



Fiona and Gavin Brown live in Gateshead with their daughters Isabella, five and two-year old Emily.

Fiona knew she was right to **listen** to people who **recommended** Riverside Primary Academy – and now she would **recommend** it herself, in every way

First and only choice

Although Fiona and Gavin adore their home, Fiona is sometimes envious of people who live further down the very steep hill towards Riverside Primary Academy but nothing would persuade her to move either home or school. “We fell in love with the school just as we fell in love with the house and after we had made Riverside our first choice, I panicked that Isabella might not get in! Thankfully having done so, she is really happy there and achieving very well, so I know we made absolutely the right decision.”



A caring and understanding attitude

Fiona already knew a little about the school from the playgroup held on its premises and to which she used to take Isabella as a toddler. "I also knew quite a lot of people whose children went to the school and they all recommended it," she says, "but it was probably the Open Evening we attended that finally sold it to us. I had a hundred questions in my mind and I wondered if some of them might sound a bit silly, but the teachers seemed to know exactly what sort of things a new parent might want to know and answered many of them before I even asked! That is exactly the caring and understanding attitude which sums up Riverside Primary Academy."

Simple and effective solutions

Keen to support her daughter's learning, Fiona appreciates the help and guidance offered by Isabella's teachers so that she can build upon what Isabella is learning in school. "It's not forced on us but if we want to work with Isabella at home, we are given the tools and ideas to do so," she explains. "The school's ethos is to encourage children to do their best and that means that parents are also encouraged to make their own contribution. I have previously worked as a Teaching Assistant at Secondary School level and I know the value of parental input, so many of the ideas for home support which the teachers at Riverside have offered me are brilliant. Simple but very effective suggestions have been invaluable, and have helped hugely with Isabella's school experience."

A warm, intimate atmosphere

Both Gavin and Fiona's mother are teachers which makes Fiona particularly aware of the stresses which can arise in the profession, so she has enormous respect for staff at Riverside for whom nothing is too much trouble. "All the teachers are approachable and have time for parents. There is a great rapport between staff, children and parents and that gives the school a lovely community feeling. The outlook is always positive, friendly and encouraging and although it has expanded physically, it still retains a warm and intimate atmosphere."

Where children blossom

When Emily starts school Fiona hopes to return to work as a Teaching Assistant, preferably at a Primary School, but in the meantime she volunteers at Riverside Primary Academy

once a week to read with the children. "I actually get really excited about my Tuesdays! It's something I look forward to so much because Riverside is such a lovely place and I feel that my contribution is genuinely valued. Isabella has grown so much in confidence in the short time she has been there and is very happy; from being rather shy and timid to begin with, she is now much more likely to instigate friendships and has blossomed through the praise the school is happy to offer all children whenever appropriate."

Positive impact

Fiona admits to being a worrier as far as her children are concerned but she is fully reassured by the approach that Riverside Primary Academy takes to the physical and emotional safety of its pupils. "It's not only the usual security measures in place that make me feel so comfortable but the way the school informs and equips the children to be aware of danger," she says. "A recent talk by the Headteacher had a real impact on Isabella without scaring her in any way, and I was so pleased to see how much she had taken on board. If my ambition to find work as a Primary School TA comes to anything – working at Riverside Primary Academy is my dream scenario!"

Children say

Isabella: "I like Read, Write, Inc because you learn new sounds and do words. The teachers help us when we get things wrong and are happy for us when we do well. And I love the cauliflower cheese school dinner - it's better than Mammys!"

