



“What are the issues facing schools?”: *Identifying and supporting girls on the autism spectrum in schools*

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We can choose to stand together in the face of a society which may often feel like a lonely and disconnected place, and we can choose to make a difference by making lives more liveable for those who struggle to cope. We believe we can do this because we know that people and organisations are stronger together.

Working together to reduce suicide 2015-21, Samaritans



Research

- there is almost no research on the educational experiences of autistic girls

?



Ethical issues

- Number of girls in special schools/PRUs is small
- Limited opportunities for these girls to develop appropriate peer relationships with other girls
- Double whammy effect
- Girls face the same academic challenges as boys but are not as vocal as boys: will not ask for help, will try to hide difficulties



Autism, girls & schools

Key issues

- Friendships and relationships
- Learning and communication
- Interpreting the world
- Recognising the positives

Girls with autism in the classroom: hidden difficulties and how to help ; Victoria Honeybourne , 2015



There is something inherently valuable about being a misfit. It's not to say that every person who has artistic talent was a social outcast, but there is definitely a value for identifying yourself differently and being proud that you are different.

— Daniel Radcliffe —

AZ QUOTES

Schools can...



- bring structure to the unstructured
- provide a range of activities for pupils at break and lunch times
- provide clear guidelines for group work
- allocate specific roles and make expectations clear
- make it 'ok' and 'normal' for students to use a quiet space when they need some time alone.
- be exhausting for those with ASC but there are also many other students who will benefit from knowing they have quiet spaces to use.



Schools can.....



- allow and encourage different ways of communicating and learning in the classroom (through discussion, writing, video, one-to-one and visual means)
- work to students' strengths
- ensure that every student is given the opportunity to build skills supportively (e.g. by giving an oral presentation with a classmate, or recording it on video instead of standing in front of the class)
- provide quieter ways of learning, and offer more time



THINKST

Schools can....



- mean what you say and say what you mean
- have clear and consistent rules and expectations
- appropriately use sensory profiles of a type and level of detail relevant to the needs of individual pupils, and ensuring these are regularly reviewed and used to inform curriculum delivery approaches.
- make us feel good about ourselves, help us to accept that this is the way we are and that is how other people are.
- show us why misunderstandings have occurred without judging us.
- allow us to have our own goals, targets and hopes, not ones that have been imposed by the school or other people
- adopt 'Respectful Language Policy' which supports positive and inclusive practice

**Most of the time I
don't find autism
to be the struggle,
I find other people's
understanding of
autism to be the
struggle.**

Person on the autism spectrum

Finding the positives

- the best thing educators can do for girls with ASC is to find out how they learn best
- allow girls to work to their strengths, and encourage an atmosphere which embraces difference, making it the norm to be unique.



- Autistic girls are gifted
- Autistic girls can surprise you
- Autistic girls can focus on certain interests for long periods of time
- Autistic girls are passionate
- Autistic girls are non-judgmental
- Autistic girls are honest
- Autistic girls are rarely boring
- Autistic girls are special
- Autistic girls are logical
- Autistic girls are loyal
- Autistic girls are interesting
- Autistic girls are wonderful
- Autistic girls are diverse
- Autistic girls are imaginative
- Autistic people are unique, and as Temple Grandin says,

“Different but not less”



“We need schools where difference is valued
and where there is less emphasis on conformity
and greater focus on harnessing strengths in order to
enable all, staff and students alike....to be the best they
can become”

Rita Jordan



Thank **you**

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