

Jimmy



Underley Garden

Jimmy is a complex pupil who has profound autism, learning difficulties and is unable to speak. At Underley Garden he is in a class of two pupils, and has weekly access to Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy. His parents are delighted with the progress he's made at Underley in his first year.

Their advice to other parents is: "Don't accept second best."

PREVIOUS SCHOOL

"Jimmy wasn't happy at his previous school and they weren't able to meet his needs. The school knew it but at that stage there was nowhere else for him to go. It was a constant battle to try to get his needs met and it was so frustrating. His previous school said all they could do was keep him safe, and they admitted they wouldn't be able to educate him.

Jimmy couldn't cope with the noise: it was too big and too busy. The teaching assistants tried their best with him but they had no training. Jimmy was upset all the time, and he'd go at other children. He had to fit in with everyone else and I always felt that Jimmy's needs came last. In the end, he spent a lot of time on his own because he couldn't cope with the other children.

I felt they should have done more but the attitude was 'he shouldn't really be here' and that was the end of it."

UNDERLEY GARDEN

"The first thing that struck me was how calm it was at Underley - how calm, and quiet and it felt very relaxed. The ethos was all about meeting Jimmy's individual needs, and not, this is what we do with autistic children."

PROGRESS

"His class teacher (April Boyd) 'got' him straightaway. When she talks to us we realise she understands him completely. That's very important to us.

For Jimmy, the main focus at the moment is around communication. You can see that Jimmy wants to communicate but he just doesn't know how to.

He's just started with PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and the school is sending PECS symbols home for him, once they've established what works best for him in school.

They work at Jimmy's speed and they know that, however long it takes, it will work for him. They don't give up because they have the expertise and experience and know it will be successful. They keep trying and I can see the progress he's making. It's only gradual, but it's progress.

We see progress at home all the time: he will be more persistent about asking for things to be given to him or to be done for him, such as asking for a lid to be taken off something or asking for something to be switched on.

It's giving him independence, and although I don't think he'll ever be able to live independently, he's now able to make choices for himself.

Jimmy now has some control over what happens in his life, rather than everything being done for him.

At Underley, they're listening to him, and they're responding to him as a person which is very good.

He's made more progress in a year at Underley than he did in the previous three years at his old school.

We noticed very quickly - in the first couple of months - a massive difference in him: he matured from a little boy to the seven year old he is. He seems far more grown up; he's far more confident at home.

As his first year at Underley went on, he became more and more independent. At a recent hospital appointment he was watching strangers and making good eye contact. He went over to the doctor and took his hand - I'd never seen him do that before: he used to just ignore people.

Recently, he stayed for a class sleepover at school. It was the first time he had been away from us for about six years and he did really well. We were really impressed that the school tried that with him.

Underley will try new activities with the children in a safe and controlled environment. They will always try to stretch the children and I think it's a wonderful approach. I was amazed. I was expecting a phone call to say 'he's really upset' but I didn't: he really enjoyed it.

They went for an outing the following morning and he did really well on the climbing wall. We were amazed because he struggles up and down the stairs at home!"

IMPACT ON FAMILY

"Underley has given us peace of mind. We feel now that he has a future.

Initially, it was such a relief to see that he is happy, and know that we haven't got to keep fighting anymore. He's getting the right education now which he wasn't before.

We can stop worrying about his future now, because we know he has one.

We're delighted that he's valued as much as every other pupil in the school. That's important to us. We're very pleased with the respect that they show the children.

At home we feel confident to try more things with Jimmy, instead of worrying about whether he will cope.

We're just so happy he is at Underley and so pleased with what they are doing for him. We'd like to thank them for all their hard work.

I worried initially about the taxi journey for him, because it's an hour each way, but he goes with an escort in the taxi and he loves it. He has enjoyed it from the beginning: it didn't bother him at all.

At Underley, I know he's safe and I know he's happy. Obviously, Jimmy has his bad days, but I know they'll cope. The down days are fewer than they used to be and at Underley every day is a new day with a very positive attitude towards the children.

His home/school diary is full of everything that he has done at school each day and if Jimmy does something out of the ordinary, school will phone and tell me. Although the school is a long way away [geographically], I know what's going on and what Jimmy's doing.

We're both so relieved that we have found a school where he is learning and he is happy."

ADVICE TO OTHER PARENTS

"My advice for other parents would be: don't just settle for what you're given. If a parent knows that the school isn't right for them or isn't working, you can do something about it.

Don't believe the wrong school is all that there is out there. Don't take it for granted that your child 'will never be able to...' because you just don't know.

Before Underley, we had people telling us all the time 'he'll never be able to do this or that' and setting limitations for him. You know your child best.

I'd advise any other parent in a similar position not to give up. Don't accept second best."

THE FUTURE

"We know one day we may have to consider a residential education for him but at the moment we are still enjoying him living at home.

We feel that Jimmy has a future now: we don't know exactly what it will be, but we feel at Underley they will take him as far as he can go. That's all we ever wanted for him."

Jimmy's Mum

"Jimmy is a very complex young man and our priority has been to understand and manage his behaviours whilst trying to teach him a means of communicating. We started by using objects of reference and we are now moving on to PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).

There are two pupils in Jimmy's class. They're at the same learning level so we can take it as slowly as we need to. We're using lots of strategies in their classroom for them to make choices from pictures.

For example, at morning snack time, I can offer them a banana or biscuits and they can each choose successfully what they would like to eat. We've progressed to the next stage, for them to choose from a picture of a banana or biscuits and this will take longer for them to understand. At Underley, we know we'll achieve that, and we'll work with patience for as long as it takes. We know we'll succeed.

I know that Jimmy is making progress. It's progress that might look like a flat line from an academic view point, but this is progress that will change his entire life. It's tiny steps, but every tiny step is crucial.

When Jimmy first arrived at Underley he didn't interact with other people or get involved in activities. He'd wander around and play with a toy for just a few minutes before becoming bored and agitated. Negative behaviour would follow. Now, he'll initiate interaction with staff which is progress. The poor behaviours we were witnessing have disappeared."

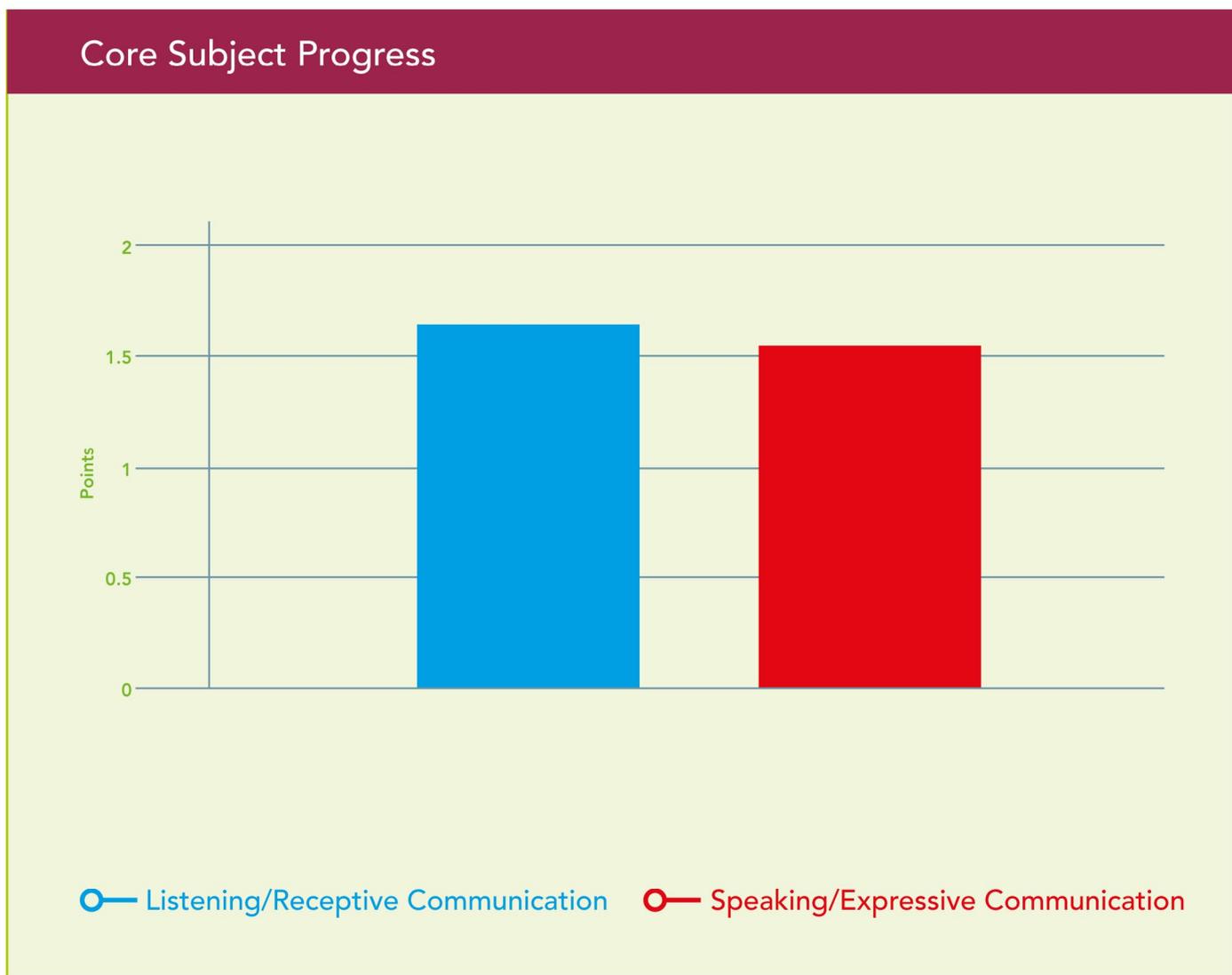
April Boyd, Teacher in charge

"Jimmy is now a much calmer person, because he is thoroughly enjoying the environment and surroundings at Underley Garden. The sensory and communication orientated programme we have put in place for Jimmy is suiting him well and meeting his needs.

I see Jimmy interacting with the whole school community now; not just within his own class. The feedback from his parents has been very important for us because our communication strategies will have an impact on his life at home, as well as his life at school.

Knowing that the influence of our specialist communication strategies will transform Jimmy's whole life is hugely rewarding." **Head of School**

JIMMY'S PROGRESS



Attendance, Behavioural and Educational data is constantly recorded for each pupil.

The school's judgment on Progress for Jimmy is: **OUTSTANDING**

“Excellent initial progress since his placement began, despite significant barriers to progress.”

Head of Education