

The Shires:

Progress: OUTSTANDING

"Every child at The Shires is treated individually because autism is such a wide ranging condition. We adapt our practice to meet the child's needs. We always put the child first: they're children first and the autism comes second."

Marina Gough, Director of Care & Education.



"Dominic came to The Shires with a difficult educational history and demonstrated non co-operation as well as very challenging behaviour. He has made outstanding progress at The Shires, attending school full time with 100% attendance. He is supported by well trained staff and accesses a wide and balanced education in relation to the National Curriculum. In front of parents and other guests, he sang a duet at the end of term Christmas concert with his friend Kevin." **Jeff Harper, Teaching Manager.**

"Initially, Dominic displayed anxiety about joining the class but he is now a firmly established and fully participating student. Dominic is willing to read from PowerPoint presentations to the whole class; he likes to participate in classroom discussions; and he makes every effort to complete his classwork.

Dominic has made a number of peer-group friendships in class and across the school. His attendance and punctuality are impressive, and he is encouraged to tell staff when he is feeling anxious. Dominic has access to Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Music Therapy and Play Therapy. In due course he will join the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme." **Christian Williams-Jones, Class Teacher, Red Class.**

"As a parent myself, I understand it's a big decision to place a child at a residential school. I hope I can reassure them by knowing we offer the best standard of quality care we can possibly provide. Parents can keep in touch as often as they like, whether it's by text, email, phone, visits or a combination of all of them. Alternatively, we can take their child for a visit home.

I want all our children to learn to be as independent as possible and have as much fun as possible growing up doing the activities they most enjoy. It might be going out on trips, going swimming, horse riding, or to a theme park. We risk assess everything and take everything at an appropriate pace.

Dominic's passion at the moment is cars, so often his trips and activities have an automotive theme. Even his reward chart is car-themed with car key fob stickers!"

Amy Merchant, Registered Manager, The Shires.



Independent Educational Psychologist

An independent educational psychologist visits each pupil at The Shires. Their role is to observe, assess, and work with the teaching and care staff to ensure individual initiatives are in place for each student to ensure the best progress can be made.

"Dominic settled in to his class at The Shires very well. He was extremely shy at first but once he joined in with the class he has started learning and making excellent progress. The Shires has a very strong supportive environment and very good staff teams who can adapt to the needs of the individual to entice and motivate the pupils."

Richard Bulkeley, Independent Ed Psych



Ofsted: Inspection November 2015

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home	Outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

*An **Outstanding** children's home provides, "Highly effective services that contribute to significant improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time." Ofsted.

Dominic at The Shires

You can watch Dominic's family tell their story on YouTube by searching the title or via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6ps9F3a6nk>



Dominic



"We're happy again as a family and you can't put a price on that happiness."

Mum: Lorraine

"All our lives have been totally transformed by The Shires and they have done more for Dominic than we could have ever imagined."

Mum: Lorraine

"Young people are encouraged to express their wishes and feelings in all aspects of the care provided." Ofsted Nov 2015



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Better days, Better lives

Life before The Shires

Dominic was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of three. Additional diagnoses of ASD followed, and he suffers from severe anxiety, attachment disorder, hypersensitivity and hyper vigilance. He started his education at a mainstream school but moved to a special needs school in Year 3 where he was isolated in a classroom on his own because of his disruptive behaviour and anxiety.

His secondary education in a SEN school lasted a month before he was moved out of his class.

He became extremely aggressive, tried to escape from school, and caused damage to property and vehicles.

He started self harming and also suffered from anxiety eczema to the point that doctors feared he could lose a leg.

Dominic was excluded from his previous SEN school.

"We reached rock bottom. We weren't living, we were all just existing. We were walking on eggshells all the time. We reached a point where we were all living by Dominic's rules, just to try to keep things on an even keel.

It would be the simplest thing that would lead to a meltdown, such as not being allowed to sit in the front of the car or going out of the front door in the wrong order.

We were all sleep deprived. I had no interest in anything or anybody at all." **Mum: Lorraine**

"As a family we were in total crisis. It was a complete mess." **Dad: Ian**

Moving to The Shires

"We were offered three schools to choose from: the first, we felt, was just going to move the issues to a different place: it wasn't going to address Dominic's problems. The second wasn't an option: they were going to just put him in a 'Dr Who Tardis' all day on his own.

Then we went to look at The Shires. We knew instantly it would be right. It felt right. It's a very small school and they were very welcoming. The bespoke, individual curriculum was exactly what Dominic needed. Whilst we were visiting we saw a couple of children in crisis and we watched how the staff handled the situation which was very reassuring. We saw what the staff had in place to help the children through that crisis: it was brilliant. They answered all of our questions.

They asked about his likes and dislikes for his bedroom - even his preference for the colours of his walls and bedding. They tailor each child's room to their personal specifications. The staff went out of their way to ensure he would be happy and settled. Staff from The Shires came to see us at home to find out what we're like as a family which was very helpful." **Mum: Lorraine**

Flexibility of Placement at The Shires

Dominic is on a 38 week placement and comes home for weekends and school holidays. During the long, six week summer holiday, the family was offered the flexibility to let Dominic have a week back at school.

"We know that if we went into crisis when Dominic was at home, staff would be here within an hour to take him back to school and deal with the problem. Knowing that has lifted a huge weight from our shoulders. It was wonderful for Dominic to go back to school for a week during the summer holidays and catch up with his friends, and for our other two children to have a week with us without Dominic. Because of Dominic's anxieties, they also accepted him back a day early to ensure he could settle in to the new school year more easily. They keep him busy and it works."

Mum: Lorraine



"If we have a crisis whilst Dominic is home, school staff will be here within an hour to take him back: it's lifted a big weight from our shoulders." Mum: Lorraine

Transformation

"The difference The Shires has made to Dominic is immense. He's matured: he's no longer a boy, he's matured into a young man. They are teaching him life skills which a mainstream school wouldn't have done. He'll cook his own tea a couple of nights each week, he goes out after school to places we would never have dreamt of taking him and it means the children go out and about in the community which is wonderful. His anxiety eczema has totally gone.

The staff are brilliant. We speak to them often and they will tell us everything we ask. They keep us informed about everything. They reassure us that everything is absolutely fine.

I'd like to thank the staff at The Shires. They have done more than we could have ever imagined. In my heart, I know Dominic is in the right place and I can't thank them enough." **Mum: Lorraine**

"Since he has been at The Shires - it has been absolutely brilliant. When he comes home on a Friday, he has no stress or anxiety. There's no aggression any more. He has showed no aggression since he has been there." **Dad: Ian**

Friendships

Dominic quickly made friends at The Shires, something that hadn't happened at his previous schools. His best friend is Kevin. Although they're not in the same class, they see each other at break, lunchtime and after school, often going out on activities and trips together. With the support of The Shires staff, Kevin has been to Dominic's home at the weekend.



Impact on Family

"We're happy together as a family and you can't put a price on that. I can't put a price on our happiness. All our lives have been totally transformed by The Shires: Dominic's, ours and his brother and sister's.

As a family, we all benefit from Dominic being at The Shires. He's learning every day. We want to be with him at the weekends, spend time together and do things as a family. We are a family again. We're enjoying life together.

The impact The Shires has had on our family is immeasurable. The anxieties and stresses he had at his previous schools have gone: he doesn't show any of that behaviour now. The Shires has totally changed our lives completely and Dominic is absolutely thriving there.

The Shires has had a massive effect on all of us. To make the decision to send Dominic to boarding school, was the hardest decision we've had to make for any of our children.

We know we made the right decision. We had to look at the bigger picture, which wasn't about us, it was about what was best for Dominic and - just as importantly - what was best for our other two children. Their life wasn't good when Dominic was at his previous school." **Dad: Ian**

"We all benefit from Dominic being at The Shires. We're enjoying life together." Dad: Ian

Impact on Siblings

Before Dominic went to The Shires, his sister and brother were unhappy and struggling at school. They were witnessing his behaviour at home, often aimed at their Mum.

"It was impossible for them to lead normal lives or concentrate on their homework because of Dominic. Now, they're thriving at school, and making progress. They can do their homework in the week, in peace, and look forward to Dominic coming home at weekends." **Dad: Ian**

"We're really happy because Dom can learn new skills, different skills, and he can actually learn more. Friday, Saturday and Sunday are really good days where I can be really happy. I run up to him and give him a big hug when he gets out of his taxi. I would just say thank you for helping my brother with his learning and making it easier for our family." **Dominic's Sister: Bethan**

In Dominic's own words

"I like everything about The Shires. I like the school and the staff are very friendly and kind. I like relaxing in my room listening to my music or Heart FM. My favourite lessons are English and Maths Bingo. My best friend is Kevin and we like doing things and going out after school together."

Advice to other Parents

"We know what it's like to be at rock bottom as a family in crisis. We've been there. Do what is best for your child. You're not being selfish by choosing a residential school, you're doing what is best for your child: The Shires will help you do that." **Mum: Lorraine**

