Eleanor and her husband Chris adopted William* through PACT when he was 16 months old in 2015.

The couple had two older birth children following IVF treatment but really wanted another child. They had always been open to the idea of adopting, having previously considered it. They decided to adopt, and given Eleanor’s experience as a special needs teacher of many years, they were keen to adopt a child with additional needs.

Eleanor said: “It just seemed like the obvious, right thing for us to do.”

The couple chose to adopt through PACT because of the post-placement support the agency offered, as they knew they would likely need this if they did adopt a child with special needs. They attended an adoption information event and really liked PACT’s approach.

“We just loved how positive PACT were. They were realistic as well and said it would be tough but they also talked about the wonderful things about adoption too.”

Once the couple were approved to adopt, they were inundated with profiles, given the demand for adopters of children with special needs. Soon after, they saw William’s profile and went on to be successfully matched with him.

William has a chromosome disorder and severe development delay. He also needs a tube for feeding and has some physical difficulties.

Eleanor said the day they first met him she had never been more nervous.

“I work with children and know I can strike up a rapport with kids really well but it has never mattered as much before. But he liked us, and his foster carer was brilliant, she made it as easy as possible for him and us.

“He was so cute, just adorable. I’ve got a big smile on my face now just remembering it.”

William settled really well with the family, and has made fantastic progress since being placed with them.

“At 16 months he wasn’t even sitting up, we were told he might not walk or talk. He’s come on massively and is now walking and talking, and goes to a mainstream school with one-to-one support.

“He has been a huge team effort, with lots of support from physiotherapists and speech therapists, but we know that if he had stayed in care he wouldn’t be where he is now.”

Eleanor said William has a very special relationship with both his older siblings.

“They are just amazing with him, we are so proud of them. Right from day one they were so good at communicating with him on his level, they weren’t fazed at all.”

Eleanor said her professional experience had helped, certainly initially when reading William’s profile and understanding what the realities of his condition might mean in practical terms.

But she added: “Being a parent to a child with special needs is completely different to teaching a child with special needs. Some of it has been really daunting.

“But he is an absolute joy, he really is. He gives us so much, and the rewards are wonderful.

“Yes, it can be hard work and you have to be realistic about that, but he just has an incredible ability to live life in the moment.

“If he’s having a good day that’s all that matters. And that is an amazing gift – for us all to be able to have that perspective on life.”

* Name changed in line with confidentiality