

Tom's story



I was born on August 31 meaning that I started school when I had only just turned 4. Bearing in mind that I am dyspraxic this made the start of life at school very challenging.

I repeated reception and quickly fell behind other pupils. Fortunately a teaching assistant who I worked very well with and showed a lot of patience with me stayed in reception for my second year.

However, I continued to struggle right up until the age of 12. After an assessment I was told that I had a reading and writing age of an 8 year old and that

unless I improved I would not be able to progress to GCSE's at the school I was at. This forced me to focus. I began to read and seek out help and support. I found developing an interest in reading out of school was key to me catching up.

I ended up catching up with my peers and by the time I was 14 I had the reading and writing age of a 14 year old. I achieved quite good GCSEs and good A levels and progressed to the University of Manchester to study History and Politics and then the University of Oxford to complete a Masters in Russian History. Both subjects requiring good English and a lot of essay writing.

It is hard to pin down precisely what led to this dramatic change in fortunes. I think it was due to me running out of time. When I was 12 it really hit me. It was spelt out clearly. You need to work 2/3 times harder than all your peers to catch up or you can't stay at the school where all your friends are. I think this combined also with the feeling I got that a lot of people doubted me and doubted whether I could catch up. This triggered a switch. I became very determined and motivated to prove people wrong and that I could catch up. I gritted my teeth and was determined to do so. It frustrates me when I struggle with tasks and sense that people look at me and think I am somehow lesser. What they don't appreciate is that people with dyspraxia are just different. Not lesser.

I was elected as a Councillor representing the Ely South ward on East Cambridgeshire District Council in 2011 and contested the European elections in the Eastern Region in 2014. At 24 I was the youngest candidate in the country to contest the European elections for a major political Party. I currently work in Parliament for a Member of Parliament. I am very passionate about politics and education and would like to think at some point I might be able to make a positive difference to those who like me have Dyspraxia.

I was very fortunate that when I went through my most difficult patches at school I had the help and support I needed. The key is to have one or two people who see something in you and believe in you and who are well placed to help. However, I appreciate that not every pupil with Dyspraxia will be as lucky as I was in this regard. The educational establishment need to ensure that no Dyspraxic is left behind and that the potential and creativity of those with Dyspraxia is spotted and nurtured. It is also important that those with Dyspraxia continue to believe in themselves. There are many positives that being Dyspraxic can bring, for example being a creative lateral thinker, embrace these, and develop coping strategies for the negatives Dyspraxia brings.