

Being Dyslexic in Today's Education System



My relationship with Dyslexia was a struggle for the majority of my time in the education system. My mental health and academic growth were severely impacted, due to a lack of awareness and support provided in school.

I was diagnosed as dyslexic in Year 2. The majority of my dad's family are dyslexic and my then teacher's son is also dyslexic, which meant it was not hard to recognise that something wasn't quite right.

For the majority of my time in primary school I thought nothing of my dyslexia label. Even though I had to have dyslexia training after school, eye-tracking sessions, Kumon¹ classes and being the bottom set for Maths, I enjoyed my learning.

In Year 6, we had to do the Eleven-plus², in order to determine what school I would be going to. Even with two years of training, I failed both the exams, as I couldn't finish the paper, as I had no extra time. I felt like a failure, and this is when I felt a divide between my classmates and me.

My parents appealed, and I was given a place at my local grammar school. Immediately, I recognised that I was not meeting the expected academic standard of everyone else. I received no support in class, and was only given dyslexia support sessions, which involved me being taken out of my lessons to do joined-up handwriting exercises. I very quickly fell behind, most significantly in maths.

I would often get into trouble for not concentrating or not being able to do the homework – but seeing as I couldn't understand what was being taught, I didn't see the point in trying.

My mental health suffered badly: I assumed I was stupid, unable to do well, unable to achieve. In Year 10, I was told that I needed to start improving my grades, otherwise I would not be able to get into my school's sixth form. This was when I realised I needed to get my act together, but even then, I did not think I would be able to achieve the required B in maths, let alone a D.

Luckily, my parents were able to send to me a Maths tutor who specialised in Dyslexia. In the first session, I learnt what a fraction was, something I couldn't get my head around for the whole of my time at school. In the space of two years, I managed to go through about six years of the maths I had missed out on. From long division to multiplication, my ability to understand maths was completely transformed as my tutor taught me in a way that worked for me.

This was eye opening. I had assumed that I would never be able to do well in anything, let alone Maths, and so I applied the strategies my tutor gave me to the rest of my subjects. When I got my GCSE results back, I think many people were shocked. I had got an A* in Maths, after only having learnt what a fraction was under two years before.

I was often told it was unfair I received extra time, or that I had a laptop in exams. I still get these comments today. However, if I had not been given the support from my tutor to recognise that I was not stupid and that I was just being taught in a way that didn't work for me, I would never be where I am today.

My mental health has significantly improved and I have achieved so much academically. What should be taken from my story is that I was extremely fortunate in my position, to have parents who financially supported me to get the extra support I was never given in school. Yet, I still faced so many struggles, both academically and mentally, which is often a common theme for many dyslexics in the education system today.³

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¹<https://www.kumon.co.uk/>

²Eleven-plus - England - A competitive examination given between primary and secondary school at about age 11. It evolved after 1944 as a means of determining in which of the three types of secondary school—grammar, technical, or modern—a child should continue his education. (Source: www.britannica.com)

³Evidence provided to APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs following her presentation at 24 April 2019 meeting.

*Sourced from: The Human Cost of Dyslexia - April 2019
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