



Getting the learning environment right.

Afaan joined Mary Hare Primary from a mainstream primary school with a hearing resource unit. Over the years he had faced many problems at school, the main one being his speech and language delay. Without access to speech and language he became delayed in all aspects of his education and had fallen further behind than his deaf peers at school. His progress was very slow at school and we were told the school could not meet his needs any longer. The school felt that he would benefit from a specialist deaf setting.

What was your main reason for choosing Mary Hare Primary for Afaan at this stage?

The main reason for me selecting Mary Hare Primary for Afaan was the oral-auditory approach to learning. As well as being profoundly deaf, Afaan has Usher's Syndrome (type 1) which means that he could lose his eyesight in a few years' time.

Afaan is very oral and does not use sign language much. I felt, after viewing many deaf schools in London, many of which relied on sign language, that he would benefit from an environment that used spoken English more.

Also seeing the confidence in the children at Mary Hare Primary and how easily they welcomed Afaan, asking him questions about himself and his school, made up my mind that I wanted him to be at Mary Hare.

KEY FACTS

Name: Afaan

- Current Year 5
- Started Mary Hare in 2018
- Profound hearing loss
- First language English
- Wears bilateral cochlear implants

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What difficulties did the mainstream environment present for Afaan?

The difficulty that Afaan faced at his previous school was the inability to have access to the resource unit all the time. He would only have 45 minutes a day there which was less than he required. The rest of the time he would be in a classroom with about 25 other children. He could not follow the teacher in lessons and had to rely heavily on the Teaching Assistant's help. The Speech and Language Therapist came once a week for a session lasting 15 to 25 minutes which I felt was not enough.

How easy was it to get Afaan into Mary Hare Primary?

After the initial assessment Afaan was offered a place. Unfortunately, it took much longer on the part of our Local Authority. It took a year to transfer Afaan's statement into an EHCP. Initially they refused to name Mary Hare Primary, instead naming a local specialist school which was for visually impaired children with additional needs. We appealed, and our case went to tribunal and we won.

All in all, the process took two years which was unfortunate because Afaan remained in a school where his needs were not being met. I felt very strongly that two years of his education had been wasted because knowing that his eyesight will go meant I wanted his speech and language and listening skills to be developed.

What difference has the specialist environment at Mary Hare meant to Afaan?

The specialist environment has made a very big difference to Afaan. He has become his own person with likes and dislikes.

He has an opinion on everything, he talks more and is asking lots of questions. He is more confident and stands his ground with his brothers and cousins. He tells me at the weekend what he has done during the week which he never used to do. His pronunciation whilst reading is getting better and better and he now attempts to pronounce words he is not familiar with.

He is using longer sentences now. Before he would only use four or five word sentences.

What advice would you give other families going through a similar experience?

I would say 'don't give up.' I know it is hard, especially when you are up against your Local Authority and it takes time, but persevere - it will be worth the fight to get your child into Mary Hare.

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Securing the future of deaf children and young people