



**Amy was worried about her daughter's separation anxiety, but Church Hill Infant School knew how to make sure mother and daughter were supported, reassured and cared for**



*Amy and Stuart Winkless live in Thurmaston with their daughter, Ella Rae, who is five years old.*

### **Change of heart**

Amy was absolutely determined that Ella Rae was not going to go to Church Hill Infant School; not because she had heard anything bad about it but because she wanted her to go to the one in her catchment area. "For some reason our application for a place was delayed and we were denied a place," Amy says. "I was absolutely devastated as I had set my heart on my first choice but we had no option but to look at alternatives. Knowing what I know now, I would be even more devastated if I had to move Ella Rae from Church Hill - and there is absolutely no way that I ever plan to."

## Passionate

It is rare for a parent to be so passionate about their child's school but Amy most definitely is. "It's not like a school, it's a family," she says. "I have never known anywhere quite like it. Every member of staff, including the Headteacher, is incredibly approachable and understanding and even though Ella Rae is only one of 29 children in her class she is treated as an individual, and so am I. I probably need to be in close contact with the school more than many other parents but I've never been made to feel a nuisance. I have only ever been supported and reassured and that means a great deal to me."

## Support mechanism

Amy's main concerns have been for her daughter's emotional wellbeing as Ella Rae suffers from separation anxiety when she is away from her mother. "She finds it very difficult to be away from me and to see her crying and unhappy when I leave her at school is heartbreaking. Given that I have no choice but to send her to school it is immensely reassuring to be able to trust the people who are caring for her for six hours every day. If Ella Rae has been particularly tearful one morning, I can ring the school and someone will go and check that she's ok and it's obvious that they really do care about her, and about how I am feeling. The support mechanism at Church Hill isn't just for the children, it's for their families, too."

## Engaging the child's imagination

Fortunately, the tearful days are becoming less common and Ella Rae is now becoming more comfortable at school. Amy believes this is largely due to the caring attitude of her teachers and the fact that she enjoys her lessons so much. "Ella Rae knows that if she has a disagreement with her friends she can tell her teacher and the issue will be sorted out fairly. All children fall out from time to time but the school's approach is low-key and very effective and we have never had a real problem on that score. I also love the way that a lot of the lessons are presented in a fun and inventive way; Ella Rae might come home and tell me she's been playing shops, and I think - in lessons? But it's a lovely way to teach numbers and basic sums and it works. It's a great example of learning through play and it engages Ella Rae's imagination."



## The best interests of the children at heart

Amy has nothing negative to say about other local primary schools but she feels strongly that it is Church Hill which is without doubt the best setting for Ella Rae. "Every child is different and other schools may have a different and equally effective approach to education, but for me, and for Ella Rae, nothing could compare with Church Hill. The teachers see their work as a vocation rather than just a job and they recognise that the family plays an important part in their child's school experience. That is why they will always take the time to address any issues I may have because they know it is in Ella's Rae's best interests."

## Looking to the future

Stuart and Amy have plans to provide Ella Rae with a baby brother or sister in the near future and if that happens there is one absolute certainty. "Any new child of ours will be going to school at Church Hill. If we had to move house I would travel across the county every day to make sure that he or she would have a place there and nothing will persuade me otherwise."

## Children say

Ella Rae says: "I like my school because everyone is friendly and beautiful."

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