

Neurodiversity: A guide for parents and carers

Written by parents and carers of neurodivergent children at Kilmore Primary School

What is neurodiversity?

- Neurodiversity describes the normal variation in the human population, similar to biodiversity and variety in the natural world. As a concept it helps us to understand that every human brain and experience is unique.
- It describes the range of differences in how people communicate, perceive the world, interact, process information; all of which affect behaviour. It includes:

Autism, ADHD, Tourettes, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, OCD and Developmental Language Disorder
- When we shift our language and perspective from seeing “deficits” and “impairments” to understanding that these are natural diversities, we can begin to be more accommodating and inclusive. We want you to join us in validating and celebrating all of the different and unique ways of being that come with neurodiversity.

Isn't everyone neurodiverse or “on the spectrum”?

- All brains are different, but an individual who is different to the larger group of ‘typical’ people because of the way their brain works is neurodivergent.
- People who are not neurodivergent are sometimes called ‘neurotypical’.
- ‘On the spectrum’ is an expression sometimes used to avoid using the word ‘autistic’. The idea of the spectrum often makes people think you can plot people somewhere along a line, but in fact it’s better to understand neurodiversity in 3D – no two brains are alike, whichever way you look at them.

Why do we want to celebrate neurodiversity at Kilmore?

- All children are amazing and neurodivergent kids have many strengths and unique ways of living in the world that are worthy of celebration! Some of the greatest minds on the planet are neurodivergent - inventors, scientists, artists, performers, sports stars, authors and so many famous entrepreneurs. It takes a special kind of creativity, outside-of-the-box thinking and problem solving to dream up such incredible ideas!
- Despite this, without the right support and encouragement, many neurodivergent people struggle. They experience worse physical and mental health and often do not achieve their full potential in education and work. Nor is it a level playing field. Research shows it is even harder for neurodivergent people from Black and minoritised backgrounds to get a diagnosis or the right support.
- Our experience is that our neurodivergent children struggle with lower self-esteem and self-confidence and may struggle more with friendships and social settings. We know that by shifting the narrative to be more inclusive and positive we can help our children recognise their strengths and build their confidence and self belief.

Did you know?

Approximately 15% of children may be neurodivergent, many of whom are undiagnosed

It is estimated that neurodivergent kids hear an additional 20,000 negative messages by the age of 10

It takes on average 3.2 years for a child in Lewisham to get a diagnosis. Waiting lists for support are also very long

Experiences
of our
neurodivergent
children at
Kilmorie

- “My daughter tries really hard to concentrate and follow the rules all day at school. She seems to be listening and learning mostly the same as the rest of the class. As the day progresses, the sensory overload begins to increase, from scraping chairs on the floors to bright, overhead lights and lots of noise. By the time she reaches home she has an absolute restraint collapse, with tears, angry outbursts and the need to wrap up tightly to decompress. This is called masking and is a very common occurrence for neurodiverse children.”
- “My autistic son loves learning - numbers, languages, transport systems, electrical circuits, board games - but school is not easy for him. Friendships are particularly difficult and understanding neurotypical social ‘rules’ is hard for him. We hope he will grow up flourishing in his unique way, but we know it won’t always be easy.”
- “Our daughter describes her ADHD as like having a popcorn brain - with lots of random thoughts going on at the same time. It can make it very hard for her to focus in class, but it also means she can think outside the box and come up with unique solutions to problems. She’s spontaneous and can become completely gripped by a new hobby, skill or interest. Like many people with ADHD, she feels injustice and unfairness very intensely and can be emotionally sensitive to perceived rejection or criticism. This can make friendships tricky. She thinks of her impulsivity, restlessness and inability to sit still as her battlefield reflexes now, thanks to the Percy Jackson books!”
- “My daughter has boundless energy, creativity and can hyper-focus on things she is passionate about. She does up to 15 hours of dance and gymnastics each week sometimes, and it makes her feel good and confident”

First of all, don’t make any presumptions – all of our children are different.
But here are a few suggestions from parents:



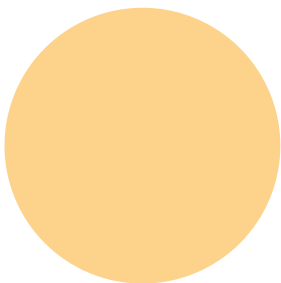
What can the wider
school community
do to help
neurodivergent
children at
Kilmorie?

“Pick up and drop off are really tricky for my son – please give us a bit of space and a smile, but don’t expect us to be able to hang around and chat.”

“Encourage your child to be curious and ask questions about differences, without judgement.”

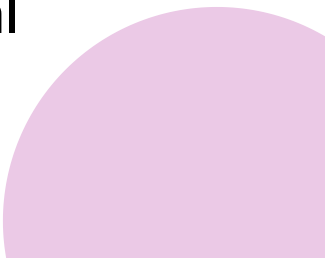
“My son finds social situations and loud, chaotic environments really hard, but also hates feeling excluded. It really helps when parents of neurotypical kids are proactive in asking whether there is anything they can do to make social gatherings (parties, playdates) easier”

“Keep in mind that neurodiversity looks different in different children and it isn’t always obvious or outwardly visible. Some children expend a huge amount of energy trying to blend in, but this takes a toll.”



“Please remind your kids to be kind - my child had to deal with classmates asking why she still read baby books or why she had to read out loud in Y3/4. This made her really self conscious and upset but also harder for her to read in class as she felt she was being judged.”

“Help your children to understand why children with neurodiversity at Kilmorie might need certain accommodations made for them at school. This includes having access to wobble cushions, fidgets, one-to-one support, timeout breaks, a laptop etc. These accommodations are vital for many children to access learning, but sometimes their classmates may feel this is unfair or that they are receiving special treatment.”



Where to go for local advice and support

It can be really lonely being a neurodivergent parent. You might be wondering if your child is neurodivergent, or you may be looking for support, advice and community after a diagnosis.

Here are some of our suggestions:

Drumbeat Outreach

- Offers free workshops for parents, carers, families and grandparents of autistic children, including topics like emotional regulation strategies and autistic children exploring gender identity
- There are regular coffee morning for Black and dual heritage families
- Also find regular online drop-in for parents of autistic children who are exploring their own neurodivergence
- Email outreach.admin@drumbeat.lewisham.sch.uk to get on the mailing list
- Drumbeat also produce an excellent podcast in which autistic kids tell their own stories

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/drumbeat-autism-outreach-podcast/id1567694765>

Signal

- Mutual support network for families of autistic children across Lewisham. This is a great source of advice and also organises low cost outings (eg Airthrill, panto) and popular trampolining and swimming classes

<https://www.signalfamilysupport.org>

Chameleons' Club

- Regular after-school social club for autistic girls aged 10-18.

<https://lewishamparentcarer.org.uk/the-chameleons-club-autism-girls-group-dates/>

Social events for neurodivergent adults

- Many neurodivergent children have neurodivergent parents! This is a regular weekday evening social for neurodivergent adults at Ignition Brewery – a warm and welcoming gathering with some Kilmoreie regulars.
- Email autismsocial1@gmail.com to get on the mailing list

The neurodiversity colour wheel helps visualise the complex range of needs. Each child experiences varying degrees of intensity in each area. This is a better picture than a sliding scale or spectrum.



Other useful resources

National Autistic Society

<https://autism.org.uk>

ADDitude ADHD research & courses

<https://additudemag.com>

British Dyslexia Association

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>

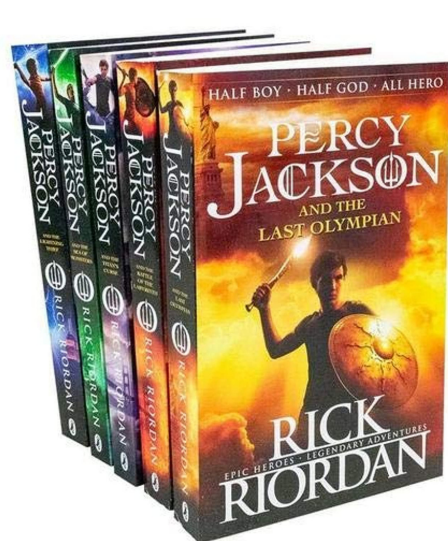
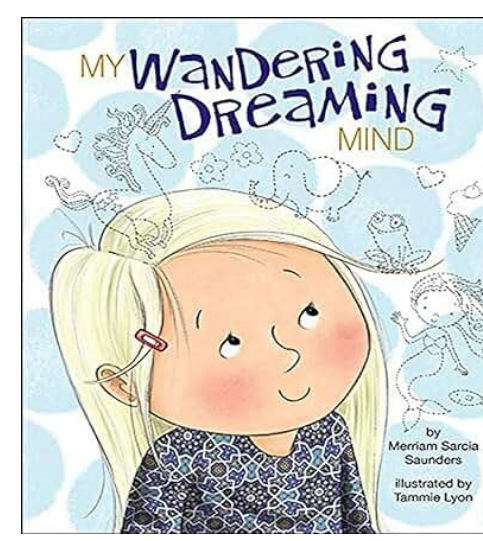
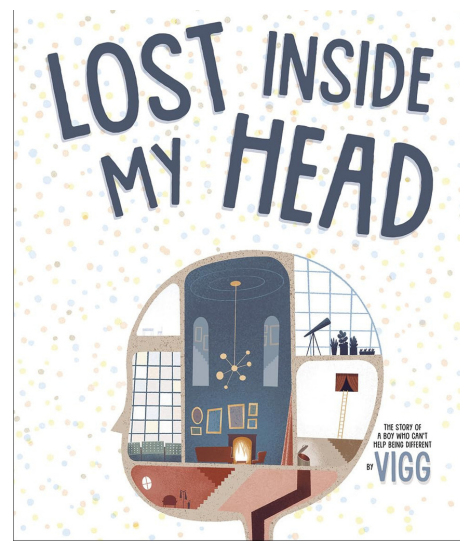
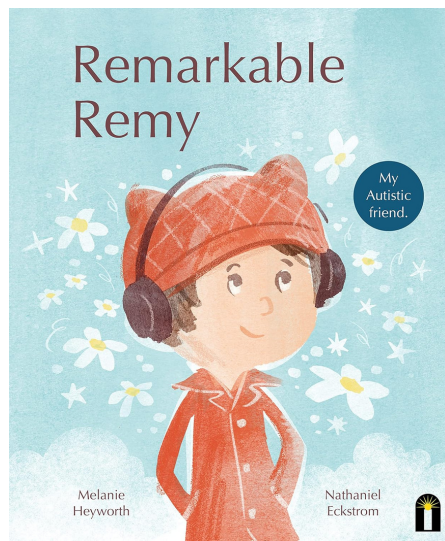
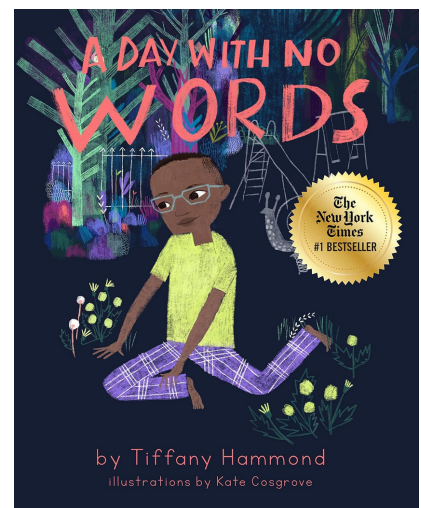
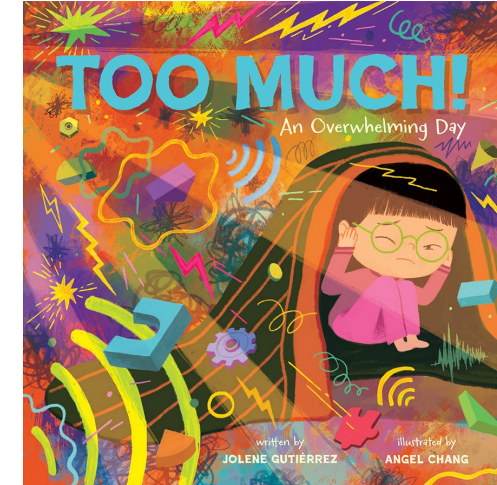
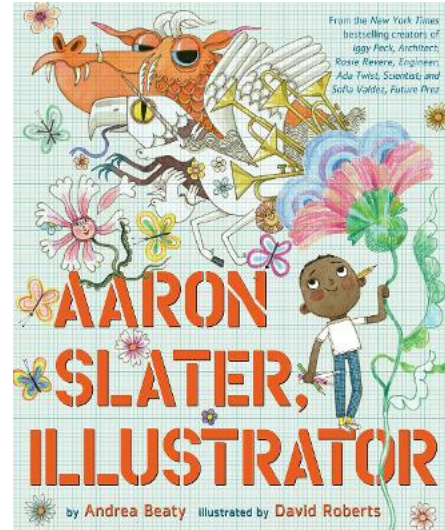
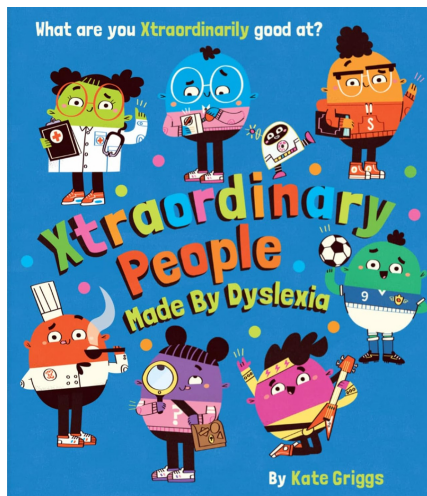
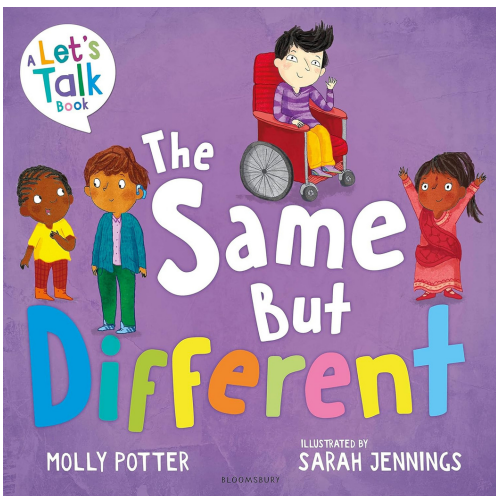
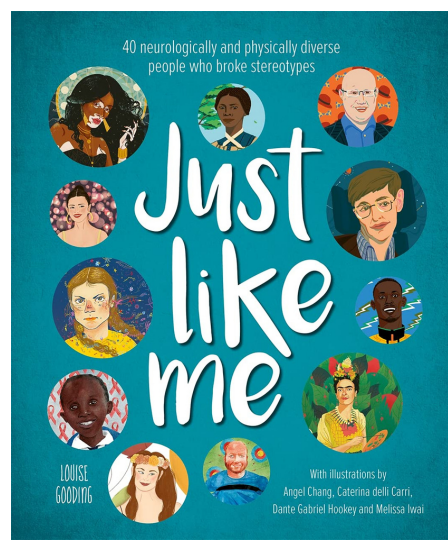
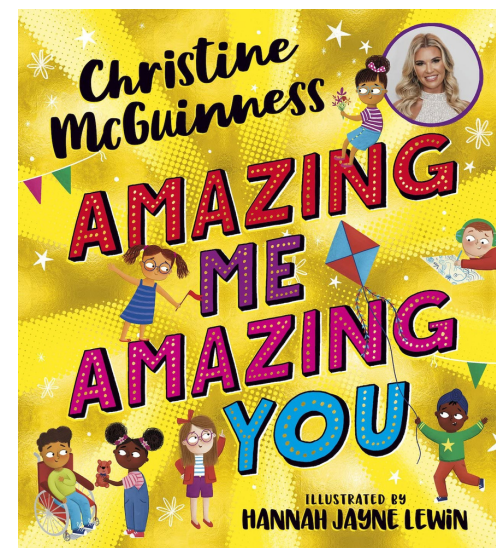
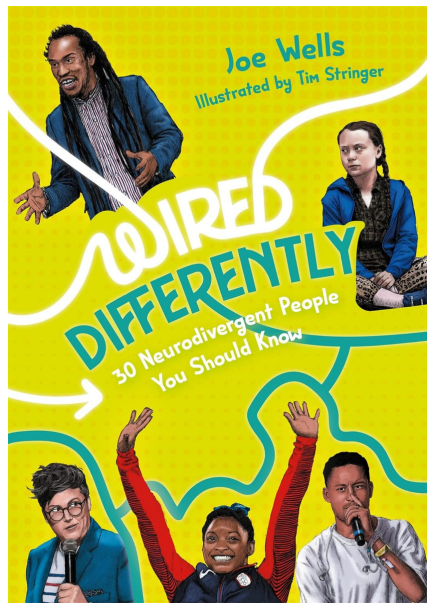
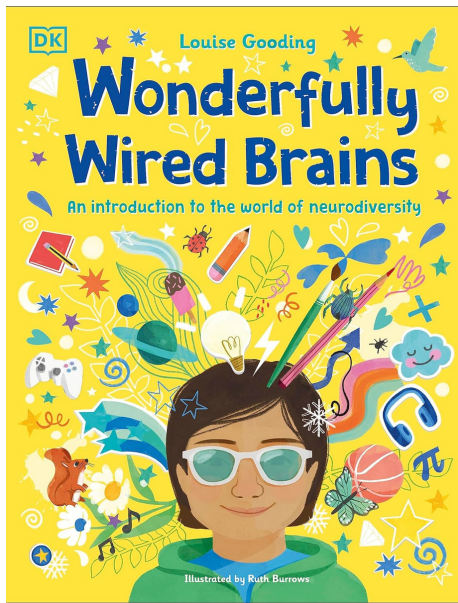
Neurodiversity Week

<https://neurodiversityweek.com>

National ADHD Information & Support Service

<http://www.addiss.co.uk>

Brilliant books
about
neurodiversity or
with neurodiverse
characters



- **Wonderfully Wired Brains**- Louise Gooding (there is a copy of this in every Kilmoreie classroom)
- **Wired Differently- 30 Neurodivergent People You Should Know** by Joe Wells
- **Amazing Me, Amazing You** by Christine McGuinness
- **Just Like Me- 40 Neurologically and Physically Diverse People who Broke Stereotypes**- Louise Gooding
- **The Same But Different** by Molly Potter
- **Xtradordinary People: Made by Dyslexia** by Kate Griggs (dyslexia)
- **Aaron Slater Illustrator** by Andrea Beaty (dyslexia and dysgraphia)
- **Thunderboots** by Naomi Jones (dyselxia and sensory processing)
- **Too Much! An Overwhelming Day** by Jolene Gutierrez (sensory processing/ Autism/ ADHD)
- **A Day with No Words** by Tiffany Hammond (Autism)
- **Brilliant Bea** by Shaina Rudolph (dyslexia and general neurodiversity)
- **Remarkable Remy** by Melanie Heyworth (Autism)
- **Lost Inside my Head** by Vigg (ADHD)
- **My Wandering, Dreaming Mind** by Merriam Saunders (ADHD)
- **I Think I Think a Lot** by Jessica Whipple (OCD)
- **Percy Jackson series** by Rick Riordan

There is a Kilmoreie
WhatsApp group for parents
of neurodiverse children.
Please ask for details to
be added.