

Being Me

kidscape 30
30th anniversary 2015

Isn't it time someone heard your story?




Kidscape -
Giving you
confidence to
challenge
bullying at school

Louise's diary for you

7.45am Mum is sitting on the bed reminding me it's only two weeks until the end of term. She says it like it's not long. Two weeks is 10 days of school! I just want to close my eyes and go back to sleep. She tries another tack, reminding me I don't want to miss sports day.

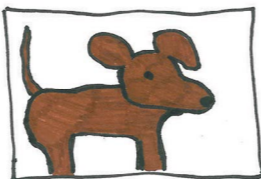
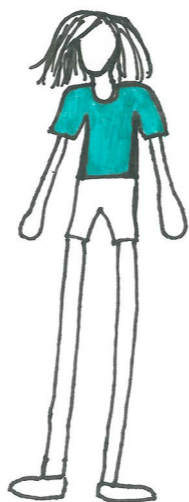
8.10am I have always loved sports day. I'm good at sports. Dad says that's why I've grown so tall – I was made to be a runner. Personally, I think I was made to be teased. A couple of the girls in my class started calling me long-legged Lou and then it turned to Loser Lou. My friend Phoebe who has been my friend since we started school seems to have forgotten who I am. It sounds silly when I write it down but I hate school and I'm beginning to hate being me.

8.50am Mum is telling me to hurry and get out of the car as the bell has gone. I've just seen Jenna and Cassie get out of Jenna's car and I want to wait until they're in. Too late. They've seen me. They link arms and put their heads down and rush past giggling.

 **9am** In English we're reading a book about animal conservation. It's a great book but I haven't read the chapter we're supposed to be discussing. I just couldn't concentrate yesterday. I look out of the window and wonder if it might rain. I wonder if they will let us go home.

10.45am The bell goes for break. Jenna and Cassie had a sleepover last night and are talking about Jenna's new puppy. Girls crowd round looking at a photo. I ask to see and Cassie holds it up but won't pass it to me. This is a game they play – let's not pass Lou the picture or the paint or the book or whatever's being handed round the class. I tell Jenna it's a gorgeous puppy. "Mum says we can take her out when you come over Saturday," she says to the girls. They chat about who'll hold the lead. I want the ground to swallow me up. What's going on this Saturday?

11.05am After break we have PSHE and they're talking about Olympic values – about competitions and fair play. Miss Connor asks the class what makes a good team and people put their hands up and say things like respect and supporting each other and saying 'well done' to people even when they lose. They talk about letting everyone have a go. I imagine myself on the athletics team at the next Olympics – with people who would cheer me on and want me on their team. It must feel so good. Miss Connor wishes us well for sports day and there's a rush for the door and the dinner queue. Maybe she really can't see how I'm feeling – why would she when they're all so nice in front of her? She seemed really pleased with Jenna's answer about giving everyone a go. Yeah, right Jenna.



1.30pm After lunch we're told to get into our PE shorts so we're ready for sports day. Cassie is laughing and pointing at my shorts. "Are they your brother's?" I look at the girls sniggering and wonder if any of them know how mean the others are when their backs are turned. In my frequent spells hiding in the loo I hear them talking about each other all the time. How 'Amy thinks she's so grown up with earrings', or how Sasha is 'so boring' or how Phoebe's house is 'sooo small' or how Jenna's puppy 'smells bad'. I feel angry then. I would never talk like that about my friends. I used to love going to Phoebe's house.



2pm Out on the field I feel lonely and awkward. "Are you doing long jump, Phoebe?" I ask when she walks over. She mumbles "yes" but keeps on walking. "Why don't you go stretch your long legs, Lou?" Jenna laughs, rolling her eyes at the others. "You look like you could do with some exercise to help you shape up." Some of the girls laugh, some look at each other awkwardly. I move across to where the boys are sitting, trying to stop the tears coming again.

L I think about what Miss Connor said yesterday. About me having to learn to stand up for myself, and to ignore the silly teasing. "Rise above it, Louise," she said. "Don't let it get to you." I imagine for a moment what she'd feel like if she was in the staff room talking about maths and everyone rolled their eyes and sniggered, or how she'd feel if she went and sat on the teachers' table for lunch and one of them asked her to leave because they were having a private conversation. And as she walked away how would she feel if she heard them whisper, "Miss Connor's a loser." I wonder if she'd rise above it, or end up in the loos with me trying to wash the tears away so no one spotted them.

2.30pm The PE teacher Mr Peters has put me on the red team, which seems to be made up of kids who haven't been picked. We watch race after race, the girls screaming out names of their friends. Go Amy, go. Aw, hard luck Cassie, that was amazing. They hug each other after each race, squeezing into saved places on the grass. I look to see if Mum has arrived and then line up on the field for the relay. For those five minutes I forget everything else. I'm watching while Bethan goes first, then Martin, then Alijah... He passes the baton to me – and I make my dash. I hear Mum shouting my name. I'm



across the line. We've won. I glance at the class. They're all chatting, oblivious to our relay and to our victory. Mum is watching me. I'm embarrassed to go back to my class because she will see that I have no one waiting to slap me on the back. My eyes smart. I pretend to join a group, sitting outside their circle as they chat. Invisible. Nine more days until the end of term.

By Louise x

HARRY'S STORY FOR YOU!

VACANCY: BYSTANDERS WANTED

My dad has his head in the paper, looking for a job, as I give him another reason I should stay off school. I walk through to the kitchen to talk to Mum about Jamie, and how out of nowhere he has stopped talking to me, stopped including me. How Marcus keeps putting me down and tripping me up and spreading stupid rumours. Hoping Mum might just give me another day away from the awfulness of it all.

"Look at this. Driver wanted to join growing company," shouts Dad suddenly. "Flexible hours, good pay... They want someone who's experienced and has their own car." "There must be a downside," says Mum, typically cautious, giving me a hug to acknowledge she's listening to me too. "What are the flexible hours? Evenings and weekends?! Who would be your boss? What would be your role in this company?"



I pick at a bowl of cereal and think about why the boys at school take on the roles they do. And they seem to enjoy those roles as well. Friends of mine – like Steve and Ahmed and Jamie who I've had here for sleepovers – suddenly worshipping the new boy Marcus and siding with him when he tells me I'm no good at

football, or that there's no room for me at his paintball party. Those so-called friends weren't the ones firing the insults, so I couldn't call them bullies. They were just not arguing with the insults, not stopping them. They laugh when others are mean to me. Mum says they've become what are called 'bystanders' to Marcus' cruel tactics. I feel sick now when I remember Jamie looking away, embarrassed, when Marcus questioned him about *why* he'd hung out with me over the summer.

I start to imagine an ad appearing in the school newspaper.

Bystanders wanted!

Perks of the job:

1. Guaranteed to share Marcus' popularity.
2. Guaranteed to be chosen to be on the football team.
3. Guaranteed invites to cinema trips on Saturday.
4. Guaranteed seat on bus.
5. Guaranteed to have someone to eat lunch with in canteen.



Downsides:

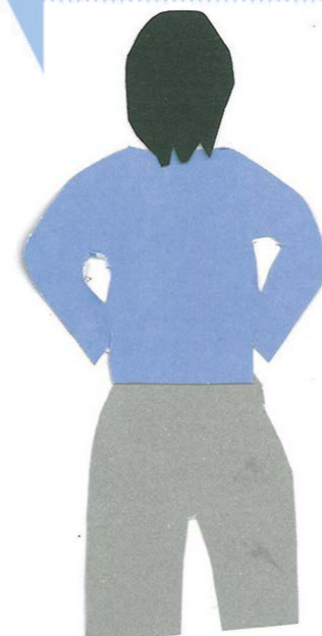
1. Must keep mouth shut rather than standing up for old friend.
2. Must lie to teacher (or pretend you were momentarily blind) when boss (aka Marcus) reported for bullying and questioned about what happened.
3. Must hide any relationship with 'unpopular' people. Absolutely no way Marcus can find out you walked home or hung out with them. With me...
4. Must find way to enjoy lunchtime assaults on unpopular people, and learn how to hide away from them (that's me again) even though you know you're making them feel rubbish.
5. Must find way to persuade your mum to drop 'unpopular's' mum (that's my mum) so she doesn't accidentally ask unpopular person over to your next sleepover.

I found myself smiling then, in spite of the familiar sick dread in my tummy. This was exactly what my friends had become and it sounded so terrible. I picked up my rucksack and set off, grabbing my new book off the kitchen table so I'd have something to read at lunchtime.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, I actually felt sorry for these boys who'd taken pleasure in laughing or leaving me out of games, or making sure there was no room for me round the lunch table. Mum says you have to be a little person to belittle someone else. Or perhaps have a big problem in your life and no one to help sort it out, so you need to take it out on someone. I suddenly started to think more about what she meant.

When I got on the bus I gave Jamie a nod but sat down next to a boy I didn't know very well and started talking computer games. And when the bus stopped I marched ahead to class, without even a backward glance.

I'M THE BOSS!



It struck me that my pals – Steve, Ahmed and Jamie – must be having a pretty miserable time in their new position as one of Marcus' gang. Must hate the pressure, knowing that if they fail him they'll be out of the job and end up being me – at the rough end of his nastiness as a result. They must actually have no real idea about the kind of friend they could be (or the kind of real fun they could have!) – if they applied for a different position.



By HARRY!

Anthony Horowitz OBE, author and Patron of Kidscape



"As a writer, I'm aware that words can be very powerful...and they can be very harmful too. I was bullied at school when I was 12 and even now I can vividly remember the experience and can't even bring myself to write down the names I was called. They still hurt. The truth is that bullying doesn't do anything useful for the bully or the bullied. There is nothing beneficial and nothing character building about it. Positive experiences, positive peer groups and positive reinforcement are what build a strong character."



Information for teachers

Bullying behaviour – the type described by Louise and Harry – should never be viewed as an unfortunate but unavoidable part of school life. It does not make children resilient – but instead undermines their confidence and development. Whether it's exclusion from social events or group name-calling, rumour spreading, stealing or hitting, it can have a devastating impact on the bullied and their feelings of self-worth as they develop. It almost always has an impact on their attendance and/or ability to learn. It also, of course, has an impact on the learning and development of the bully, and the others in the class and school who may become bystanders to what is considered 'acceptable'.

Kidscape believes all children have the right to lead their lives free from bullying and abuse, and that all adults have a responsibility to support, nurture and care for children, enabling them to reach their full potential. That has been its mission for 30 years. Kidscape knows schools are striving to make their setting a place where children

learn how to be kind and respectful – both in the class and outside it – as well as where they learn how to read, write and study. Teachers they work with see that ignoring bullying behaviour is like teaching children that the poor way they are treating each other is acceptable.

While your school probably has an anti-bullying policy in place, there is a big difference between policy and practice. Listen to children, and look harder at what goes on when they leave the classroom (children rarely bully in front of adults), as well as their behaviour when they're with you. Remember there is often a fine line between children who seem popular leaders and children who are bullies.

To bring your anti-bullying policy alive – and help it impact on attendance, behaviour and results – it needs to be agreed and supported by everyone in the school, at every level, so there is a clear message in the classroom, in corridors, and in the playground about what behaviour you expect and what behaviour won't ever be tolerated.



You're not alone: Kidscape brings children together so they can see they are not alone, not at fault, and have a say in preventing the abuse



kidscape
preventing bullying
protecting children

Kidscape runs workshops for bullied children and training for teachers. To find out more about how they could support you and the children in your school, visit www.kidscape.org.uk

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Carers Trust
—
Supporting
Young Carers
in your class

Jack's diary for the day

9 am I don't mind being late to school some days. Yesterday was Kayden's birthday and I couldn't go so they'll be talking about it in the cloakroom and if I'm late I'll miss that. Kayden did invite me but my mum was having a bad day and asked if I'd bring Fi (my seven year old sister Fiona) home after school before the party. To be honest once I'd arrived home and got her sorted with a snack and made Mum a cup of tea and changed my jeans (Mum said the ones I put on were dirty and it took me ages to find clean ones) I thought I'd probably missed too much – they might even have gone to the park to play football by now.



Mrs Adams asks me why I'm late. She asks me the same question so often she doesn't even wait for an answer and tells me to sit down and get on with my reading in her firm voice. I can see Poppy and Josh in front sniggering to each other as I get into my seat and search for my book in my desk.



9.05am I look at the clock and work out I have been up for three hours. Dad has to leave for work really early so woke me to help with Fi at 6. He wanted to make sure we were ready for school before he left at 7. Then after he'd gone Fi spilt her Coco Pops on her shirt and I had to find another and iron it and she made such a fuss about getting changed. I got her to watch TV for a bit while I got Mum her breakfast and sat with her to make sure she ate it. Then it was already 8.20 and Fi complained all the way to school, going along like a big ugly slow snail to the school gate and that's why I'm late.

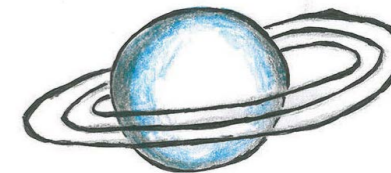


11am At break the boys are talking about the party. "Why didn't you come?" Josh asks in a voice you'd use to say "why are you stupid?"

11.30am Reading time but I can't focus on my book. I keep reading the same page twice. I think about Dad reading the paper out loud to Mum each evening. I don't like using Mum as an excuse for why I don't always go to things. It's hard to explain what's wrong with her. My friend Lauren's mum has cancer and she has to help get her a bowl when she feels sick, or help her get washed when she's feeling wobbly on her feet. I wonder if it's easier to explain cancer though I don't want Mum to have that. I love Mum, and I like helping her and Fi. In fact I like being me – but I just wish we could be a family like everyone else, at least in term time. And I wish Mum felt better. Mum has nervous problems and gets really sad and some days can't get out of bed. Once I did try and explain what was wrong with Mum and this boy in my class, Lee, said 'you mean she's sick in the head?' and everyone laughed and called me a 'mummy's boy' and I have never mentioned Mum since.



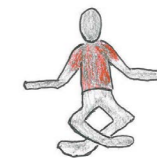
12 noon We're in science now talking about bones. I like this class. I made this great model of the planets last term. Dad helped me. Dad's really good at that sort of thing. He has to work all the way up in town so leaves at 7 to catch a train and doesn't get in until after 7 but at the weekend we do stuff together.



1pm At lunch time when I go out everyone is already playing some new card game. I say sorry to Kayden about missing his party and he says it's okay. He tells me he got the card game for his birthday but it only needs four people. I go and see if I can find anyone else to hang out with. I ask Mrs Crossly on reception if I can phone home but she says the phone is just for emergencies and I should ask Mrs Adams my teacher. I go back to the playground.



1.45pm Back in class, waiting for PE. I've forgotten my PE kit and Mrs Adams makes her loud tutting noise but says I can do PE in my uniform. I can see some of the boys smirking and hear one of them say 'what a loser'. I feel like a loser. I stick out like a sore thumb. That's something Lauren is always saying at Carers Club. We must stick out like sore thumbs and that's why we get picked on.



2.15pm I've been given the job of collecting the ball when it goes out of play. I wish the bell would go so I could go home. It's only when I go to Carers Club at the village hall on Friday nights that I realise I'm not the only one who feels like I do. There are girls and boys who have to look after their little brothers or sisters because they have disabilities, or their dads or mums when they become ill. Lauren only started coming in October because her mum only found out she had cancer recently. She says it has changed everything for her. We talk about things we hate like not having someone to help with homework or not always having uniform or PE kit ready or not being able to hang out with friends at the weekend or the house being messy and nurses coming in and it being embarrassing when people come round. But most of all we hate it that our mum or dad or brother or sister is ill or disabled and so not as happy as they should be. Lauren says we are just the same as everyone else except for the fact we are caring for someone. And Mrs Teddington who runs the club says what we do is amazing, and if the children in our classes ever had to care for someone in their family they would understand just how amazing we are. And just how amazing they could be, too.



By Jack

Molly's story for you.

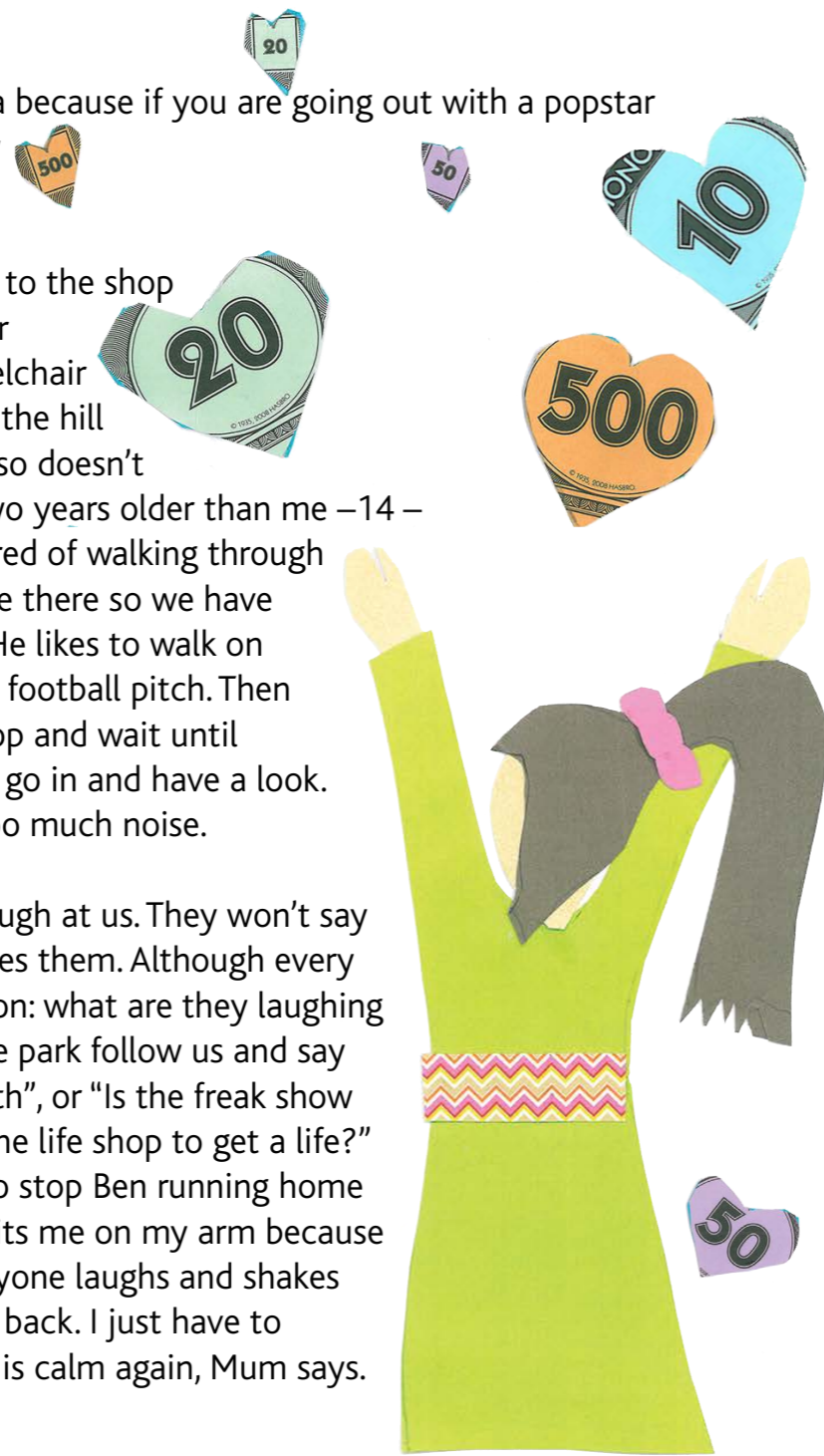
We were playing this game at home called Money No Object, where we each had to think up one thing we'd do if we won the Lottery or if someone else was going to pay the bill. My grandad liked mine best.

I was going to pay Harry Styles from One Direction a zillion pounds to come to the shop with me. The thing is he'd have to wear this bag over his head so no one would know it was him.

That might sound like a mad idea because if you are going out with a popstar then you want everyone to know it's him. Right?

But you see I take my brother up to the shop every day to get milk or whatever Mum needs. My mum's in a wheelchair so it's dead hard for her to go up the hill and Ben, my brother, has autism so doesn't like to go out on his own. He's two years older than me -14- and I'm 12 but he gets really scared of walking through the park if there are lots of people there so we have to walk right round the outside. He likes to walk on the white lines that go round the football pitch. Then we cut up a quiet path to the shop and wait until everyone has gone out so he can go in and have a look. He's scared of busy places and too much noise.

On a good day people will just laugh at us. They won't say anything and I don't think Ben sees them. Although every day I ask myself the same question: what are they laughing at? But sometimes the kids in the park follow us and say things like "Weirdo on the warpath", or "Is the freak show opening?", or "Are you going to the life shop to get a life?" Then I have to work really hard to stop Ben running home or getting cross. Sometimes he hits me on my arm because he's so cross with them and everyone laughs and shakes their head. Ben knows I won't hit back. I just have to stroke his hand and wait until he is calm again, Mum says.



Anyway. What has this got to do with Harry Styles? Well I reckon if he'd put a brown paper bag over his head and just wear the old jeans he seems to like, I could walk him up to the shop. And even (if he'd let me) hold his hand like I hold Ben's hand and hopefully the park would be full of people and they'd follow us and call him a weirdo and a freak and a loser and all those things they call Ben. Then, when we got to the shop, he'd take the bag off and ask the gangs what they get out of making Ben's life so horrid. And everyone would be really amazed

that I was at the shop with Harry Styles. And he'd tell them he has loads of friends like Ben and they should try to get to know Ben. And he'd tell them (I don't mind if this bit isn't true) that Ben is coming to his party and meeting all the band and that I am going too. Would that be cool or what? Maybe he could make them stop and then Ben and I could go out every day without worrying.

My grandad says it would be really cool (he uses the word smashing, not cool) if I took a different person every day with a bag over their head. Perhaps one of the mean girls' mums or maybe our teacher or the guy who owns the

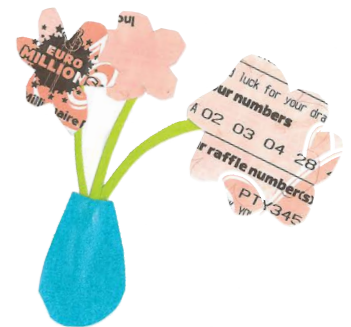


sweet shop. And every day the kids who bully us would feel really stupid for being horrid to Ben because it wasn't Ben. Grandad reckons they don't know anything about Ben, so it really is like they're shouting at someone when they don't know who he or she actually is.

That's what I'd do if money was no object. Perhaps...maybe... I could get one of the cool and popular kids at school to do the bag thing for me. If just one of the cool kids stood up for Ben maybe they could change our lives just as well as Harry Styles could.



Molly x



Michael Sheen, actor and supporter of Carers Trust

"I first came across the work of Carers Trust a few years ago, and was astounded by the numbers of extraordinary young people taking on the demanding role of carer for their family, some with little or no support. It would be wonderful if schools could create an environment where disabilities and issues around caring are understood. It could not only reduce bullying but enrich the lives of all pupils in the school who might learn something about themselves by connecting to these extraordinary young people in a new way."



Information for teachers

There are around 700,000 young carers in the UK and most spend between 11 and 20 hours each week caring for their mum or dad, or a brother or sister. Often they're looking after someone who is sick, has a disability, a mental health condition or is dealing with an addiction. Most don't tell their teachers or even their friends, and their families are rarely asked if any of their children have caring responsibilities when they enrol at the school. These children and young people do an extraordinary job but often end up isolated and bullied as a result of their commitment to their family.

School can start to get difficult for a young carer because of limitations on their social life. Young carers can find it hard to host or attend play dates, might find other children are nervous around their family if they are ill or disabled, or find friends simply get fed up when they cancel arrangements because of what's going on at home. Sometimes problems start if children are often late for school, or perhaps behind with schooling. This can knock their confidence and make them vulnerable to friendship problems.

Carers Trust is a charity now working with schools across the UK and Isle of Man. The charity knows there are so many things teachers can do to help these young people. Perhaps you could find out (via a letter home or at enrolment) if a child has

any caring responsibilities and then be mindful that they may need to phone home at school or need extra time or help with homework. Let all staff know that pupils who are carers have a good reason to be late (and need reassurance on arrival), or may need to go home straight after school (perhaps some after-school activities could be moved to a lunchtime slot).

You could talk about the amazing job young carers do in PSHE or an assembly, without identifying any pupils by name.

Crucially, it helps if the school understands how young carers can be vulnerable to bullying behaviour. Children can feel both angry or nervous around others, on the outside of friendship groups, or be a champion for the underdog – all behaviour that can be seen as weak and make them susceptible to bullying. Sometimes young carers need extra support to build friendships (perhaps via peer mentoring) and help (perhaps from other parents) so they can attend activities outside school. For more support you can direct young carers to www.youngcarers.net



The life you don't see: by being aware of a young carer's responsibilities at home, teachers can make sure they get the proper support at school



carerstrust
action · help · advice

If you would like to find out more about Carers Trust and how they can help your school support young carers visit www.carers.org or <http://professionals.carers.org>

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Diversity
Role Models —
Here to
tackle homophobic
bullying

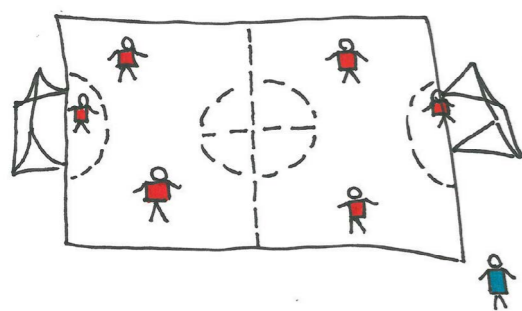
Evan's diary for today!

8am I look at myself in the mirror and try and see what others see. I'm the smallest in my class and I have two left feet when it comes to football, but I can't see anything else that's different. Do my shoes look stupid? Have I got a girly face? Is it my skin?



8.15am "Have you got your swimming stuff?" shouts Mum from downstairs. "Yep," I shout back, my stomach twisting into a knot. I like swimming. I just wish I didn't have to swim at school. Some of my class think it's weird I dive well and dance and that's why they call me names. I'd rather be rubbish at everything and never dance again and be in one of the gangs in my class than be good at something and be picked on. I wonder if I'll get in trouble if I 'forget' my swim stuff again so I have to sit on the side.

9am At school I sit next to Ella. We start talking about what we did at the weekend and she asks me if I saw this dance programme on TV on Saturday. "You girls okay?" comes a voice behind us. Rich again. "Give us a break, Rich. Haven't you got anything better to do?" says Ella. "She your bodyguard, Evie?" says Rich, and the boys all laugh. In case you're wondering, this particular 'Evie' joke started when I wasn't listening to Mrs Geller in an art class in primary school and she asked all the girls to get up and get their bags and I stood up and then realised my mistake. In that one split second my name was changed from Evan to Evie. It might have been funny if it had lasted one class, or even one day. But this was a year ago – in a different school – and the boys from primary school told everyone in this class and they still won't let it go.



10am At break we hang around on the field. Most boys play football and there's nothing much else to do. I've brought in some playing cards – Mum's idea – but can't find anyone to play with. I wonder about joining in the game but I'm rubbish at football, and I feel rubbish about myself standing here as though I'm invisible. It's a relief when the bell goes.

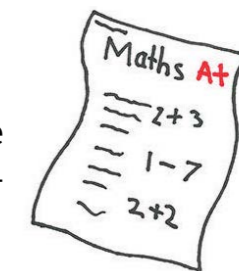
On the way to class Owen comes up behind me and asks why I wasn't playing footie. "Are you gay, girl?" he says into my ear, spitting bits of crisps in a disgusting way on my neck. "There's something wrong with you..."



11am I wonder whether I should tell Mr Cook about this whole Evie gay thing again. Last time he said it was just banter and I should ignore it. "Don't take it too seriously," he said. "Focus on what you're good at, not what you're bad at."

11.15 Maths. But I'm still thinking about Mr Cook. I wasn't actually focusing on what I was bad at when I told him about the boys picking on me. Was he suggesting I was getting called names because I was bad at football? I don't even like football. I just hate being the odd one out, and I hate it that when I mention dancing or get good marks in maths or hang out with Ella I get told what I do is so gay. I'm confused. Just by being me and being quiet and keeping out of their way I seem to make them hate me. But if I ask them to stop – I did try that once in the first term – they start asking if I have something to hide. Last week I went off on my own and tried to ignore them, but then the game was 'find Evie', and I felt really scared.

11.40 I try and concentrate on my maths – I'm usually first to finish these tests – but I really just want to go home. I stare out of the window and think about Jono, my cousin. He's gay – he's at uni now – and I wonder if it feels okay when people call you gay if you really are actually gay. If what sounds like a put-down when you're 12 and not even sure who you want to date (ever!) sounds different when you're 19 and actually going out with a boy. Mum said that is all being gay means. Going out with someone of the same sex rather than the opposite sex. She says lots of people are gay, including famous people and important people in the government. She says it shouldn't be a big deal. No more than her being married to Dad, who's a man, is a big deal.



12 noon Lunchtime, and in the dinner hall I go and sit by Ella and make some excuse about finding out the time of tomorrow's dance class. Ella says her sister wants me to help her with a breakdance move. That gives me an idea. I could start a school dance club at lunchtime.

1.30pm In the afternoon class while everyone is reading I tell Mr Cook about the dance club idea. He likes it and immediately asks the class what they think. Owen pipes up and says he can street dance so Mr Cook asks him to find out who else would like to join – he suggests

Owen and I team up to organise it. Owen? My heart sinks. This was supposed to be something for people who don't like football, not something else for them to do. Owen is obviously unhappy about teaming up with me too. I hear him joke with the boys that this will be for breakdancing, not ballet...not for 'girls'. I can feel my face burning. I look at Mr Cook but he's talking to Kate now about something else.

3.15 When the bell goes I see Owen with a ball under his arm, climbing into a car with some of the other boys from my class. And I see Ella going off arm in arm with her friend Suzanne to catch the bus, and I feel stupid standing there, with no one saying bye to me, or wanting to hang out with me after school. Maybe they're right. Maybe there is something wrong with me.

By Evan!

Sonan's story for you

THE MAGIC SWORD

Once upon a time, on a castle high up on the hill in our town, there lived a magician who owned a magic sword. Word had it that, in days gone by, the magic sword had cut out the tongues of the roaring beasts who had tried to terrify the people who lived in our town.

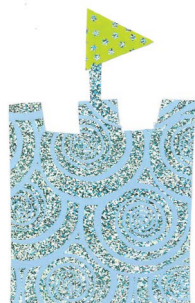


One morning, in the week just before the half-term holidays, Callum brought the sword into class. At least that's what he said it was. He said the magician from the castle had been to a party at their house that weekend and had passed him the sword so he could slay the beasts of Berrisbrook Primary. You'd better slay them quick, I thought, because Miss Russell is going to take that off you and put it in her cupboard with the mobile phones and cans of Coke and Mars Bars she confiscates each morning.

Miss Russell didn't! Callum is one of those boys who's great at everything – he looks great, he's always captain of the football team and he's the boy who Sally – the most popular girl in our class – is sooo in love with. Callum's dad is on TV, so he's always getting to go to cool parties. Maybe that's how he knows a magician. Apparently his coolness has won over Miss Russell, who, instead of saying, "A weapon, in school – absolutely not!" says in a voice a bit like the Queen's, "Use it wisely, Callum."

During assembly Mr Rasish, our head teacher, gave out certificates. I received one for most improved recorder player and Emma was given hers for fundraising at the cake stall. Peter, a boy in our class, got his for passing his grade 6 dance. "That's so gay," sneered Eric behind me.

Suddenly there was a flash and Callum stood up, challenging Eric with his sword. He flashed it in front of his face and it glowed with the words: "What's wrong with dancing?" Eric looked round for support but everyone was looking at Callum, the coolest kid in the class. He turned the sword and flashed it closer to Eric's face. Sasha – my friend who is very dramatic – squealed and said he was going to slash out Eric's eyes. The sword now glowed with the words, "Why did you say it was so gay?" It turned, and it said, "What's wrong with being gay?" Eric was slain, in that he shut up and looked as pathetic as he sounded.



Callum – I'll call him Sir Callum now – put the sword back in its sheath and went to class as if nothing had happened. We were working on computers, inventing games, and Zac, the smallest boy in our class, said he'd partner me. We decided to invent a game using sharks and he found a sea image online and made it our background. Then we started to create little shark cartoons. "That's so clever," I said. "It's easy really," said Zac. "Let me show you what I learned on my computer at home."



"It's easy really," mimicked a mocking voice behind us. "Let me show you how to be queer..." Ronnie and Adam – typical.

In a flash, Callum was up, sword in the air, standing in front of Ronnie and Adam. "Why are you laughing at Zac for being good at computers?" he said.

"Well it's such a gay thing to do," moaned Ronnie in a sneery voice. "And helping a girl..."

"Did you know," said Sir Callum, "that we wouldn't have the Internet and Xbox and Minecraft if it wasn't for the people like Zac?" Ronnie's eyes searched the room for someone to back him up. Callum twisted the sword in his hand, right in front of Ronnie, and the words said: "Gay? Really?" And he turned the sword, and it said, "Don't you know any other words, dork?" And Ronnie was speechless, and everyone cheered.

And so the day went on, Callum defeating the boys from Year 8 who said Finn was 'a big girl' for not wanting to play football at lunchtime (Callum not only used the sword, he started a game of slay dragons, making me and Zac team captains, which was so



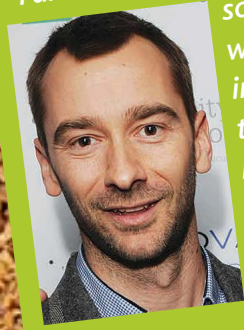
much fun), and completely crushing Eric again when he said Callum was being gay for pretending to be a prince. This time the sword flashed the words, "Is it so bad to be gay?" which threw everyone a bit...and then when he turned the sword it said, "Who are you really laughing at?" which threw Eric completely. Just before the bell went in the afternoon Miss Russell asked Callum to give her the sword and asked him which beasts he'd managed to defeat that day. "Just the uncool ones," he said, smirking, and I noticed Eric and Ronnie and Adam went bright red.

Miss Russell said the sword was in the school that day to help us celebrate difference and to slay those – or at least teach them – why it mattered. She then pointed out that there was something different about us all and asked us to write down what our difference was. Everyone found at least one. Then she told us we needed to congratulate Callum because his dad got married to his partner Tony that weekend, hence the big party. "You mean your dad's gay?" said Ronnie before he could stop himself. "Yes," said Callum. "He loves Tony and so it's kind of like having two dads. I live with my mum but stay with dad every weekend. You should come round and hang out some time Ronnie." Everyone held their breath, waiting for the sword... But Callum's words had already defeated Ronnie's and the battle was over.

By Sonan x



Charlie Condou, actor and Patron of Diversity Role Models



"I am so glad to support the work Diversity Role Models is doing in schools. As a parent, and a gay parent, I feel it is wonderful to be able to give children in schools the important message that everyone is different, and that it is okay to be different. To not only help them recognise bullying is wrong – most children we meet know that. But to help them see that not accepting and respecting people's differences is also wrong, and is part of that bullying behaviour."

Information for teachers

Diversity Role Models was launched by Suran Dickson, a teacher who saw the growing rise of homophobia in schools. It struck her that none of the pupils she taught had an issue with her own sexuality and she noticed there was far less gay banter in her class. She was gay and they knew it, but they liked, trusted and respected her. She launched Diversity Role Models to introduce more children and young people to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender adults so they, too, could get to know the person behind the stereotype and become more accepting of differences, including other differences in their class.

Diversity Role Models' workshops are nothing to do with sex education. They are about relationships and acceptance of, and respect for, other people's relationships. Children are often surprised how hateful and isolating gay banter (the 'you're so gay' line) can be to children whose parents are gay, or to them if they feel they might be – or to anyone when the term is used to mock them. Children soon realise how what's often thought harmless, is actually working to effectively promote discrimination. It does this by suggesting gay is rubbish or weird or unacceptable.

When workshops encourage children to think about the impact of banter, nearly all commit to not using the term 'gay' in a negative way again.

Diversity Role Models can support your school in establishing an embedded diversity programme across the curriculum and can also help create a specific policy tackling homophobic bullying. They know a lot of LGBT bullying develops from established gender stereotypes. So often, for example, boys who don't like football or other sports but who like to dance or who like fashion are bullied as a result. The same happens to girls if, for example, they like football and don't like make-up. The charity also know – they see it every day – that children, when given the tools and the opportunity, can be the greatest ambassadors for respect and equality, even if the issue (race, disability, gender) doesn't affect them personally. Children readily recognise when this subject is aired and discussed that homophobia isn't just an issue about gay people and tackling it isn't just for their sake. This is about simply accepting and respecting everybody in the classroom, whatever their differences. This is about creating a happier class.



Celebrating difference: class-based workshops encourage students to accept and respect everyone in the school.



Diversity Role Models
in partnership with RBS

If you'd like to have a Diversity Role Model visit your school, or find out more about their teacher training packages visit www.diversityrolemodels.org

Being Me

kidscape 30
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Isn't it time someone heard your story?



Potential Plus —
supporting
high potential
learners so
they can flourish
at school

Robert's diary



7am I've woken early to read my book and can hear Mum and Dad talking, their door open as they start to get organised for the day. Dad is saying my school needs to give me more work so I'm not bored, and Mum is saying she worries about my behaviour, the arguments, the melt-down I had on Monday. Neither sounds happy.



8.30am As Mum drops me off she looks at me and says, "Robert, will you try something for me today?" "Okay," I say, checking that I've packed my maths set. "What?" "Just don't put your hand up so much," she says." Mrs Ashcroft says you might be getting picked on because you always put your hand up and always know the answers and she thinks it might look like showing off." I look at her, confused. "What do you mean? They always beg me to do their homework," I say. "They nick my books at break. They want the answers off me." Mum sighs. "Just keep your hand down. Just try it, today."

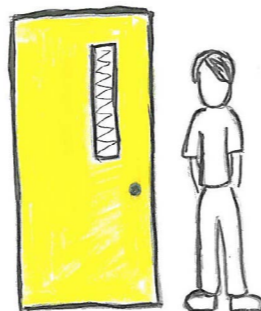
9.30am Half an hour into English, and I haven't put my hand up once, even though no one else seems to be answering the questions correctly and Mrs Ashcroft is saying, "Anyone else?" I sit on my hands, and then when they get hot I decide to screw up bits of paper ripped from my exercise book and flick them at people. "Concentrate, Robert!" shouts Mrs Ashcroft. "I'm not going to tell you again. I'll be giving you a test on this in a minute."

9.50am I've finished the test and am screwing up more bits of paper. "Please wait outside, Robert," says Mrs Ashcroft. "I've had enough of you." Some of the boys laugh, some applaud.

10am I'm still outside thinking about how they call me a geek and Ashcroft's baby boy when I do answer questions right, and then laugh at me when I don't – or get into trouble. I feel a bit sick and my head hurts.

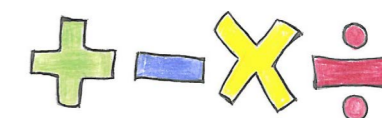
11am I'm in the special needs room now, meeting with a psychologist that the school has called in to 'assess my needs'. Maybe there is something wrong with me. The man, who says his name is Lawrence, is nice and talks to mum and asks me all sorts of questions and then gives me a test where I have to answer A to E. I finish it and he looks surprised. "You're a fast worker, Robert," he says. Then I have to write a story about my morning, which takes me ages because my writing is pretty poor. "Tell you what," he says, "just tell me about your morning." And we talk about this morning,

ha ha ha



and every morning, and I tell Lawrence I'm confused about why everyone seems to find me annoying. How on the school trip I ended up being paired with the teaching assistant because no one else would pair up with me, and how that ruined the whole trip. It had made me feel worthless and isolated, I explain. When Mum has gone out of the room to get a drink, I tell him in a low voice and rather guiltily that they've brainwashed my mum into thinking it's my fault, and that she told me not to put my hand up in class because that's why I get picked on. That maybe she thinks that they're right to call me teacher's pet and geek, and maybe they'll tell her I deserve to be tripped up on the way to assembly. Lawrence takes his glasses off and rubs his head.

12.30pm At lunchtime Ellen asks me to help her with her maths. I'm feeling happy after such a nice chat in special needs, so I'm in the mood for being with someone else. "How did you do that when you weren't even in maths this morning?" she asks after we've finished. So I tell her how. And then tell her this game I have at home which teaches you numbers in ten different languages and you have to add up Spanish and French and give the answer in German. She looks at me like I'm mad then, so I shut up. But she says 'merci beaucoup' in a really friendly voice when I hand her back her book, which means thanks in French and makes me feel great.



2pm Sport, which is a relief because this is where I'm allowed to be good, and everyone wants me on their team. Today, though, Pete and Bruce are captains and they hate me so I'm last to be chosen. When we run round the field warming up, Pete comes up beside me and says something horrible, something I can't write down. As he's running off he shouts out they're going to kick me so hard I won't be able to sit down again. I stop and look round to see if anyone's heard. "Come on, Robert," shouts the PE teacher. "Hurry up! Or have we finally found something that you're not good at?"



3.30pm Mrs Ashcroft and the psychologist and Mum and I are all sitting in the classroom, Mrs Ashcroft with that kind look she has when she feels sorry for you. They were going to meet without me, but the psychologist has suggested I come in too. "My impression is," he says, "that the main problem for Robert is he's bullied and frustrated and lonely." Mrs Ashcroft's look has changed. He talks then about my talents and how teachers can use them better, and how my mum should be proud of me. I go a bit red then, in case she knows I told on her. He suggests that teachers introduce a new way of dealing with 'who has the answer', like a whiteboard or turn-taking, to prevent me feeling frustrated or becoming a figure of fun. "It's quite easy," he says, seeing Mrs Ashcroft's mouth gaping in surprise. He also suggests she uses me as a mentor for children who struggle to do maths (he'd apparently watched me helping Ellen), puts me up into Year 9 for Maths and Science, and helps me with my writing when I'm in her class. He has a lot of ideas that day, and the most important one is about how all these things can help me find better friends in a class that simply doesn't quite understand me – yet. I want to hug him, but I've had enough tellings-off for one day so I don't. **By Robert**

Sarah's story for you!

THE PARENTS' EVENING

I don't know about your class, but our class worries about parents' evening. Mrs Shawali gets us to put all our books on top of our desk, and then tidy up what's left inside, and tells us that this evening she's looking forward to showing our mums, dads, carers and family what we get up to when we come to school. She says it with a bit of a smile today, and me and Marcie can't work out whether that's good or bad. "I wish we didn't have to come too," says Marcie. "I don't want my mum to get cross with me in front of Shawali when she mentions my maths." But we've all been asked to come along, like it or not. That's one of the school rules. "It's a chance to get to know each other better," says Mrs Shawali. And there's that smile again.

That evening the lights are all on and the parents are all chatting, but instead of forming a queue, like we expected, like in Crosby Juniors, they're getting into a group and Mrs Shawali is telling us to sit at our desks. Then she announces that the parents have a surprise for us – they're putting on a little play. "O...M...G," says Sally, looking at her mum. "A play?" What happens next is hard to describe, but here goes.

Puna's dad and Jack's dad come on and start talking about what they're planning to do to Miles' dad down the pub that night. "Have you ever met anyone so boring?", they say. "If you ask him to come with us again, we're dumping you too," they bark at Nigel's dad. "All he talks about is computers. Okay, so maybe he did get an award for his hospital database, but who cares? I wish someone would put him in hospital." Miles' dad, Mr Harris, bounces on to the stage telling them he's just come across a new computer program to save on energy bills. "Geek," Puna's dad coughs into his

hand. Some of the boys are sniggering, but I can tell they don't know whether it's supposed to be funny or not. Nor do I. Mum said Miles' dad has made hospitals so much better and that he's a bit of a hero. I wonder if he minds them making fun of him, even in a play.

Next four mums come on to the makeshift stage and my mum starts telling Marcie's mum she looks rubbish in her police uniform. "Think you're strong do you, just because you're a policewoman, Sonia?" she says. Marcie



glances at me, horrified. I don't know where to look. "She always looks like she's pretending to be better than us," says Cathy's mum, Mrs Shaw. "Tell you what," she whispers to my mum. "Let's not ask her to go to coffee on Saturday. Let's pretend we're all going out with our mums." My face reddens, remembering the drive home in the back of Marcie's car yesterday, when we planned to use the same

excuse to dump Alice. Did Marcie's mum hear us? Marcie's mum turns away, looking upset, and they all walk away.

Suddenly another dad I don't know rushes in to say his car is broken and he needs to get home urgently. "I can fix it," says Sam's mum. They leave the stage and then – would you believe it – the other dads start slagging off Sam's mum, saying she's a real know-all and fancy being able to fix cars and what a stupid way to make a living. Sam's mum comes back in wiping her hands, but then the dad she's just helped comes up behind her and makes a really rude signal, and whispers to the other dads he's off to the pub to watch the football and do they want to come. "Just don't tell Sam's mum," he says. "She's such a loser." I look over at Sam. I don't know him very well but I feel awful for him. "But Sam's mum just helped them fix the car," says Marcie, before she can stop herself.

Well you get this gist. The laughs didn't last. Scene after scene saw our parents treat each other horribly, criticising each other's clothes, jobs, talents. Accepting their help then dissing them, excluding them, never saying thank you.

At the end of the evening Mrs Shawali thanked us all for coming. "What was that about then, Miss?" said Ewan, voicing what we were all thinking. "That was about you getting to know each other better," she said. "Didn't you recognise yourselves in those scenes? Did you like what you saw?" Dave's hand went up then. "But what about our books? No one looked at our books?" Mrs Shawali smiled. "Your books will take care of themselves when you take care of each other," she said. And with that she was gone and parents' evening was over.



Jeff Forshaw, author and Professor of Physics and Astronomy

"It is easy to think that clever children are going to sail through school without facing many problems. However, for some children and young people that couldn't be further from the truth. Labelled as 'geeks', 'clever clogs', 'teacher's pet', 'swot' or worse, and being bullied on a daily basis can make the lives of these children with high learning potential absolutely miserable. Potential Plus UK has been supporting families and schools since 1967 to help improve the lives of these children and young people so that they can achieve their best without being held back."



Information for teachers

Gifted children come in all shapes and sizes, and from all social and cultural backgrounds. More than anything they want to fit in with their peers and to stop being singled out as the clever one or the geek or the oddball or the one who doesn't make friends easily. If left in this environment they will try to behave in a way to help them fit in – coasting or causing trouble, rather than excelling in what they are good at. The higher their IQ, the more difficult it can be for them. The level of bullying they experience is unacceptable. Often a child's mental development can be leaps and bounds ahead of their physical, social and emotional development, which is not only frustrating for them (how can they get their thoughts on paper?), but can lead to comments from adults like 'I thought you were bright, but look at your handwriting', or 'how can a clever boy like you behave in such a silly way like that?' – comments that can feed a class's low opinion of a child they already find a bit different.

Potential Plus UK is a national charity aiming to support these children and drive change. A lot of the work they do is helping parents avoid the frustration and anger that many children feel as a result of how they're

treated by their peers. They know that by working with schools they can make a difference. They know that if they don't, all these children have to offer their friends, their school and their communities and this world can so easily go to waste and the child can be left feeling bullied and ostracised and lose confidence in their special talents.

Being gifted is not a special need (although some children who have high learning potential are also dyslexic or have autistic spectrum disorder), but it is an additional need that should be explored, and schools that understand this have demonstrated that simple strategies – a provision of emotional support, the introduction of mentors, the opportunity for mixed aged classes or the introduction of new technology in the classroom so children can work at a pace that suits them without being singled out for doing so – can make a world of difference to these children. Potential Plus UK are working with these families, and with schools around Britain, to help them discover, assess and nurture pupils with high learning potential so they can be both happy and successful in the school where they study.



Room to flourish: Potential Plus work to give children confidence in their talents, and schools an understanding of them

Potential Plus UK | Discover. Nurture. Succeed.

If you'd like to find out more about what Potential Plus can do to support your work, and the training and support they offer visit www.potentialplusuk.org

Being Me

kidscape 30
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Isn't it time someone heard your story?



The National
Autistic society -
Helping everyone in
schools understand
autism better

Liam's diary for today

MONDAY 11.15am I'm on the school field and Chris is throwing the ball to Sam, who throws it to Tom, who throws it to Ed. I can't get it. They asked me to play and now I'm in the middle and supposed to get the ball but I can't. I look at Chris, who is holding the ball and Tom flicks me hard on the back of the head. When I turn to speak to Tom, Chris throws the ball to Ed and when I turn his way I feel another thwack on my head – Chris this time. I can feel my eyes stinging. This is why mum said I should go to the library at break. Chris has been mean before, I know, but him and Ed really did seem to want me to play today. I was hoping to ask them back after school. Now Tom is behind me again. I can hear him laughing but I don't know what's funny. When I go to grab the ball I land in a puddle and my trousers get all muddy. I get up and the next time I hear him behind me I turn and block him with my arm before he can hit me, but I catch his face. "Ow, no!" he says, holding his cheek. "What is wrong with you, moron?" Then Mr Gratton comes over and asks what's going on and Tom says I smacked him in the eye when we were playing ball and Mr Gratton asks me if that's true and I say 'yes' because it is, so he asks me to go with him to the office.



11.40am I'm still sitting in the office waiting to 'calm down', as Mr Gratton put it. I'm missing maths, and I like maths. How can I calm down when I feel this mad at myself for getting into trouble again? I'm not really sure what happened, but Mr Gratton says this is the third time I've hurt someone on the field so he's called Mum. When she arrives I can see her eyes flickering between Mrs Lowe on reception and me as she hears I got into a tussle at playtime. "A tussle?" she says. "Why is he so upset and who else was involved and where are they now?" I look at her, hoping she's not going to ask them to get Tom and Chris, but she just says, "Can I take him home? We can calm down at home."

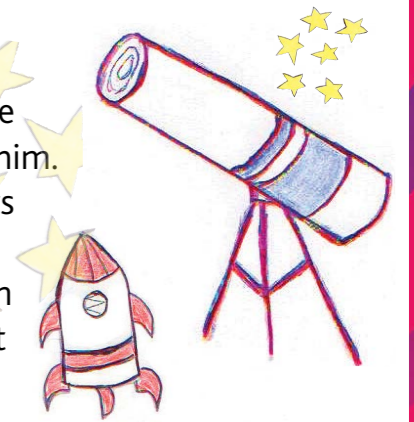
TUESDAY 7.15am I put on my joggers so I can go out with Mitchie our dog. I like to run round the block with him before breakfast, even when it's raining. He stays right by me the whole way and wags his tail even when it's wet and then rests his chin on my knee while I eat my cornflakes. I go and change after breakfast. I can't find my trousers, the baggy ones that don't cling to my legs. Mum must have washed them after they got muddy yesterday – so I get back into bed. I have a bad feeling about today.



8.45am Mum's giving me a lift in as I missed the bus because of what she calls 'the trousers debacle'. She's a bit cross because she's late for work, but she tells me she's definitely not cross with me and rubs my hair. I look in the mirror and flatten my hair down again and then keep checking in my bag to make sure my pencil case

is zipped up and then fasten my bag again. Sometimes when I go through reception the Year 9 boys grab my bag and if the pens fall out they get broken.

9am Mrs Lowe in reception is telling me how late I am. I see Sam coming in late too and wonder if I can walk to class with him. I wave but he just walks past and on to class and Mrs Lowe says nothing. I pick up my bag and try to catch him up. I wonder if he wants to see my new book about the Hubble Telescope. Sam visited the Space Centre when he was in the States which must have been amazing. I will show him my book.



9.30am In class we're working on our history essays. It's really noisy and Mr Gratton keeps telling everyone to calm down. Paper is being flicked across the class, and Ed and David in front of me are trying to get things out of their bags, and Mr Gratton is setting up the projector and tells everyone to be quiet, and I can't stand the noise. "Quiet!" I shout, "Quiet." The boys look at me and then carry on as if nothing has happened.

11am Mum has told me to stay in at break so I ask Sam if he wants to see my book, but I don't think he hears me, even when I speak really loudly. He's talking with Amar and Ed about a film they all saw at the weekend. "Have you seen Transformers?" I ask. They look at each other and smirk. "Got the DVD, mate," says Amar, and they carry on talking about their film. "What film did you see?" I ask. "Oh, nothing," they say, which seems an odd answer, as they obviously saw something. They walk out to the playground before I can ask them again. I take my book to the library, wishing I wasn't on my own but also hoping no one else is there.



11.30am English, and Mrs Stephenson is telling us to get our pens out, and I can't find mine. She lends me her pen but the nib is all wonky. I need my pen. I see Chris passing it to Kuna. "Give me my pen back!" I shout. Mrs Stephenson tells me not to be silly and to get on with my work. My hands are too hot to write and I want to go home.

12.30pm After lunch I ask Kuna for my pen and he says I can have it if I play football on the field and that they need me on their team. I would like to play so I follow him, wondering if I should ask him and Sam back for tea. During the game they keep tackling me before I have even had a chance to get the ball. At one point when I dribble it down the field, ready to shoot, they all charge at me and I'm on the ground. I'm scared then and kick out with my foot and catch Tom's hand. "Moron!" he shouts. Everyone is looking at his hand and no one is looking at me and Mr Gratton comes over and asks what happened. I think he's going to help me up but then Tom says, "Liam kicked me, sir, when we were playing football." Mr Gratton asks me if I kicked him, and I say 'yes' because I did, even if I didn't mean to. Then he asks me to go with him to the office.

By Liam

Annika's story for you

BEWARE THE GIRL WITH CURLY HAIR

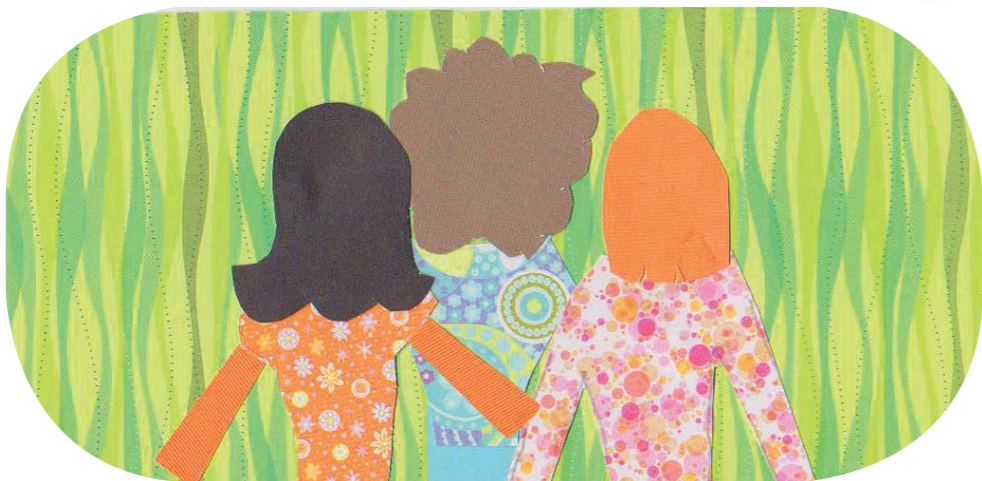
Today a new girl started at our school. Our teacher Mr Williams said she had curly hair – but we should all be really nice to her. 'But'? Why 'but'? When she arrived on her first day her eyes were red and she looked scared... Maybe it was because of the curly hair. It was all squashed into a scrunchy. Maybe she was embarrassed... That night Mum said a woman in her office had a son with curly hair. Then she started talking about how badly behaved he was and how difficult it was for his mum. She talked about him not fitting in at school. That some kids just don't fit in. It made me think there must be something weird about curly hair. The next day the girl with curly hair followed us down to the field, which is where me and Sally and Emma always go and talk about stuff while we make daisy chains. Emma was immediately annoyed as she said she'd heard the girl with curly hair was a bit odd.

"Odd? How odd?" I asked. "Just weird," said Emma. "I don't know. Just watch out for weirdness." I felt sorry for the girl with curly hair and asked her if she'd like to come to lunch with us. "Annika! Why did you go and do that?" wailed Emma when we were at our desks. "Because she's new," I said. "Well if you ask her tomorrow you can't sit by us," Emma moaned. I shut up then. I definitely want to go to Emma's party and if I ask the girl with curly hair Emma might cross me off the list.

The girl with curly hair is really clever, and when we were reading parts from our play she read hers with an American voice which made everyone laugh (in a good way). She did come to lunch with us but she ate really slowly and Emma said we were leaving before she'd finished. Later I saw her walking around the field on her own, until Maria and Sally asked her

if she wanted to play tag. First they chased her in a way that seemed a bit mean and then when she was 'it' I saw them run into the loos to hide. I saw the girl with curly hair looking for them for ages.

It reminded me of Thomas. The boys used to do that to him. Everyone would chase him until he was furious he couldn't catch them, all hide, and then laugh when he got furious about that. The teachers used to tell us to leave him alone because he didn't like to play, but he always wanted to play so that didn't really make sense. Thomas was absolutely



nuts about trains and talked about them all the time and people called him Thomas the Tank Engine in a mean way. Sometimes in class he said he couldn't concentrate because of the noise. He left at the end of Year 7 and everyone was glad and said he was annoying. Mum said he had autism and it was best that he'd left as he didn't really fit in. I never understood what autism was. Come to think of it, I don't know what makes girls with curly hair different either.

I asked Mr Morgan at break what was wrong with the girl with curly hair and why he asked us to be nice to her. "Nothing is wrong with her," he said, looking surprised. "I want you to be nice to everyone. I just mentioned her curly hair so you'd know who she was when she arrived."

"Nothing weird or different about her then?" I asked. "You're all different and you can all be a bit weird," said Mr Morgan with a smile.

I decided to find out more that night. First I searched online for 'curly hair'. It turns out scientists think that curls are largely determined by the shape of the hair follicle, which seems to be controlled by a gene. That made their hair curly, uncontrollable and prone to dryness. Huh! Was that it? Mr Morgan was right. There was nothing wrong with curly hair. So I searched 'autism'. It turns out children with autism have a disability that affects how they communicate and relate to other people. They might have problems expressing how they feel, and might not pick up body language or jokes. They can take things very literally, and sometimes find unfamiliar situations really difficult. It said that sometimes people with autism hate a lot of noise. Even buzzing noises from the projector can make them feel like a stick is being scratched on a chalkboard... I stopped reading because my teeth were on edge thinking about the chalkboard.

I wondered why no one had mentioned any of this before. I wondered where Thomas was now, and if I could say sorry for not sticking up for him. I wondered if his new school understood that some of the things he did were because he had autism, and not because he was annoying. On the bus the next day I was revising for a test on Henry VIII but I was still thinking about what I had learned about autism and about the way we'd all treated Thomas. It was almost as crazy as the way people reacted to the girl with curly hair – judging her before they'd even got to know her. I wondered what would happen if we were told to be careful around girls who were obsessed with ponies (watch out, Amarjit) or to avoid boys who put gel in their hair (Neil thinks he's so cool) or girls who dance (like me, like Emma). I wondered about a lot of things that day. And before I went to bed I told mum that she was wrong. It wasn't that some children don't fit into schools. It's that some schools don't let children fit in.

Annika



Author and actress Jane Asher is President of The National Autistic Society



"It is wonderful to go into schools and see the difference the right support can make to children with autism. To see the difference in children's confidence and their parents' happiness when the support and understanding are in place. To see the difference it can make to the whole school..."

Information for teachers

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism. There are around 700,000 people with this developmental disability in the UK but it is still relatively unknown and misunderstood. This means that many children with autism (and 70 per cent are in mainstream schools) get nothing like the level of help, support and understanding they need. Often, because of their disability, autistic children get bullied. The NAS knows that much of this bullying happens simply as a result of children not understanding their peer's autism and the challenges they face. As a result many students never really get to know the child behind the 'behaviour' and benefit from all they have to offer the class (e.g. their loyalty, insight and intelligence).

Bullying mostly happens in free time at school when children with autism find the unstructured activities a real challenge. They are often targets for backhanded bullying, where they are invited to play or offered friendship by those who find it funny to mislead them, wind them up or even intentionally get them into trouble. Children with autism find it difficult to know when someone is

being genuine but often go along with suggestions hoping they can be accepted into a social group.

Too often, teachers think they can help children with autism by separating them from the class, or by encouraging them to modify their behaviour so they don't attract a bullying response from their peers. However well intentioned, this can highlight differences rather than promote inclusion and understanding. Instead, teachers should help all children in their class or school understand what autism is (the NAS has a wealth of resources to help here). They also need to encourage them to get to know the person behind the 'behaviour' or 'idiosyncrasies' and introduce strategies to support children with autism, to avoid them getting into difficulty. Many strategies are targeted at that free time in the school day which pupils with autism find so difficult. Structured play, lunchtime clubs or designated quiet areas can work brilliantly. These ideas are relatively easy to implement, but they can all make a huge difference to children with autism and to children who struggle socially in any way at all.



Beyond the behaviour: the NAS knows children with autism simply want to be understood and valued by their peers



If you would like to find out more about The National Autistic Society and how they can help your school support children with autism, visit <http://www.autism.org.uk>