

Special school for Elliott at long last

Gran fought for six years

THE end is finally in sight for a woman who has struggled for years to get the right kind of education for her autistic great-grandson.

Janice Heffernan, 67, says she has tried to secure appropriate special needs help for Elliott Mannix, 13, for almost six years.

On September 24 Nottingham City Council sent a letter to say they had found him a place at Westbury Special School, in Bilborough.

Janice said: "I've been given the run around so much - six years is such a long time to have something like this going on."

"It's really good that Elliott's got a place at the school and the council has also said it will take him there and back by taxi, which is great."

"But to be honest it won't be over until he is actually in the school - he needs the education he deserves."

She admits there has been support for Elliott at his previous schools but says it has never been enough to meet his complex needs.

Local authorities have a duty to provide education for all children.

The Government encourages authorities to educate those with special needs in mainstream schools where possible but those with more complex problems can go to special schools.

Family friend Grenville Green - who fought a similar battle for his own son - has been a key player in moving Elliott's case forward.

The 64-year-old said: "The whole process has been awful, it has felt as though there was a real communication problem."

"Elliott had problems at school and had to be taken to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in 2001 to sort him out."

"Since then the family have been dealing with the schools, social services and health authority."

"To get them to act together has been very difficult - there should be a much easier way for this kind of family to get help."

By JOSEPH WATTS
Education correspondent

When Elliott was at a mainstream school Janice would get two or three calls a week asking her to collect him.

His autism, she believes, makes it impossible for him to be educated in mainstream education as he would constantly disrupt lessons.

When the *Evening Post* reported his case in February, Elliott was spending his days at Street Reach - a project set up by youth workers to encourage teenagers off the streets.

Shortly after, in March last year, Janice received confirmation that Elliott would be formally assessed by the council.

She will now go with Elliott to the school she hopes will give him the chance of a good education.

A Nottingham City Council spokesperson said the first request to them for support for Elliott over and above that provided by his school was during his second year at comprehensive school in January 2006, which they responded to by trying to provide more support through the school.

The spokesperson said: "At the beginning of this year Elliott's family asked for a detailed assessment of Elliott's needs, which was immediately carried out."

"As a result Elliott was offered a place at Westbury Special School."

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LONG STRUGGLE: Janice Heffernan, Elliott Mannix and Grenville Green

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