know best', well I'm sorry but they don't. Underley keeps me informed about everything and it has built my trust. I value their opinions, and I still feel part of his team. I know they are working really hard for my son.

"I honestly believe that Underley Garden has the best interests of the children at heart and they go that extra mile for them. It is unique."

In spite of his problems, Mark and his Mum have always been very close and it was a big decision for her to accept residential care for him. He goes home each weekend and for holidays.

"Sometimes you have to make decisions that you don't want to make. It can feel as if you're picking between your children. His sister gets more time with me than she ever did when Mark was at home, and she has missed out on so much. We're a very close family: we all miss him, but we have made the right decision, even though it has been so hard for me to make it.

"My daughter's sitting her GCSEs this year. She's not naturally academic but she works hard and I know she'll do well in pursuing her career dream in becoming a speech and language therapist.

"My hope for Mark is that he progresses further socially and with his communication skills. I would just love it if I knew one day he was safe going to the corner shop on his own and able to buy a pint of milk."





# School Progress

## Accessing the Curriculum

**2011**

Mark had difficulties in following instructions and was unable to clompromise.

He struggled to form relationships with members of staff and would rlefuse to attend some lessons.

When he did attend, he would be extremely selective about the aspects of learning he would take plart in.

Mark could also hold grudges against members of staff when he didn't get his own way, and this further compounded his difficulties in accessing the curriculum.

## Social Skills

Initially Mark required a high level of support with his social skills. When in a group he would either try to monopolise the discussion or refuse to participate.

Mark appeared very isolated, and would often avoid group situations such as using school transport which impacted on school trips.

Mark had little social awareness of others and could be very insensitive to his peers. He would insist on trying to help others which would often require a great number of prompts from staff to help him maintain focus on his set task.

**2014**

Mark's attitude towards learning has improved greatly and he has made huge progress in developing his basic core skills.

He has completed vocational courses in Environmental Conservation and is completing a Level 2 Award in Practical Horticultural skills.

He is also working on a combined core skills course consisting of both level 1 and 2 modules in the Maths, E!nglish and ICT.

He has responded very well to the high levels of pastoral support offered and is now an articulate and confident learner who loves a challenge.

Mark's level of understanding of his peers and their needs continues to improve.

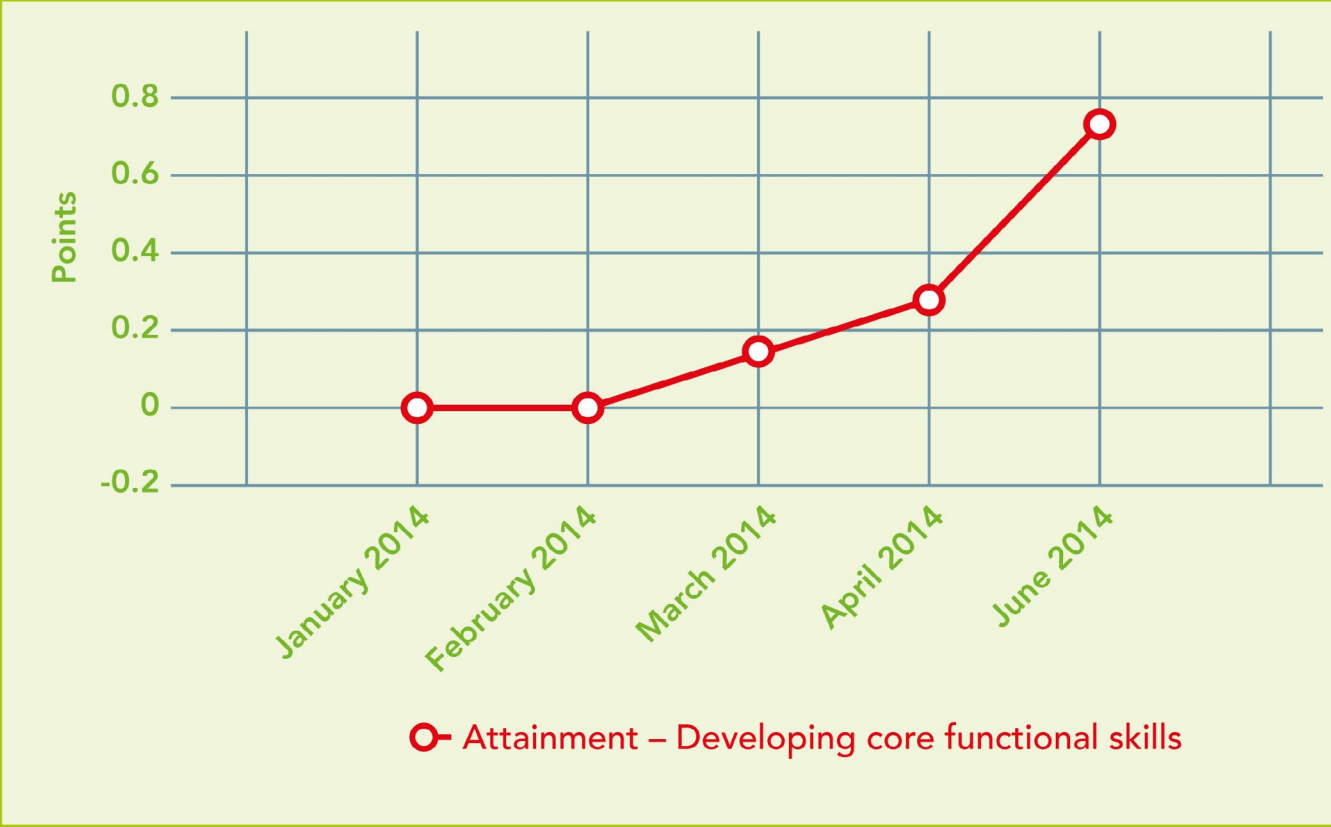
He allows others to discuss their opinions and is learning to accept the opinions of others.

Following a programme with the school's Occupational Therapist, Mark is much more confident in using transport.

Mark has developed very strong friendships and is also a great role model to younger pupils and regularly engages them in games at break times.

Mark offers other young people advice and encouraging comments if he notices they are distressed but has also shown awareness when not to do this. He is developing many skills and qualities required as a Mentor.

## Diploma Progress Graph



Mark has made really good progress academically and has gained a good range of qualifications.

“Considering his reluctance to engage in many aspects of education this is a great achievement and also means that he is well prepared for adult life and different options that might be available to him.”

“As well as making great academic progress, Mark has also made huge progress with social skills and his ability to self reflect.

Mark has a very caring side to his nature and it has been great to see him learn and develop skills to enable him to help others in an effective way.”

Head of Education

