



Queensmill School

1 Askham Road
Shepherds Bush
London W12 0NW

An outstanding provider of education and care for children and young people with autism.

April 2015

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS WEEK

ALL ABOUT AUTISM

27TH MARCH- 2ND APRIL 2015

HEADLINES



Around 700,000 people in the UK have autism. Together with their families they make up around 2.8 million people whose lives are touched by autism every single day.

WHAT IS AUTISM

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

People with autism have said that the world, to them, is a mass of people, places and events which they struggle to make sense of, and which can cause them considerable anxiety.

The main areas of difficulty involve social interaction, social imagination and social communication, as well as sensory sensitivities.

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CLIMBING MOUNTAINS

Dear neighbours, friends, colleagues, parents, governors of Queensmill School,

On reading our inspection report (enclosed here), Fiona Mylchreest, one of our governors and mother of Finn, a student in our secondary department wrote:

"This is a Hallelujah moment. I keep thinking of that film 'The man who went up a hill and went down a mountain'. When I first came to Queensmill, autism was a hill. Then it was recognised as a mountain, but no-one knew how to climb it. Then we did know how to climb the autism mountain, better and better, the Queensmill way. And now, we are still climbing that same mountain, in different and better ways. And nobody laughs at us anymore. They know it is a mountain. They watch us climbing, and they learn from us.

Today was the third time Ofsted have watched us climb our mountain, and they said, nobody knows your mountain as well as you do, and nobody climbs it so well. And nobody else makes sure every child gets to the tops of their mountain, and then some. I am not at all surprised, but very proud.

Well done everyone and well done our amazing, different and exceptional children."



Regards,

Jude Ragan



Ofsted
Outstanding
2013 | 2014



As you will see from our latest inspection report, we are a specialist school for children with severe and complex autism. We have moved into the glorious new building in Askham Road in September 2014, and already it feels like a wonderful new home.

Our thanks to neighbours and the local community who have been so welcoming and supportive of us and our work.



What is Queensmill?

We are one of the biggest state-funded special schools entirely for children with autism, having approximately 130 children from the ages of 2 -19 in our main school, where they receive an education that is entirely geared towards their autism. All of our 150+ staff are highly trained in autism, and we engage in autism research all the time in order to keep our provision at the cutting edge of autism practice. The school has almost 20 classes, some exciting specialist rooms like a wet play room and a completely interactive room, spacious dining rooms and our own kitchens and a glorious and well-equipped garden.

Additionally, we have two units within local mainstream schools. One is at Fulham Primary School (Fulham Primary Queensmill Unit) where we have three separate classrooms with our staff and with 30 pupils, but of course being on the mainstream site they are right in the middle of things in terms of being able to work and play with mainstream children. This unit model, we believe the first of its kind in Britain, has been highly successful and offered a wonderful half way house for pupils from Queensmill who are ready to experience something different and more challenging than Queensmill main school, but who are still not ready to be fulltime in mainstream schools.

Exciting Developments

SEPTEMBER 2015

It is an exciting growth period for Queensmill as we continue to branch out into supporting mainstream schools and develop further support opportunities for our Queensmill graduates.

We are preparing to open two new exciting units!

FULHAM CROSS GIRLS' SCHOOL

PROMOTING A LOVE OF LEARNING WITHIN OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY

A Queensmill Unit within a mainstream girls school, Fulham Cross School, for secondary aged girls with autism who need the autism-specific environment of our unit, and our highly skilled staff, but are able to make the most of the opportunities open to them in being side by side with mainstream peers on a mainstream site.



GRADUATE SUPPORT UNIT

We are also planning a unit for Queensmill 19 year old graduate students, who still require a highly autism-specific environment to further grow their education and life skills into adulthood. This will open in September 2015.



Meet the new Head of Queensmill

Freddie Adu

After many years teaching and learning myself from the wonderful children and people I have encountered throughout my career, I will be retiring from my post as Headteacher here in Queensmill School at the end of the summer term this year. I have had an extraordinary 10 years with the school, watching it grow and developing new provisions with fantastic staff carefully and gradually, ensuring that everything we do is up to the same outstanding practice that our families know they can expect from Queensmill School.

The time has come for a new Head and a new approach, to which the governors have appointed our present Deputy Headteacher, Freddie Adu, commencing from September 2015. Like me, Freddie believes entirely in the Queensmill Way, and will bring a welcome new slant and energy to the post.

Freddie has worked with students with autism for many years now, both here and at other London schools, and is highly trained and experienced. He already has the confidence of governors, pupils and families; he will appoint his new Deputy soon, so will be ready to take over without a glitch in the autumn term.

Jude



It gives me great pleasure to be succeeding Jude as Head of this truly outstanding School. We are immensely proud of our exceptional new building which is not only spacious and low-arousal but has everything a child with autism needs to enable them to have fun, access learning and manage their autism.

Jude's retirement will be a huge loss to the school, to not only staff and children but parents who have found her an enormous source of support on a range of issues. Jude will be leaving the school in extremely good health and at an exciting time of growth with the post 19 and girls' units in the new academic year. I am thrilled at the prospect of leading such a hardworking, enthusiastic and committed staff group working each day with such extraordinary children.

Freddie

The Queensmill Way

The term "The Queensmill Way" has become a term we use here in school as a short-hand to describe the component parts of our approach, all of which together we have tried, tested, refined and developed and we know it works with our children with severe and complex autism.

Queensmill staff have always been second to none, willing, able and happy to develop. Above all, they have the vital ingredient that must be there for the best possible provision for children with ASDs, and that is not to think first about themselves, or about risks, or health and safety, but to always have a willingness, indeed a real desire, to do the right thing for the child and then work everything else out after that.

Although this is the first imperative for an outstanding educational setting for children with severe and complex ASDs, there are other factors that must be in place and must be maintained, and it was one of my governors who first described these factors together as "The Queensmill Way". In brief they are:

1) Staff who know what they are taking on, and come to work ready to address the huge complexities of the children we serve. The majority of our staff at Queensmill are support staff, and they do not need to have ASD knowledge, experience or qualifications in order to be successful at getting a job with us. They need to be bright, enthusiastic, above all kind people, with a passion for a job which can be hard, but ultimately very rewarding. This may even apply to main grade teachers; sometimes we take people from special schools where they have already learned highly successful ASD practice, at other times we may take a teacher from mainstream with huge National Curriculum knowledge to bring to us, but they must have those above qualities. We then give them the autism knowledge.

2) Staff who are willing to think differently. In all schools for severe autism that I have worked in, when talking to staff about adding another child to their class I have often been asked if then they can have more staffing. At this point I try to re-think the issue with the staff, as if moving from thinking like a policeman; "by my presence I will be able to stop you doing whatever it is you do that I find challenging", to a detective; "I will use all the evidence available to me to try to work out what it is you were trying to achieve by that challenging behaviour". Apologies here to policemen, I do not mean to disparage your work, but just to make a rather simplistic point, and also acknowledgement to Skinner, father of

Behavioural Analysis, which is of course what I mean by the detective analogy. The benefits of this way of thinking are enormous – it helps staff to work as a brainstorming team, it puts the onus on the staff to change the environment rather than expecting the child to fit into ours, it reduces the need for restraint, and ultimately it releases more money from the staffing budget that can be spent on a constant stream of enticing curriculum resources for us to entice our children.

3) A strong and committed management team to carry the load together. As Head I am of course ultimately responsible, but I want around me bright, energetic, thoughtful senior staff who have the experience with our children to be able to model our best practice at all times. At Queensmill, we have a highly experienced group of Senior Managers, but have also created a new Middle Management Team of 8 amazing teachers, all internal appointments, all the best possible proponents of superb ASD practice, and all shouldering significant responsibilities for parts of the school or its curriculum. They are keen, exciting and energising.

4) Training, training and more training. On average, we spend approximately 20% of our annual disposable budget on training. Annually. It is on-going, cumulative and iterative. We all do all the training together. We do not have some people expert in PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Systems), or in TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Children with Autism and Communication Handicaps), or in Intensive Interaction, or any of the other strategies that we use. We all train in them, use them, practice them and develop them all the time. The benefits to this are enormous and self-evident; as a manager I can move any member of staff anywhere and know they will be able to work efficiently and with confidence. Our in-house training programme is huge, and is often mentioned by people at interview as a reason they are applying to work in Queensmill. There is a clear progression route for all staff, many of whom have done GCSE maths and or English whilst with us, Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualification, a degree, teacher training through Graduate Teacher Programme and now Schools' Direct, and on to post-graduate autism qualifications which we offer in-house.

5) A culture of self-improvement, enquiry and research is central to our ethos and our success in Queensmill. I am awe-inspired by support staff who work tirelessly during the school day, who then pick up overtime in one of our after-school clubs, and then go on to their chosen course in order to develop their practice and their career. I am equally admiring of the participants on our in-house post-grad autism courses, many of whom are learning in their second language and can still listen, research and write in English at Masters' level. We have

an externally chaired research board through which go all of the many requests we receive for research projects in the school. Staff who are taking on post-grad qualifications have their research programme going on around them in class, and are encouraged to develop the outcomes in order to both inform and develop our practice and to offer their research for publication.

6) The courage, determination and energy to take to task those staff who cannot bring to the school all of what I describe above. If staff, despite training on offer and the support of a large management team, are not willing to fit in with what is the norm at Queensmill, that is a hard-working, dedicated staff who always put children first, then Queensmill is not the place for them. It is not easy to move a member of staff on, but where it is, then it is vital, because a group as hard-working as Queensmill cannot afford a weak link, and existing staff need to see very clearly that their own high standards are being required of all staff, no exceptions.

7) Supportive governors and a supportive borough. A borough who understand the complexity of the children we teach, and are respectful of our admission criteria. I have been extremely lucky in my borough, Hammersmith and Fulham, that officers have always been open and willing to support new Queensmill developments. This has resulted in our school expanding rapidly, the growth of our secondary department, the creation of two Queensmill units within local mainstream schools, our outreach service, and most recently our move into a dream purpose build, designed to our specifications. Due to this, the borough can truly offer parents a spectrum of provision.

8) The tools that we choose to use for teaching and learning in special schools for severe autism are many and varied, and are well known to all autism specialists. However, whichever methods we adopt, or whichever combination of methods, they must in my view be underpinned by the ethos described above in order to have optimum efficacy.



Q4 at Fulham College Boys

Queensmill School has a unit placed within Fulham College Boys which caters for secondary aged pupils with a diagnosis of autism who need a mixture of provision, ie: they are able to take up the opportunities to integrate into some of the mainstream lessons, accompanied by unit staff, but they can also spend some of their school week in the unit, being taught in small groups or individually by Queensmill School staff who are highly trained in autism.

Each student's inclusion package is based around their interests, their academic ability in any particular subject and the levels of anxiety they might feel in working in a very busy mainstream classroom. We provide all students with an individually tailored broad and balanced curriculum that incorporates highly differentiated and ASD-specific teaching and learning styles across all subjects from the National Curriculum. An important aspect of our curriculum is the development of relevant and purposeful life skills, supporting our students to prepare for greater independence in their future. We ensure a calm and positive climate for learning and maintain consistently high expectations of all students. This model allows for our students to have a wide range of appropriate opportunities and experiences but with the security of being surrounded by people who understand autism and their specific needs.

Last term one of our pupils at Q4 was picked from the whole Key Stage 3 cohort to participate in an interschool rowing competition. He raced against 3 other schools and felt very proud because Fulham College Boys' School came first in the competition. In assembly Mr Haylock (Headteacher) awarded him a gold medal and certificate. A fantastic experience and achievement.



Two of our pupils at Q4 go together to two DT sessions each week in the mainstream school alongside their peers. The adults at Q4 have been so impressed with their attitude to learning, behaviour and motivation to stay on task. In their sessions they use a range of materials and complex tools as well as having to remember to wear all the appropriate safety equipment. They have produced some excellent products including tea towel holders, catapults and name labels for their bedroom doors. Well done boys.



Fulham Enterprise Studio

We are also very lucky that Fulham College Boys is also home to the Fulham Enterprise which is a Studio School and the first of its kind in inner-London. Fulham Enterprise Studio accepts girls and boys of all abilities at age 14 and into the Sixth Form, to study the National Curriculum, GCSE, BTEC and A Levels. It specialises in Construction and Performing Arts (Production) and the associated business enterprise skills. Students do much of their learning through projects with relevance to real-life work situations and through work placements with local employer partners. Every student at Fulham Enterprise Studio has the support of a Personal Coach and extracurricular opportunities are varied and include the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. We are very hopeful that some of the students in our unit at Fulham College Boys will also be able to take advantage of this wonderful facility and opportunity on their school site.



Research Project with IOE

Three teachers have been working with the Institute of Education in a research project to help promote the use of technology in enabling our pupils to learn. The project aim is to produce a consultancy model for schools about effective pedagogies for the use of ICTS with children with special educational needs (SEN). This will involve identifying and developing examples of effective pedagogic practice (by teachers) in using ICTs which facilitate learning for and aid teaching of pupils with SEN and developing the skills of practitioners as e-mentors.

The idea of the e-mentor is, having developed the skill of reflecting on practice in relation to effective use of ICTs, to then mentor a colleague in developing their use of technology, thereby further developing the skills and understanding of mentor and mentee. So far, visual schedules for getting changed have been transferred onto an ipad app and a phonics app has been helping pupils to read and spell using their sounds in silver class. Class 4 has been introduced to a new coding programme and Joanna has been using sensory apps to aid transition periods.

The IOE are also running this project at Swiss Cottage special school, the Queensmill team involved had an enjoyable visit there (and await their visit here!) at which, both schools were able to share ideas, resources and best practice; a great opportunity and outcome from the project already.



Queensmill Special Interests Project



At Queensmill we regularly use the special interests of the pupils to support their learning across the curriculum. This is also an area that is beginning to receive greater attention in research both as an educational and a therapeutic tool.

The aims of this project are to embed a more systematic approach to the use of special interests to support learning across the curriculum and to provide a model for the application of special interests in the curriculum that can be adapted and applied in other mainstream and special school settings.



FAST FACTS

1 in 88
CHILDREN
are diagnosed with
AUTISM



AUTISM IS CHALLENGING AND REWARDING
INNOVATION COMPLEX AND LIFELONG
OVERCOMING BARRIERS EVERY DAY
UNTAPPED POTENTIAL
SKILLS TALENT AND
MORE THAN IN RAINMAN
DUSTIN HOFFMAN
INVISIBLE AND MISUNDERSTOOD
AN EYE-OPENER
SEEING THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY



Queensmill Fundraisers

Queensmill Skydive

Our very own PE teachers, Aaron and Joe have very bravely put themselves up for a Queensmill skydive for autism! The date is set for April 8th and we are eager to raise as much money as possible for our children and young people with autism. Every little helps and really can have such a huge effect on their lives and how they manage the disorder. Previously, money raised has gone towards our wonderful new playground with swings, climbing frames and trampolines! This has made such a difference already but we constantly need to update and buy new equipment to ensure the safety of the children. We are looking to buy new bikes and sensory equipment to help engage, motivate and regulate our pupils.

A huge thank you to Aaron and Joe and to all that donate!

To donate visit:
www.justgiving.com/queensmillskydive



Pub Quiz for Autism Awareness

Our neighbours, The Queen Adelaide (412 Uxbridge Road, White City, London W12 0NR) are kindly hosting a pub quiz to raise funds for autism on Monday 30th March at 8pm. With £2 entry per person we invite all to join us for an entertaining evening from which all proceeds go to autism. Prizes include drinks, dinners and champagne! We are expecting it to be busy so if you have a team and would like to book a table, please do not hesitate to call the pub on 020 8746 2573 and make your reservations. We look forward to seeing you there and may the best team win!



Specialist Rooms



Audio Visual room

A multi-sensory, interactive learning environment. The AV room has been an extremely beneficial space to stimulate pupils at Queensmill. Being able to adjust the interactions accessible on the floor and two different walls means we can respond to the moods presented by pupils, helping them to cope with emotional and sensory regulation.

Water play room

A huge range of curriculum topics can be covered in the wet play room, using different resources to support learning with the added fun of water- which can be a huge motivator to some of our children with autism.

This room also enables us to promote independence with self-care skills such as showering, hand washing, washing up, washing dolls etc. Many children at Queensmill have sensory difficulties and can be very anxious around water so we can help build up their tolerance of water here.



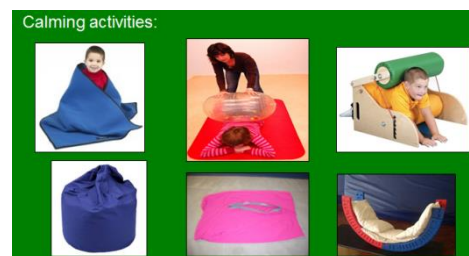
Softplay

Our colourful soft play room can be stimulating and alerting. It is used to help our pupils gain confidence and improve movement skills including balance, coordination and agility. There are blocks to build with and a trampoline, both of which help to improve gross motor skills and body control.



Bodyshop

This is where we focus on the child's individual sensory needs to help reach and maintain a calm-alert state through the use of sensory strategies. Activities are listed below and would follow this sequence from alert to calm.



PECS



PECS was developed in 1985 as a unique augmentative/alternative communication intervention package for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and related developmental disabilities. It has received worldwide recognition and is used on a daily basis at Queensmill to aid communication for our pupils, many of whom are non-verbal. It is taught using prompting and reinforcement strategies that will lead to independent communication.

PECS begins by teaching an individual to give a picture of a desired item to the teacher who immediately gives the requested item in an exchange. This progresses to teach discrimination of pictures and how to put them together in sentences. In the more advanced phases, individuals are taught to answer questions and to comment.



PECS begins by teaching an individual to give a picture of a desired item to the teacher who immediately gives the requested item in an exchange. This progresses to teach discrimination of pictures and how to put them together in sentences. In the more advanced phases, individuals are taught to answer questions and to comment. We were lucky enough to have Julia Hoffman, the clinical director of PECS, visit Queensmill this term to observe all classes with the senior management team in order to feedback on our PECS practice and how we can develop. Here's what she had to say:

'It's been quite a while since I visited Queensmill and so much has happened! When organisations grow so massively so quickly, it's a big challenge to maintain quality. Queensmill is proof this can successfully happen! There were so many examples of outstanding practice – I don't think you are fully aware of the high level of skill you consistently demonstrate.'



Gold class have recently completed a topic where they learned all about shapes. The children enjoyed exploring 2D shapes through activities such as messy play, cooking, art and computer work. The class worked really hard on their personalised shapes PECS books. Over the weeks, the children learned how to use multiple attributes to comment on the different shapes that they could see. One child used PECS to comment "I see big red circle" and another "I see four little green triangles".

Queensmill Outings



Following an invitation from QPR in the Community Trust, Queensmill School was given the wonderful opportunity to attend the Kensington Leisure Centre opening.

Six students, ranging from early years to secondary, spent the day taking part in sporting activities alongside children from other special needs schools in the community. As an added bonus, the event was marked with a very special appearance from the Duchess of Cambridge, Catherine Middleton. One of our own was lucky enough to speak to the Duchess herself, gracing her with a bow as seen in this photograph.

This was a very special moment for Queensmill School and we would like to thank QPR in the Community Trust and the Kensington Leisure Centre for allowing us this valuable and unforgettable experience. It's great to see our students accessing and integrating with the community, and this occasion proved to be truly remarkable.



A group of our secondary students performed brilliantly and won the pentathlon at the beginning of March at Sobell Leisure Centre in Islington. Now they get to look forward to the finals in June at the Olympic Park! Congratulations, what an achievement!





Residential Trips

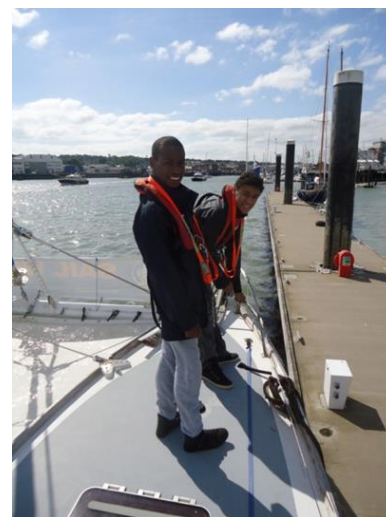


Staff and students from Queensmill embarked on two different residential trips last year. Stacey and Freddie led a group to Margaret McMillan House, a fantastic activity centre in Kent which included climbing, archery, shelter building, tower stacking and a party! It was a fantastic experience, of which all staff and pupils will cherish.



Another success was the boat trip, led by Adam, with four Queensmill sailors eager to set sail! What a joy to hear of the boys completing jobs on the boat such as checking the oil, steering and cooking. Not to mention their pub visits! Great fun was had by all and we cannot wait for the trips to continue this year.

At the end of April, Stacey and others will be returning to Margaret McMillan House to give our young people of Queensmill the experiences they deserve.





Autism is..

amazingly peculiar.	unique to the individual.	mind-blowing.	understanding the world in a different way.
extraordinary.	teaching me something new every day.	Individuals, Unique and misunderstood, Who love and are loved.	socially isolating.
thinking outside of the box.	a different way of seeing the world around us.	getting to know the world through heightened senses.	an upside down world.
confusion.	over-sensitivity.	attention to detail.	communicating without language.
sometimes painful but always a delight.	difficulties with social understanding and communication.	the warm, fuzzy feeling with each tiny step of progress.	under-estimated.

..the Queensmill way.



An end note.

After reading this, I felt compelled to share, as the parent's aim is also to spread autism awareness.

I asked professionals at Queensmill school 'What is autism?' Read, think, share!

I STAND QUIETLY

POSTED BY DIRTYNAKEDANDHAPPY IN [AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER](#), [DIRTY NAKED AND HAPPY](#), [SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER](#) 03.03.15

I stand quietly while you do somersaults on the bed as you aren't being naughty, you are just trying to get your out of sync body under control. I stand quietly by the toilet door every time you need to go, and come with you around the house, and sometimes even just across the room, because I know you can feel truly frightened when you are not near me.

I stand quietly at the supermarket checkout while everyone stares at you barking like a dog and blowing raspberries on my arms to cope with the buzzing lights.

I stand quietly while you tell the baffled shop owner that you are looking for shoes that feel hard like splintered wood because your skin can't bear soft things.

I stand quietly when the attendant gives us scornful looks when I ask for the key to the disabled toilet because the hand dryer noise is too overwhelming for you.

I stand quietly while the nice old lady who lives over the street tells me you wouldn't be like this if you had siblings.

I stand quietly watching the part-cooked dinner flush down the toilet as the smell was becoming too strong for you to bear.

I stand quietly as you diligently brush your teeth even though it feels like the toothpaste is burning you.

I sit quietly while you scream at me, trying to control the panic you feel because I gently touched your head when brushing your hair.

I sit quietly while the teacher tells me she knows about autism and that you are not autistic and asks if I would benefit from some parenting classes.

I sit quietly while the GP, the occupational therapist and the paediatrician agree how bad it is but say that there are no resources to support us further.

I sit quietly while you cry because your friends say you can't play with them any more because you tried to change the rules once too often, even though it was only so you could cope.

I sit quietly watching you desperately try on countless items of clothing, searching your cupboards, feeling the textures, knowing that we will have to cancel your beloved horse riding lesson again because they all feel too bad to wear.

I sit quietly as you explain to me that you can go to no more birthday parties and no more clubs as people are just too scary when they are excited.

I sit quietly when my family tell me that you will grow out of it, you just need more routine and earlier bed times.

I sit quietly and rack my brains for something for you to eat as everything you try today makes you gag and wretch until your eyes stream with tears.

I sit quietly when an old friend suggests I would be better off putting you on the naughty step and taking away a beloved toy.

I sit quietly all night whilst you sleep on the cold wooden floor with your head on my leg as you are really poorly but the warm softness of the bed that should be a comfort is making you feel worse.

I sit quietly while you try to regain some kind of control over your body in a meltdown, scared and sobbing and writhing about, hitting yourself harder and harder and begging me to hit you as hard as I can too.

I lay quietly with my back to you as my smell makes you feel sick and although we both desperately want and need to cuddle, you can't bear to.

I lay quietly beside you when you tell me that you are the wrong sort of special and the wrong sort of different and you want to die.

I have had to learn to do these things quietly because my daughter needs me to. She is seven; bright, super funny, articulate, thoughtful and loving. She also has autism spectrum disorder. If you saw her on a good day, you'd maybe think she was a little shy and kooky. You'd maybe wonder why I am letting her wear flip-flops in the winter rain. You'll never see her on a bad day as she can't leave the house.*

She has severe sensory processing difficulties. A normal day exhausts her and when she feels overwhelmed, even a gentle voice trying to soothe her with loving words can be too much to process, making her feel crazy. She describes walking into a room of people as "like staring at the sun". She's incredibly empathetic but you may not realise as she feels her own and others' emotions so deeply she can't bear it, and so sometimes she has to just shut down. Forget about a hug. She is also desperately trying to come to terms with having a hidden disability that few people can understand.

This is just one story among thousands of different stories of autism, not everyone is like Rainman or like my daughter. I know it's no great piece of prose but it's from the heart.

*3 months of non-stop bad days and counting, not left the house since December 3rd 2014