SLIGO CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASPERGER’S PROGRAM

My son moved from his home school inclusion classroom to the Asperger’s program at Sligo Creek Elementary School this past fall. He had always had teachers and paras who really loved him and wanted to help him, but they didn’t have the specialized knowledge or time with which to be able to teach him in a general education classroom.

My son has a PDD-NOS diagnosis and is very bright. He was able to hold his own academically for several years, until third grade, when things began to fall apart. Socially he’d always had problems and also had a hard time completing work and attending to the task at hand in class.

We are new to the school this year, but so far have been very happy with how things are going. There are two Asperger’s classes there, one for 1st-3rd graders and one for 4th-5th graders. The classes can be as large as 10 or so students, but there are currently only six in the 4th/5th grade class.

The Asperger’s classroom has one teacher and two paraeducators for the six students. There are areas of the classroom where kids can take sensory breaks and there are fidgets and other tools available to the kids at all times. The paras and teacher track daily data on a contract sheet that comes home every day.

One part of the program that I really like is that the students do their math and science with typical peers in typical classrooms. This year, that is in two different classrooms, which means that the Asperger’s students have to travel to three classrooms with three teachers throughout the day (always with paraeducator support). My son has been able to handle it, but it could be hard for kids with serious transition issues.

The Asperger’s classroom teacher works on social skills throughout the day, but focuses on it at lunchtime, which the kids spend in the classroom as a group. (They go to recess with mainstream kids.) There are a lot of opportunities for after-school programs as well as chorus and instrumental music. My son did one after-school program (karate), but had a hard time managing it without support, so he withdrew.

I do feel that the teachers there have been successful in teaching my son. His homework load is less than it has been in the past and even the homework we have has resulted in fewer struggles, which I chalk up to him being happier at school, as well as a teacher who is able to tailor assignments and expectations for each child. She has also been willing to work with me to make sure that he doesn’t get too dependent on certain accommodations, such as scribing and his para.

That said, it’s not perfect. I feel like this school could be such a great model of inclusion, but I’m not sure it’s there yet. When I have observed the inclusion classrooms, the kids don’t seem to know my son and he never talks about any of them. I don’t know that there is a lot of interaction between the two groups. I wish there could be more education of the mainstream students about the kids in the Asperger’s program.

My son hasn’t been bullied or teased there that I know about, but I have heard anecdotes about typical kids saying unkind things about the Asperger’s kids, although not necessarily to their faces.

I am not sure yet if I think that the school is pushing my son academically as hard as his home school did. He seems to have fewer in-depth assignments than he did last year.

My son and I are still getting used to the school, having only been there for four months, so my opinion may shift in the coming months. A friend of mine’s daughter is in my son’s class. She has been there since first grade and her mom has wonderful things to say about the school.

What I do know is that by the end of third grade, my son was miserable and he hated school. This year he is happy to go, he always tells me it was great, he talks about his friends in his class, and he has returned to being a happy kid.

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