

Just Joe

Senior school selection

Shelley Ducarreux

Parent and Family Support Worker, The Down Syndrome Educational Trust



Paul, my husband, and I have two sons, James (14) and Joe (12). James has Down syndrome. James has always been educated in the mainstream and in September, 2003, he took up his place in our local secondary school in Hampshire. Almost as soon as he started at this school, Paul and I received a form for selecting a secondary school for Joe. (James repeated Year 2 in primary school for a variety of reasons, which means there is one academic year between the two brothers).

Joe was now in junior school with no sibling. Paul and I noticed a new confidence in him and during a casual chat with him, he confessed to us that when James was at the same school he felt guilty for doing well and getting good test results. He felt it was not OK for him to be better at things than his older brother.

Now that James had left he enjoyed being 'Joe' and not 'James' brother'. James has a huge personality and made himself and his business known to everyone in the school. Joe, however, had grown tired of regular reports from pupils on James'

behaviour whether excellent, hilarious, inappropriate or otherwise.

Our plan had been to send Joe to the same secondary school as James but the seeds of doubt began to grow in our minds and as the closing date for secondary school application loomed, Paul and I decided to talk to Joe and suggest the possibility of his going to school out of the area. The boys had already moved school at ages 8 and 10 when we relocated from Hertfordshire to Hampshire and we felt sure that for Joe the prospect of losing another group of friends would not be welcomed.

We need not have worried as he broached the subject with us! He told us he felt guilty about not wanting to attend the same school as James, that he was the best brother anyone could wish for but that he wanted to be known as 'Joe' and not 'Joe, James' brother'. So we looked at a school which was out of our catchment area and it seemed to be ideal. My instincts told me that this school was right for Joe and, in fact, probably more suited to his needs than the one James attends. Meanwhile, in

Year 6 Joe's confidence and achievements had reached new heights – he was selected to play Bugsy in 'Bugsy Malone', the leavers' play!

Joe has nearly come to the end of his first academic year in secondary school and is very happy there. Needless to say, he has made many good friends and has continued to allow himself to do well academically. His new friends know that Joe has a brother with Down syndrome and some have met him. But, this has been on Joe's terms and given him some control over the amount of family information he allows his peers. For Paul and I it feels strange at times as our aim for James was always to send him to local, mainstream schools and not have him 'bussed out of the area' and now Joe is being 'bussed out of the area'. Joe, however, is gaining some independence by taking the bus and is happy to arrive there to be greeted as just 'Joe'.



Brothers