

## Unthoughtful Thursday

It was the beginning of the day during tutor time. Once a week we have 'thoughtful Thursday'. It is an extra tutor time where we learn about things like human rights and mental health. This week was World Autism Day so that was the topic for the week.

Our tutor put on a video about the impact of sensory overload. Nobody was paying attention apart from me and my friends. They were interested because they knew I had just been diagnosed as autistic. The rest of the class were shouting, laughing and making a ruckus. The loudest they had ever been. Our teacher, Miss Badger, did nothing.

I realised that I was shaking and that I was crying without making any noise. My best friend noticed me covering my ears and crying so she got Miss Badger who told me to leave the classroom and calm down. As I walked out into the corridor, I could hear that people in my tutor were laughing at me because I was crying at the noise.

I leant my back against the wall and slid down, so I was half sitting and half crouching on the floor. After a little while Mrs Hughes walked past. She took me into a quieter classroom next door to calm down.

That was my first experience of having a meltdown. It was not as bad as the one I had a couple of weeks later.

This time I was in English. It was the end of period 4, before lunch. Again everyone in the class was being as loud as they could, and it was really overwhelming. I started shaking and crying again. Mrs Simms didn't notice until I started hyperventilating. Again I was sent alone, out of the class and into the corridor. Mrs Simms told me to try to calm down, but I was panicking and on my own, so it started to get worse and worse. About 10 minutes later one of the LSA's came. She knelt down with me, but I started to cry even more. She said, "Calm down, tell me what's wrong". I couldn't get any words out and started to sob louder and louder. I was finding it hard to breathe properly.

As I was sobbing and hyperventilating in the corridor the bell to lunch went and the corridor was suddenly packed full of people leaving their lessons. The people from my class started to leave, laughing at me as they passed. The LSA took me to the Hub because I wasn't getting any better in the corridor. It was quieter there and there was a sofa to sit on. I still couldn't stop crying though so she gave me a notebook to write down what had happened because I couldn't speak.

I asked the LSA to walk me down to my grandad who was picking me up so they could explain what had happened. I still couldn't speak without crying. When I got home my parents tried to joke with me to cheer me up and make me feel better. My throat was sore from all the crying and my voice wasn't better until the next day when it had healed.

Helen Simms fills the kettle just enough for one cup of tea. Although it is a bit selfish – there will after all be other people wanting a hot drink at breaktime, she justifies her choice by telling herself she is doing it to save electricity and therefore the planet. As she is mashing her tea bag against the side of the cup, Imogen Badger appears in the staff room. Imogen is a rather plain looking person who has a habit of suddenly materialising in a space without anyone noticing. Helen wonders for a moment whether she might be able to move through walls and then starts to construct a plot in her head for a story about a teacher with mysterious powers. As an English teacher she is prone to getting caught up in imaginative flights of fancy.

"Helen. Just the person I was hoping to see." Imogen's voice is in total contrast to her appearance, being rather harsh and very effective at cutting through a noisy classroom.

"Morning Miss Badger, what can I do for you?"

'I was hoping you might have five minutes to talk about Maggie?'

"Of course. You heard about the incident in my class yesterday morning?"

"I did. A similar thing happened with me in Thoughtful Thursday last week. It seemed rather out of character for Maggie. She is usually fairly quiet and avoids anything that will make her stand out." Imogen reaches into her pocket and brings out a cereal bar which she eats by breaking off tiny pieces to nibble.

"You can't help but wonder if getting an autism diagnosis was actually helpful for her. She was fine until that happened."

"Do you think she is using it to get out of lessons? Or get attention?"

"It's difficult to tell. Maybe you should talk to Mr Jones about getting her a time-out card. Who is the SENDCO at the moment? I can't keep track since Mr Emmanuel retired."

Imogen screwed up her cereal bar wrapper and launched it – unsuccessfully – at the bin.

"Dr Braun is filling in, although she has said that she is only prepared to take it on until easter. I will have a chat with her when I have a moment."

As Imogen rescues her wrapper and places it in the bin, the bell for the end of break sounds.

“Once more unto the breach...” Helen takes a deep breath, flings open the staffroom door, and strides out into the corridor.

#### Questions/Talking points

1. What might the impact be of getting a diagnosis for an autistic person?
2. What do the teachers get right in this story and what do they get wrong?
3. What should the teachers have done to better support Maggie?