

A few recent letters of thanks and Compliment

Dear Jonathan,

I didn't get a chance to see you at the end of term but I just wanted to say thank you so much to you and the dedicated team at Belgrave for XXX's time at the school. I also wanted to say we are so grateful for the help you gave us to secure his EHCP. Without you I don't think we would have got it and XXX would once more be cast back into the state system with no extra help.

Belgrave has been a lifeline for XXX who has enjoyed a warm and supportive school experience there since he was nine years old. We were despairing of his primary school when we first started to look into transferring him. He had been bullied, unsupported and literally left in a corner to fend for himself in the classroom. He had been publicly humiliated in the class at XXX School because of his dyslexia, his teacher failed to keep to his Independent education plan and admitted to us he knew nothing about dyslexia. At the time XXX's ASD had not been diagnosed so we had no legal redress on grounds of discrimination. His mental state was such that I could see him steeling himself to go into the school and eager to leave. He was retreating into himself and the selective mutism had really taken hold.

Yet from the day he did his taster session to his last day at Belgrave School XXX has absolutely loved going in. His demeanour changed in the playground from day one. I could see he was among a kind, tolerant and supportive cohort of children and parents. For us as parents we were able to breathe a sigh of relief that he was among professionals and peers that understood who he was and did not treat him like he was a problem. Over the years I spoke to many Belgrave parents who had similar stories of their children's previous schools – of exclusions and humiliations, their child's eventual loss of confidence in themselves.

Since day one at Belgrave we as a family actually saw a physical as well as a mental change in XXX. He would come out the school day chatting with his friends. When I dropped him off I could hear boys shouting his name. When we secretly observed him, when we had meetings at the school we could see his engagement. All a massive contrast to his previous experience.

What Belgrave did for XXX was to give him space to be himself and no longer be fearful. I think his trauma was such that it took the first couple of years to build him back up to a fit psychological state to actually start learning. We know he isn't terribly academic but at Belgrave he actually had a crack at it. Latterly his art teacher XXX actually believed in him and encouraged him to have confidence in his own abilities as an artist. She has gone the extra mile to build him up, going out of her way to chase us up to push him, using her own time to help him and encourage him. That is real dedication and that is real teaching.

One of the key strengths of Belgrave is not that it's just a small school it's a shared appreciation of individualism and the strength that can be derived by developing children's confidence and empowering them to believe in themselves so they can learn. As we know education isn't just about qualifications it's about learning about other people, the world and our place in it. And this is what Belgrave does. So thank you Jonathan and all the team at Belgrave. Long may you continue to do a brilliant job. You are really filling a gap in a competitive education system that seems to only recognise one kind of intelligence. Your holistic approach to the mental and social wellbeing of the child should be an example for all education systems. It's not rocket science but it appears you have cornered that particular market.

Thank you. We shall always be grateful to you for helping XXX in what is a difficult journey. If you need me to send an official letter let me know but happy for you to quote anything from this. I am always happy to be an advocate for the school in any form.

XXX

Dear XXX,

Thank you so much for all you have done for XXX. I can't express enough how much I appreciate it and your kind words yesterday.

All throughout XXX's education, I have found school life as a mum very difficult. People have ostracised me looked down on me and I have always had numerous meetings and phone calls emails etc.

When XXX got accepted at Belgrave it was such a relief for me.

You are all such amazing kind caring people, and you in particular have been such a great support to XXX she is so very fond of you.

I really would like to keep in touch and let you know how we are getting on and XXX would like that.

My sincere thanks

XXX

Hi XXX

XXX and I are not able to come to the church today due to pressures of work.

We just wanted to thank you for all your help and support with XXX this year. He has really enjoyed his time being taught by you in XXX and will miss you immensely. He has grown and developed a lot over the last year so thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Have a fantastic summer and see you in the Autumn when you will get to teach XXX who literally can't wait.

Lots of love.

XXX and XXX

For a long time now I have been meaning to write a generalised thank you letter for the school so that there is something on file to show how happy we are that our son has a place at Belgrave. As I was typing I realised I was writing as though I was talking to a parent who was wondering if Belgrave was right for their child. I have decided to send this in so that it can be given, to any nervous prospective parent as a reassurance, from one parent to another, that taking the leap from mainstream is often something they will wish they had done sooner.

My son,XXX, has been attending Belgrave since Year 2, he is now in Year 7 in XXX Class. Recently I attended his annual EHCP Review, a meeting which could be quite intimidating for a parent who doesn't know all the jargon and feels concerned they may say something that could jeopardise the help and finding their child receives, but with Mr Skinner and XXX at ones side all worries are allayed. One of the sections in the document asks "What is working well?" my answer was "Everything!" and my answer to the next question of "What isn't working well?" was one delivered with a puzzled face "This doesn't apply to Belgrave. XXX's teachers have all been so tuned into him that if there is a problem it is resolved so quickly it can't be described as a problem". And there we have it. To have that level confidence in a school when you have a non neurotypical child is a true blessing. I have often heard parents in the playground saying they don't know what they would have done if they hadn't got their child into Belgrave. I have said this myself many times and heard it echoed by all members of our family.

I firmly believe that mini miracles happen every day in this school from the child who wouldn't talk to anyone being able to make friends to a child whose mainstream school felt they'd never learn to read (XXX is managing rather well with the Biff and Chip books now and he is so proud of himself)

Belgrave isn't just about a pupils education, they care deeply about welfare, happiness, positive attitude, confidence. I would urge anyone who is considering applying for a place for their child, to attend an end of term service where they can observe children with Specific Learning Difficulties take their place on stage and confidently participate with their class in the service. Then afterwards to seek out the parents of those children and ask them if they ever thought their son or daughter would ever be able to do that. For me it has been exciting to watch the children grow and to then hear of their triumphs, it gives me such optimism that my son will be able to progress too.

Belgrave is a community, the staff and teachers are just as interested in the families of their students, when you have a child in the cocoon of this school you are automatically included. This makes Belgrave a hugely happy and positive place to be which gives all parents the confidence to merrily wave their child off in the morning knowing their offspring will be in the very best of hands whilst they are away from them. There are only two places on this earth where I am confident to leave XXX, his Granny's house and school. Anywhere else I fret as XXX is a very vulnerable little boy due to his varied needs.

In short, I don't know where XXX would be, or us as a family without Belgrave cheerleading us.

And then we have the parents; many parents have become firm friends because of being united through having a child at the school. I know I felt like I had found my people when we joined. Finally I was amongst a group of people who understood exactly how it is to juggle having 3 children at 3 different schools, who could laugh with you as you told hilarious tales woe or punch the sky in joy when your 10 year old dyspraxia son learnt to tie his laces. Or to simply give you a hug and say "I understand... me too." People who were in the same boat, navigating the same uncharted waters.

To sum up, thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Dear Mr Skinner

I am writing to express how grateful we are that XXX has a place at Belgrave School in XXX Class. He has come a long way in his year and a half with you from the child so afraid of failure due to his dyslexic difficulties that he had disengaged from learning completely. We investigated eight other schools as well as home school as an option but we are convinced that Belgrave is the only suitable school for XXX's needs. It is the only school in the Bristol area that offers dyslexia specific help. Having a dual diagnosis of aspergers syndrome and dyslexia it has been crucial in addressing the dyslexia. XXX's ASD is not severe enough to warrant an autism unit and XXX's behavioural difficulties not fitting for a behavioural difficulty unit yet he cannot cope in mainstream either. As much of his initial behavioural difficulties were anxiety driven due to the frustrations of dyslexia, you have addressed both his actual dyslexic processing difficulties and consequently the behaviour it fuelled.

Thank you for believing in XXX and helping him to re-engage in learning. We have been amazed to see the transformation in him into a calm and happy child willing to learn.

Regards

XXX

Email re [REDACTED]

Hi Jonathan,

I would like to say a big thank you for all of your help (and to other staff members) for generously gathering material together so quickly for the tribunal. I was really touched by your openness to provide all that might be helpful - a welcome new experience for us in a school system! Also, [REDACTED] yet again went the extra mile and provided a really helpful updated assessment of her recent observations of [REDACTED] as requested by the solicitor.

I thought that you would like a copy of the tribunal report that [REDACTED] put together - unsure whether she copied you in. I also thought that you would like to know that we have a provisional date for the [REDACTED] but it could also happen during any date up until the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has told me that if the LEA proceed with the tribunal and we lose, we won't be able to appeal. We would have to start up a new request in 6 months' time.

I also thought that you would like to know that we have seen such a difference in [REDACTED]'s attitude to school and in her general sense of wellbeing - she now loves it! Previously she used to switch off when she came home, refusing to speak that much about her lessons and always seemed to be in trouble for 'not listening' properly. She used to be tearful frequently; feeling 'rubbish' and 'stupid' compared to peers.

By contrast, she now seems lighter and unstressed by her school day - and also bear in mind that to arrive to school she has to be up at 6.15am and doesn't get home until 4.30! - and yet despite this, she now happily chats about what she has learned particularly in science - about atoms, antibodies etc! - and whilst she may muddle some of the terms a little, she seems to have grasped some important concepts. But most of all, you have re-captured her imagination and intrigue about the world around her! (She is actually quite a bright girl but often appears not to understand through the way she might ask an obvious Q but when you put it back to her, she usually can think through and provide a useful answer for herself. She tends to think quite deeply about things but doesn't always share this part of herself.)

Anyway, many thanks and we are thrilled by the ethos of the school and the way this is clearly 'lived through' in the school.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]

Dear Mr Skinner,

Re: XXX

As the parents of XXX, who started with you just last September we thought it a good idea to put in writing our feedback from the first two terms of X being at the school.

We are truly amazed at the breakthrough and progress XXX has made. When she came to you she was more than 2.5years behind with reading. Over the last two terms XXX is now reading, she has at least kept pace and possibly closed the gap a little and her progress has been outstanding.

To hear XXX actually read a book, to herself or read a sign as we pass it in the car has brought real hope.

XXX had struggled greatly in the mainstream school she was in and despite their best efforts it was clear that little to no progress was being made. We are certain that the smaller class sizes, dyslexia teaching as part of the curriculum and other interventions by the school have made this critical difference to XXX's learning.

XXX now has full access to the curriculum something not possible in her previous mainstream school.

Hoping the good work can continue.

Yours sincerely

XXX & XXX

Dear Mr Skinner

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the help and support that our daughter XXX has received since joining your school. The care she has received from all the wonderful staff from very start has been above and beyond. This is reflected not only in her academic work but holistically. In her time spent at Belgrave she has transitioned from a depressed, highly anxious, broken spirited child with low self-esteem to a bright young happy girl that loves school, is willing and able to take part in group activities and has a great future working at her best.

As a family we dread to think what would have become of XXX if we hadn't found Belgrave. Her mental health (as well as her school work) was declining rapidly at her previous school. We feel that the importance of the role of a school such as Belgrave is hugely understated by the educational system in general.

Whilst on our journey to try and get the right setting for XXX we found the harsh reality is that no other school caters specifically for dyslexia/related needs. It seems crazy that these are such common learning needs yet there is only Belgrave in the whole of Bristol and surrounding areas to completely fill this gap. The school deserves far more recognition for the miraculous work it carries out for those few lucky enough to attend.

We sincerely thank you for all that you have/and are doing for XXX and would like to contribute all we can to support the ongoing success of your school.

Kind regards

XXX

Dear Jonathan

A quick note to follow up on XXX's recent annual review.

Since XXX started at Belgrave School in September she is a different child. She's more confident, happier, has newly forming friendships and her language acquisition, writing skills and numeracy are developing well.

For the first time, XXX is fortunate to be working in an environment with very talented teachers who have a clear understanding of the support she needs to learn, develop more independence and social confidence.

Choosing the right secondary school for XXX was incredibly difficult. XXX had done well in a mainstream primary school with specialist 121 support and our ambition was a mainstream secondary setting, as research shows that children with her issues achieve their potential when they work alongside typically developing peers.

However, the more we explored our (limited) options it became apparent that her needs couldn't be met in a conventional mainstream setting. She wouldn't have access to the teaching approach she needs, speech therapy or occupational therapy. We knew she would be 'lost' in every sense.

XXX seemed to fall between two binary educational options; mainstream provision that couldn't support her needs or a special school that couldn't offer the type of education or peer friendships to help her fulfil her potential.

Finding Belgrave School is a dream come true. A very experienced speech and language therapist who works with children across the country visited Belgrave as part of the LEA assessment and commented; *'This school is unique. I only know of one other like this in London. If more people knew about this school, they would be queuing around the corner'*.

Belgrave School is unique. It combines high quality teaching, with specialist knowledge, support and therapy. It takes an innovative approach to learning, mixing different ages and needs in a way that brings out the best in all the children. It provides a rare option for children for whom a conventional mainstream education doesn't work. The success of Belgrave's approach is seen in exam results but also in the children's happiness and behaviour towards each other.

We are so grateful for everything that Belgrave School is doing for XXX. Each day we are very grateful we found Belgrave School.

Best wishes

XXX and XXX

Dear Jonathan

I wanted to write to thank you so much for the recent Annual Review and parents evening. Its remarkable to think where we are now compared to where we were when XXX started at Belgrave a year and a half ago.

Its amazing to see he is finally settling in, making friends and making progress after two years stagnating academically and socially in mainstream. Of course we always knew he had the intellectual capability to do well, as he has shown in the past with the right support and right conditions he can make excellent progress. Plus he has plenty of friends outside of school. But his move to secondary on top of his XXX, his levels of stress, his anxiety, the lack of inclusion, his isolation, it was all so hard to watch. He was just getting more depressed and more ill.. Now we really feel we have turned a corner. It's like he is finally ready to start his education again, to start learning, to start making friends. We have found his balance with XXX so we can start to move forward. He is much happier. I know it has taken him a while, and thanks so much to you and all staff for your patience, your understanding, for making him feel welcome, for making us all feel welcome, for listening, for all your ideas.

At first I must admit I was very sad having to move him out of mainstream and away for all the opportunities he had there, but what is the point of opportunities if you cannot access them. He is so much better off in Belgrave, fully included and able to do things, thank goodness.

I don't think you know I was recently head hunted to take up a new role, despite it being an amazing opportunity, I could not take it, the main reason being it is so hard to find such a suitable setting as Belgrave. The specialist education that is not an ASD or other more specialist school, for kids that can behave and learn well but need the right educational environment, specialist teaching throughout the curriculum, small class size, relaxed atmosphere, quiet, flexible and caring approach that he has found there. Sadly I don't think it exists in many places even though so many children would benefit from it.

Thanks for helping XXX, and all of us, to be in a much better place again, its a spring board now for him to reach his potential, and XXX and I can relax a little knowing you are taking such good care of him.

Have a great Easter!

Best wishes

XXX

Official Letter from XXX Local Authority and Comment of Recognition from SEN Panel – regarding a child who was school phobic and where there were serious difficulties in finding suitable placement where he could become reintegrated

“In his contribution to the review, XXX indicated that he feels that he belongs at Belgrave and likes being in a smaller class and being with other dyslexic pupils. Panel would like to acknowledge the way in which Belgrave staff have worked to help settle and support XXX.”

Dear Staff at Belgrave School

We wanted to write to say the most HUGE THANKYOU to you all for the last 5 years that XXX has been at Belgrave School. Many of you have known XXX since he started at Belgrave and I know he will miss you all very much. He has frequently described Belgrave as a ‘big family’ and that is certainly an accurate description of the understanding and support that you offer all the pupils that are fortunate enough to have found their way to Belgrave. We can absolutely say that finding Belgrave and making the decision that XXX should come to you has been the best decision we have ever made and worth every penny over the last 5 years.

XXX was very much a lost soul towards the end of primary school and although the staff at our primary school were immensely supportive they just didn’t have the facilities, time or training to be able to offer XXX the time and support he needed. He was at an emotional low and we were both very concerned for his future. And then he came to Belgrave, the most amazing school and group of staff I have known. All of you from secretary to support staff, teachers and head teacher have been quite outstanding. You really ‘get’ these children and are constantly working to support and encouraging them. You know them as people, their strengths and their weaknesses and their anxieties. You have and continue to give these children a sense of purpose and self-confidence so that they grow and fulfil their potential.

How XXX has grown over his time at Belgrave (in more ways than one!). He has developed into a confident and self-assured young man and I cannot tell you how proud we are of him. This is in no small part down to ALL of you and you should not underestimate your part in shaping him into XXX today. He is a funny, confident, mature young man and we feel he has the world at his feet. Isn’t this something that we hope all young people will feel at the end of their school life? He will have future struggles and anxieties for sure, but his experiences and support at Belgrave will stand him in good stead for being able to cope with what life throws at him. We really hope he gets the grades he deserves in his GCSE’s he has worked hard as have all of you. However we feel that whatever the outcome from these exams we know we have a happy, confident and good young man who will I am sure go from strength to strength.

I am sure you will see XXX in the future, I know he wants to stay in touch as do we. It will be an emotional farewell on Friday and we want you to know how eternally grateful we are to all of you amazing people.

With very best wishes to you all

XXX & XXX