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‘It’s discrimination’

Boy with learning difficulties ‘turned away’ from free school

Tom Ambrose

tom.ambrose
@london.newsquest.co.uk

Turing House free school has turned away a boy with learning difficulties after its headteacher said he “would be an unreasonable use of public expenditure”.

Blake White, 10, had hoped to secure a place at the school, which is due to open on a temporary site at Livingston House, Teddington, this September.

But his mother Gemma Keville was left “shocked” after her son, who requires one-to-one learning support, was refused admission.

Headteacher Colin Mackinlay sent an email to Achieving for Children, which runs children’s services in Richmond, explaining why Blake should be rejected.

In the email, he said: “After careful consideration, we feel there are several significant reasons why Blake should not be placed at Turing House School.

“The statement of special educational needs describes provision and resources that would already be in place in a special school or possibly in a mainstream school with special facilities.

“If Turing House were to make such provision for Blake, particularly in its first year of operation, it would be an unreasonable use of public expenditure.”

Other reasons Mr Mackinlay cited in his email were:

❑ Blake can only concentrate for brief periods of time and can be “significantly disruptive”.

❑ Turing House would be unable to provide hours of one-to-one support – nor would they “wish to”.

❑ Staff appointments in April/May mean Blake’s transition could not be “carefully planned and managed”.

Refused admission: Turing House’s headteacher Colin Mackinlay said it would be unreasonable to spend public money on a place at the school for Blake White, 10, who needs one-to-one learning support

❑ Blake likes to withdraw to smaller spaces, which may not be available at Turing House’s temporary site.

❑ Providing individual sessions and support staff to assist Blake would “prejudice the efficient provision of education” for other pupils.

Ms Keville, of Verdun Road, Barnes, said Turing House was “discriminating” against her son.

The 33-year-old mother-of-four added: “I was quite shocked when I received the email, I wasn’t expecting a response like that.

“The main thing was saying he is a waste of Government funding, as it is things like that which get to me.

“That, to me, is like Blake is being discriminated against – I won’t go back and appeal it because if that is how they feel, it makes me feel that they won’t want to put the time and effort in with him.”

Blake has since been accepted into Clarendon special school in Hampton.

He struggles with speech and language, finding it hard to process information, meaning he is about three years behind other children his age academically.

He has a special educational needs (SEN) statement, which is a formal document detailing a child’s learning difficulties.

Turing House’s website says SEN students would “enjoy the full curriculum, which will be appropriately differentiated at subject level”, and that staff would be trained to deal with children with learning difficulties and “know how to draw on specialist support”.

Turing House is named in honour of World War II codebreaker Alan Turing, who it is thought had Asperger’s syndrome.

Mr Mackinlay said: “It is not appropriate for us to comment on any individual student’s circumstances.

“Turing House is an inclusive school and, like all other maintained schools, prioritises the admissions of students with SEN who would be appropriately placed.

“This determination is made by the local authority in consultation with the school and parents and we have worked closely with them on this for a number of such students this year.

“We have not refused the entry of any student with a statement of SEN.”

The school left parents scrambling for alternative places last year when it failed to open as planned in September 2014.

It is still yet to announce a permanent site.

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