Celebrating Neurodiversity

*The first Neurodiversity Celebration Week runs from 13-17 May. Siena Castellon, a neurodiversity advocate and Mayor’s Peer Outreach Worker, tell us more…*

I recently launched the Neurodiversity Celebration Week campaign. Around 15 per cent of all students have a special educational need (SEN), and I’m one of them. I believe we deserve to have our unique talents celebrated. For a change, I’d like schools to flip the narrative and focus on our strengths rather than our weaknesses. Despite our many challenges, we have huge potential. That’s a message we don’t hear often, but it’s one we should be shouting from the rooftops.

Being a student with SEN is hard. I know. I am dyslexic, dyspraxic (problems with physical coordination) and autistic. I also have ADHD. We are often misunderstood and underestimated. At school, we are assessed on the areas we find most challenging. At the same time, our many strengths are often overlooked. Our hard work often goes unnoticed. Instead it’s eclipsed by our poor spelling, reluctance to read aloud, clumsiness, inability to organise and illegible handwriting. The school day is mostly focused on what we find hard and on what we are doing wrong. We are often teased and bullied, because other students assume we are not smart. Constantly being battered down can be very disenchanting and demoralising. It makes it hard to believe in yourself. I want to change this.

Neurodiversity Celebration Week will give schools a chance to highlight and showcase the talents of their neurodivergent community. Many of these students put their success down to their singular way of seeing and interacting with the world. Over 30 per cent of entrepreneurs are dyslexic and over 70 per cent of people who work in Silicon Valley are believed to be autistic. We’re creative too, with many successful musicians and entertainers having ADHD. It’s time we started to look at SEN students in a new light. I hope that the week will also change how SEN students see themselves.

Over 135 schools and more than 120,000 students from the UK, Australia, the US and Qatar are taking part in Neurodiversity Celebration Week. The campaign is also supported by 22 major charities and organisations. My hope is that every UK school will eventually participate. Almost one in six students have a special educational need. We deserve to have our strengths and talents celebrated.

If you are a headteacher, teacher or SENCO, please celebrate your neurodivergent students by registering at: [www.neurodiversity-celebration-week.com](http://www.neurodiversity-celebration-week.com)

Find out more about Siena’s advocacy work at: <https://www.qlmentoring.com> and on Twitter at @QLMentoring

*Please note these numbers are accurate as of Monday 25th March.*