



Jo Martin and her partner Roger live in Broadstairs with their sons Rex, five and three-year-old Jem.

# Jo worried that she might have to settle for anything available, but Callis Grange Nursery and Infant School has exceeded her hopes and expectations

### Worth waiting for

Jo and Roger moved to the South coast from London shortly before Rex was due to start Year 1 at school and they were dismayed to discover that places were few and far between. "We put Rex's name on the school waiting lists but in the meantime I had no choice but to home-school him," says Jo. "He actually quite enjoyed it but I realised that it wasn't a long-term solution so we were grateful when a place eventually came up at Callis Grange."

Although Jo had heard good reports about the school, it wasn't until she visited that she realised why it was so popular. "As soon as we walked through the doors we were blown away. We found the school to be a vibrant, friendly place with beautifully maintained grounds and a lovely atmosphere and now I realise how incredibly fortunate we were that Rex was able to gain a place there."

## A real welcome

Unfortunately, all the changes Rex had recently experienced following the move and a period out of school unsettled him a great deal so by the time he moved to Callis Grange he was rather nervous. However: "On his first day he was made to feel so welcome by his teacher and new classmates that it took a very short time for him to feel at home," says Jo. "He was even chosen by everyone to bring home the Class Mascot during his first week, which was a very lovely thing and made him feel special."

## Campfire bonding

Although Jo was greatly reassured by how well the school had managed to integrate Rex, who had joined halfway through the term he was still a little shy, and sometimes lacked confidence in class. Jo believes it may have been partly for this reason he was chosen to take part in the new Forest School initiative. "Rex is a bright little lad but he started at the school at a lower than expected level because of the interruption in his education and the upheavals he'd experienced. Forest School did wonders for him: it pushes children in so many ways and helps significantly in boosting self-esteem, confidence and engagement with learning, as well as being a way of promoting social skills. The children with whom he took part were a mixture of shy, outgoing, boisterous and calm, but they bonded and co-operated well over den-building and camp fires!"

## Benefits of the great outdoors

The school is hoping to extend the Forest School provision to more pupils in the future, and Jo is convinced of the benefits. "Rex has always been happy outdoors and in a natural environment, and never been bothered about mud and bugs! But even for children who are less at home with nature, learning in this environment has huge benefits and as we didn't have access to this in London, I am so glad to find that Callis Grange has embraced it so effectively."

## Huge progress

Whatever the techniques or strategies employed by the school might be, they have certainly worked as far as Rex is concerned. "He had previously been inclined not to bother much with subjects that didn't particularly interest him but in the fairly short while he has been at Callis Grange his reading has improved beyond recognition because he thoroughly enjoys it now. In maths, he was selected for the Numbers Count initiative which filled in the gaps in his understanding and he has made huge progress. He actively wants to make an effort now, and genuinely enjoys the challenges."

## Nothing more to wish for

Little Jem is due to start Nursery at Callis Grange later this year and Jo can't wait. "I have been more than happy with Jem's current pre-school but when I saw the one at Callis I was amazed as I have never seen such a wonderfully stimulating environment. Rex has been very lucky indeed with Callis Grange, and hopefully Jem will be fortunate enough to have an extra year at a school from which we could not have wished more from."

### Children say

Rex: "The playgrounds are good and I enjoy finding out new things at school!"

Jem: Rainbow Class is colourful and the toys are awesome!"



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