

CERI & TONY'S STORY

Hello,

My name is Ceri Madden and I am a Parent/Governor at St Vincent's School for the Visually Impaired and Other Needs.

I am inviting you to read our story of not only a difficult decision but also the best decision that we made 5 years ago for our son to attend this wonderful school and hope to assist in the decision for you to send your son/daughter to this School.

In 2014, we learnt the news that we dreaded to hear, our son had inherited a Genetic Condition called X-Linked Retinitis Pigmentosa, which had not been seen in the family for 60 years. We were devastated! Of course, we had worries for the future for him but also pledged that he would have all elements of normality, independence, and confidence, and would ensure that nothing held him back.

Our Son, Anthony attended a main-stream primary school at the time, which was around the corner from our home. He enjoyed school, had friends, and was confident, bubbly, and carefree, everything was working well with the support from the mainstream school.

In September 2016, we started to notice the changes, changes to Anthony's peripheral vision had occurred which had been confirmed by the hospital, and the struggles started to show. Struggles such as falling behind in his schoolwork and not meeting national targets, we dreaded those words which were coming quite regular. SEN meetings with the teachers, who were starting to struggle with his needs and unable to provide the equipment and resources to help, regardless of us stating we would pay for it ourselves and unable to do so, but our son's confidence was diminishing, asking if we were proud of him after Parents evenings, as the report wasn't meeting National Benchmarks, that was the emotional part as we were very proud of him but felt helpless.

I contacted the SEN lead through our Local Authority who liaised with us very quickly and met with Anthony at the School at the school. The plan was for Anthony to finish his Primary School years at the mainstream School but was advised Anthony would need a specialist school for his secondary school years. The lead advised that we should apply for an EHCP (Education and Healthcare Plan) and whilst we were waiting advised to contact Dr John Patterson at St Vincent's who may be able to offer advice and a day placement on enrichment and life at a school which was likely to be the school of choice.

I remember the phone call with Dr Patterson very well, welcoming, reassuring and invited us for a visit to the school with Anthony, we chose to attend 2 days later. We were impressed from the start and Dr Patterson advised on what was on offer at the school, enrichment, sport, swimming, on top of the normal delivery of Education. Anthony took part in a swimming session with the other children while we looked around. He came out very happy and excited, he really liked it here. He was offered an afternoon enrichment placement on a Wednesday and a Friday afternoon placement to take part in after school swimming to start in September 2017.

Shortly before Anthony joining the school, we were awarded the EHCP Plan immediately but it advised that Anthony required 25 hours one to one support, which we knew he wouldn't be able to get at the mainstream school, he wouldn't have the independence/confidence to do things for

himself but he also asked if he could join St Vincent's full time, the wheels were set in motion for him to join St Vincent's and we had every confidence we had made the right decision.

Anthony is thriving, loving school life, very popular with other children and has met some very close friends. Anthony did undertake his SATS at St Vincent's and achieved excellent scores, which he would not have achieved. Anthony has undertaken attendance at COP 26 and was interviewed on the Nicolette Devidar show in Washington on Smart Sustainability, worked on the Magic Bench Project, and even interviewed Ricky Tomlinson on the School's Radio. So much opportunity!

Anthony is also due to choose his options, he is undertaking his GCSE's from September and is leading his way with confidence, independence and that can do attitude that we wished for. We work very well with all the staff at St Vincent's.

If you are considering sending your son/daughter here, please believe me when I advise that you will not be disappointed and will be the best decision you can make, still unsure, please ring Dr Patterson, make an appointment, and come see for yourself!

Thanks for reading!