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From Parents, For Parents: Shared Journeys Through Neurodiversity

A positive, anonymous collection of stories, tips, and hope - written by Harrodian parents for Harrodian parents.

Seeing the First Signs

"Words and letters got muddled, lines skipped, sentences mixed up. He had meltdowns over homework and really short concentration spans."

One family noticed early clues in the 8s: slow progress in reading, writing, and spelling; lines skipped or sentences mixed up; a short attention span, poor fine-motor skills, and, earlier still, delayed speech and hearing issues. Another parent shared that they had no idea until age 15, when the school reached out with some concerns - until then, they simply thought their child didn't like reading and was "great fun." A third parent described a child who could participate in class but struggled to work independently at home, finding it almost impossible to focus on uninteresting tasks yet becoming totally absorbed by passions.

"He's very bright, so he masked it well."

Common early clues parents described: daydreaming and fidgeting; trouble "getting started"; skipping pages or missing instructions in tests; time blindness ("five minutes" doesn't mean much); anxiety around homework and exams; and hyperfocus on areas of genuine interest.

"He was always a very lively boy, couldn't sit still, was happiest playing sport, in particular football, academics were a little bit of struggle but nothing that overly worried or concerned us. He found studying hard due to lack of concentration, no matter how hard he worked he just couldn't achieve the grades he wanted, it was then that he suspected he may be neurodiverse."

Talking with School (and What Works)

Families found it helpful to voice concerns early and meet with the school's Learning Enrichment team. In one case, the child was observed in class and monitored for about six months before a dyslexia assessment in the 9s. Another family emphasised that the Learning Enrichment department shared a summary and pupil profile, highlighting their child's needs and recommendations for support in the classroom, with every subject teacher so everyone was "reading from the same page." Regular communication proved essential, and weekly sessions with a named Learning Enrichment teacher helped children work across class demands and build skills where support was most needed.

"Regular communication is essential - for both school and pupil."

"Harrodian has been fantastic helping me to support him. I've always felt able to go and speak to the LE department either in person or via email."



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Diagnosis: Relief, Worry... and Clarity

Parents often described relief and validation when a diagnosis explained longstanding challenges. For some, there was also worry and even guilt for not spotting it sooner, plus questions about what it would mean for the future.

"It was reassuring to finally understand why he had been struggling. The diagnosis felt like a breakthrough, particularly for him, as it eased his anxiety about school and homework because there was now an explanation, not just uncertainty. At the same time, while it was empowering to have clarity, we couldn't help but worry about what it might mean for his future in education. So alongside the relief came a strong sense of responsibility and concern about the road ahead."

The language of a diagnosis is often the key to accessing appropriate support for pupils, as it identifies strengths as well as areas to work on.

"I was very upset. Guilty that I'd missed it and worried for the future. I hated the labelling and I was concerned that he would feel there was no point in trying if he had all these things 'wrong' with him. It took me some time to realise that there is nothing wrong with him but that his learning journey was going to be tougher than most of his friends. Just a different type of brain."

Daily Routines & Study Strategies That Actually Help

"He works best in short, focused bursts, then movement - walking the dog, kicking a ball, getting outside."

At home, structure helps. Parents highlighted predictable routines for meals, bedtimes, and homework; visual plans on the fridge; night-before prep for uniform and kit; no phones during homework/meals/overnight; and a stocked stationery box in a central spot.

"Structured routines are really important for him. When there isn't a clear framework to his day, he really struggles to cope. Over time and with guidance from the Learning Enrichment team, he has actually put a lot of those structures in place himself."

"Breaking work into short, manageable blocks has been particularly effective. He works best in focused bursts, followed by movement like walking the dog, kicking a ball around, or just getting outside. That balance between sitting and being physically active makes a huge difference to his concentration and stress levels."

"Planning is also essential. We encourage him to map out his time in chunks and give him plenty of advance notice about upcoming deadlines or events so he can prepare."

Some families use a 40/20 rhythm (40 minutes work, 20 minutes outside), or mirror the school timetable just before GCSE - about 8 × 40-minute slots from 9:00 - 16:00. For many, movement-based revision works: flashcards on a walk, or recording key notes and listening while walking.

"We empty school and sports bags as soon as we get home - filing gets done in 10 minutes on Saturday. Manageable and predictable."

Tools that helped: audiobooks, Barrington Stoke titles for accessible reading, reading rulers, timers and checklists reduced overwhelm. Beyond academics, passions matter - sport, music, DJ'ing, composing - anything that channels hyperfocus positively and restores balance.



HARRODIAN

"The biggest strategy has been helping him understand how he works best - and building routines around that."

"You can't leave someone with ADHD to get on with homework / projects / coursework - it's impossible for them to self motivate without immediate reward - passing their GCSE's isn't going to be enough. They need structure using the timer and constant checks (and snacks) throughout the day with a debrief in the evening to go over what they've done."

Support That Makes a Difference

Academic: Time with the Learning Enrichment team; clear in-class strategies; and positive reinforcement for effort and attitude, not just outcomes. Where appropriate, and in line with the Joint Council for Qualifications regulations, access arrangements such as extra time, typing, or smaller exam rooms were a big help.

"From the get-go, the Learning Enrichment team were there to support both my sons and myself as a parent. With the diagnosis confirmed, the school with the help of the consultants referral came up with a plan, this plan/profile was then filtered down to each teacher that taught them so that everyone was reading from the same page, regular communication is essential for both school and pupil. Additionally both boys had weekly sessions with the Learning Enrichment dept, each had their own teacher, which was so important as this enabled them to work across class lessons and areas where they needed most help."

Emotional: Naming emotions and normalising dysregulation; staying calm (even when it's hard); and clear, consistent boundaries - especially where impulsivity is part of the picture. Frequent praise protects self-esteem.

Practical: Checklists and charts (especially when younger) to reduce anxiety and increase independence; predictable rituals (like a Friday pizza night) that offer security; and scaffolding systems so children learn to organise themselves.

"Sport gave him confidence and a place to reset. Fresh air works wonders."

Wins Worth Celebrating

"His mock GCSEs were awful - but the real ones went really well. He needed to feel the pressure to get going."

Parents celebrated self-advocacy, teamwork and leadership through sport, and flourishing creativity - photography, piano, DJ'ing, composing. Academically, children learned to manage heavy reading and writing at A Level, especially in subjects like History and Politics. There were university offers, sometimes more than one, and even scholarship opportunities - milestones that felt like recognition of resilience and growth (with fingers still crossed for final grades!).

"Seeing his face on GCSE results day - he felt good about himself. That's what matters most."

"There have been so many moments of success, often not purely academic, but rooted in his resilience and growing self-belief. Watching him learn to advocate for himself has been extraordinary..."



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Advocating for Your Child (and Teaching Them to Self-Advocate)

"Don't be afraid to speak up - you know your child best."

Parents encouraged approaching school as partners, keeping communication open and consistent, and being organised and persistent as needs evolve. Keep notes so patterns are easy to share with staff or assessors. Involve your child more each year so they learn to understand their needs and advocate for themselves.

"Use learning differences as a reason, not an excuse, to explain why something is harder."

"Ask for help. Be kind to teachers, they want the same thing as you."

"Helping him understand his feelings has been key. Naming emotions, normalising them, and talking openly about emotional dysregulation has given him language for what he's experiencing. We've also learned that staying calm ourselves is crucial and that shouting only escalates things (although hard not to for obvious reasons!). Clear, consistent boundaries are equally important. With ADHD, he can sometimes feel impulsive or out of control, so firm but steady boundaries help him feel contained and safe."

Words to Our Past Selves

"Don't panic. Don't compare timelines. Share the load."

"Be patient with them, and with yourself."

One parent would have focused more on strengths sooner, sought help earlier, and invited a partner fully into the journey from the outset. Others emphasised accepting the child you have and loving them as hard as you can, so they remember you lifted them up and stood by them.

"I would tell myself not to panic and not to compare him to anyone else's timeline. I would remind myself to focus more on his strengths but also seek help sooner rather than trying to carry everything alone. Sharing the load is essential, both practically and emotionally. As a working mum, I would give myself permission to prioritise time to explore different approaches, whether that meant embracing technology, audiobooks, or alternative ways of learning, rather than feeling overwhelmed by them. I would also try harder to bring my partner fully into the journey from the start. It was difficult navigating it alone at times, especially when there was some scepticism, and I can see now how important it is for everyone to feel informed and invested early on. Most of all, I would remind myself to be patient with him and with myself."

Medication: Personal Experiences & Practical Notes

Some families chose medication and found it transformative - improved results and, above all, boosting self-esteem and self-belief. Teens sometimes learn to time medication to match demands. Others preferred non-medication strategies.

Gentle reminder: This is not medical advice. Always discuss options with a qualified clinician and your school's support team.



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Building Your Village (Community & Connection)

Parents stressed the power of finding other families who truly understand, especially as conversations shift to grades, exams, and university. Stay close to the Learning Enrichment team, arrange regular check-ins, and follow reputable organisations for practical strategies.

"You can't support what you don't know about so go and talk to school."

"Chatting to other parents whose children are also neurodiverse as swapping ideas and advice is great as well as having someone who understands."

"I would encourage parents to seek out other families who truly understand, not just when your children are young, but as they grow into teenagers and young adults too. Having that community becomes especially important when conversations among peers shift to grades, exams, and university plans. It can feel incredibly isolating if you don't have someone who understands what it's like to have a child who is struggling."

Parent's Closing Encouragement

"Seeing him on the rugby pitch, running like the wind and contributing as a committed team member, has been just as meaningful, as has watching him help younger children as a reading buddy/mentor or seeing his creativity flourish through photography, piano, DJing, and composing."

From one family with two neurodivergent young people:

"Have your child's back all the time - be present, communicate, praise often, and listen."

"There is nothing to be scared about, with the right information, teachers and teaching, your child will have a wonderful enriched school life, be excited for them for they are the future and the ones that think outside the box."

"It's good to be different. 'Normal' - what's that? We wouldn't change a thing. Anything is possible - dream big."

This booklet was produced as a collaborative project between parents of Harrodian Sixth Formers and Head of Learning Enrichment, Rachel Kimber, as part of the 2026 Neurodiversity Celebration Week. Huge thanks to the parents (you know who you are) who took time out of their busy lives to share so openly their thoughts and ideas, to help other parents navigate the challenges and successes parenting neurodiverse children.