

## Siena Castellon – Founder of Neurodiversity Celebration Week



I recently launched the Neurodiversity Celebration Week campaign, which aims to encourage schools to recognise the strengths of their autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic and ADHD students. I want to flip the narrative. I want schools to switch from only focusing on our weaknesses to also focusing on our strengths. Despite our many challenges, neurodiverse students have extraordinary potential, a message we don't hear often and which we should be shouting from the rooftops.

Being a student with special educational needs (SEN) is hard. I know. I am dyslexic, dyspraxic and autistic. I also have ADHD. We are often misunderstood and underestimated. At school, we are assessed on the areas we find most challenging, while our many strengths are often overlooked. Our monumental efforts often go unnoticed, eclipsed by our poor spelling, reluctance to read aloud, clumsiness, poor organisational skills and illegible handwriting. The school day is mostly focused on what we struggle with, 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 an opportunity to highlight and showcase the talents of their neurodiverse community, many of whom attribute their success to their unique way of seeing and interacting with the world. Over 30% of entrepreneurs are dyslexic, over 70% of Silicon Valley is believed to be autistic and many successful musicians and entertainers have ADHD. It is time that we begin to look at SEN students in a different light. I hope that Neurodiversity Celebration Week will also change the way that SEN students perceive themselves.

There are currently over 110 schools and over 65,300 students from the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Qatar taking part in the first ever Neurodiversity Celebration Week on May 13 to May 17. The campaign is supported by 19 major charities and organisations, including the ADHD Foundation, Anna Kennedy Online, British Dyslexia Association and the Dyspraxia Foundation. My hope is that every school in the United Kingdom will eventually participate in Neurodiversity Celebration Week. Approximately 15% of all students have a special educational need. These students deserve to have their strengths and talents celebrated.

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

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Siena Castellon is a 16-year old neurodiversity advocate and the founder of [www.qimentoring.com](http://www.qimentoring.com), a website that supports neurodiverse students. She is a Youth Ambassador for the ADHD Foundation and for Anna Kennedy Online. She is also a peer outreach worker for the Education and Youth Team of the Greater London Authority. Siena has won many national awards for her advocacy and website, including the 2018 BBC Radio 1 Teen Hero Award, the Diana Award and the British Citizen Youth Award.

## Neurodiversity Celebration Week

**Did you know that approximately 1 in 5 Students has a Learning Difference?**



Neurodiverse students have many strengths and talents; however, these are often overlooked. There are many misconceptions and negative stereotypes about students with special educational needs. As a consequence, their school experience can be demoralising and can have a negative effect on their confidence and self-esteem.

**Our Aim**  
Our aim is to encourage schools to take part in Neurodiversity Celebration Week, a week during which the strengths and advantages associated with being autistic or having ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia are recognised. We also aim to reduce the stigma, misconceptions and negative stereotypes of learning differences and to encourage diversity and inclusion.

**How to Celebrate Neurodiversity Week**

- Have a neurodiversity-themed assembly
- Invite neurodiverse individuals to speak
- Put up posters of famous neurodiverse individuals
- Put up learning differences fact sheets
- Showcase the talents of your neurodiverse students

**Sign Up**  
Please join us in celebrating neurodiversity and in creating a more positive, understanding and supportive school experience for your neurodiverse students by signing up your school to take part in Neurodiversity Celebration Week.

**To sign up please visit:** [www.neurodiversity-celebration-week.com](http://www.neurodiversity-celebration-week.com)

If you have any questions or would like more information, please email:  
[siena@neurodiversity-celebration-week.com](mailto:siena@neurodiversity-celebration-week.com)

# Has your School pledged to celebrate Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity celebration week  
13th-17th  
May 2019

