

Being Me

kidscape 30
30th anniversary 2015

Isn't it time someone heard your story?



Potential Plus —
supporting
high potential
learners so
they can flourish
at school

Robert's diary



7am I've woken early to read my book and can hear Mum and Dad talking, their door open as they start to get organised for the day. Dad is saying my school needs to give me more work so I'm not bored, and Mum is saying she worries about my behaviour, the arguments, the melt-down I had on Monday. Neither sounds happy.



8.30am As Mum drops me off she looks at me and says, "Robert, will you try something for me today?" "Okay," I say, checking that I've packed my maths set. "What?" "Just don't put your hand up so much," she says." Mrs Ashcroft says you might be getting picked on because you always put your hand up and always know the answers and she thinks it might look like showing off." I look at her, confused. "What do you mean? They always beg me to do their homework," I say. "They nick my books at break. They want the answers off me." Mum sighs. "Just keep your hand down. Just try it, today."

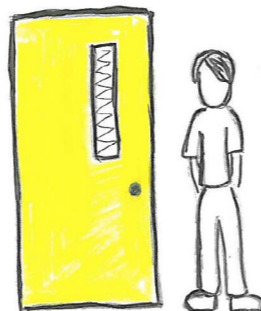
9.30am Half an hour into English, and I haven't put my hand up once, even though no one else seems to be answering the questions correctly and Mrs Ashcroft is saying, "Anyone else?" I sit on my hands, and then when they get hot I decide to screw up bits of paper ripped from my exercise book and flick them at people. "Concentrate, Robert!" shouts Mrs Ashcroft. "I'm not going to tell you again. I'll be giving you a test on this in a minute."

9.50am I've finished the test and am screwing up more bits of paper. "Please wait outside, Robert," says Mrs Ashcroft. "I've had enough of you." Some of the boys laugh, some applaud.

10am I'm still outside thinking about how they call me a geek and Ashcroft's baby boy when I do answer questions right, and then laugh at me when I don't – or get into trouble. I feel a bit sick and my head hurts.

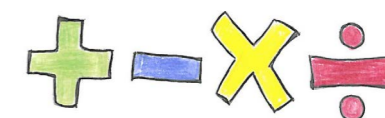
11am I'm in the special needs room now, meeting with a psychologist that the school has called in to 'assess my needs'. Maybe there is something wrong with me. The man, who says his name is Lawrence, is nice and talks to mum and asks me all sorts of questions and then gives me a test where I have to answer A to E. I finish it and he looks surprised. "You're a fast worker, Robert," he says. Then I have to write a story about my morning, which takes me ages because my writing is pretty poor. "Tell you what," he says, "just tell me about your morning." And we talk about this morning,

ha ha ha



and every morning, and I tell Lawrence I'm confused about why everyone seems to find me annoying. How on the school trip I ended up being paired with the teaching assistant because no one else would pair up with me, and how that ruined the whole trip. It had made me feel worthless and isolated, I explain. When Mum has gone out of the room to get a drink, I tell him in a low voice and rather guiltily that they've brainwashed my mum into thinking it's my fault, and that she told me not to put my hand up in class because that's why I get picked on. That maybe she thinks that they're right to call me teacher's pet and geek, and maybe they'll tell her I deserve to be tripped up on the way to assembly. Lawrence takes his glasses off and rubs his head.

12.30pm At lunchtime Ellen asks me to help her with her maths. I'm feeling happy after such a nice chat in special needs, so I'm in the mood for being with someone else. "How did you do that when you weren't even in maths this morning?" she asks after we've finished. So I tell her how. And then tell her this game I have at home which teaches you numbers in ten different languages and you have to add up Spanish and French and give the answer in German. She looks at me like I'm mad then, so I shut up. But she says 'merci beaucoup' in a really friendly voice when I hand her back her book, which means thanks in French and makes me feel great.



2pm Sport, which is a relief because this is where I'm allowed to be good, and everyone wants me on their team. Today, though, Pete and Bruce are captains and they hate me so I'm last to be chosen. When we run round the field warming up, Pete comes up beside me and says something horrible, something I can't write down. As he's running off he shouts out they're going to kick me so hard I won't be able to sit down again. I stop and look round to see if anyone's heard. "Come on, Robert," shouts the PE teacher. "Hurry up! Or have we finally found something that you're not good at?"



3.30pm Mrs Ashcroft and the psychologist and Mum and I are all sitting in the classroom, Mrs Ashcroft with that kind look she has when she feels sorry for you. They were going to meet without me, but the psychologist has suggested I come in too. "My impression is," he says, "that the main problem for Robert is he's bullied and frustrated and lonely." Mrs Ashcroft's look has changed. He talks then about my talents and how teachers can use them better, and how my mum should be proud of me. I go a bit red then, in case she knows I told on her. He suggests that teachers introduce a new way of dealing with 'who has the answer', like a whiteboard or turn-taking, to prevent me feeling frustrated or becoming a figure of fun. "It's quite easy," he says, seeing Mrs Ashcroft's mouth gaping in surprise. He also suggests she uses me as a mentor for children who struggle to do maths (he'd apparently watched me helping Ellen), puts me up into Year 9 for Maths and Science, and helps me with my writing when I'm in her class. He has a lot of ideas that day, and the most important one is about how all these things can help me find better friends in a class that simply doesn't quite understand me – yet. I want to hug him, but I've had enough tellings-off for one day so I don't. **By Robert**

Sarah's story for you!

THE PARENTS' EVENING

I don't know about your class, but our class worries about parents' evening. Mrs Shawali gets us to put all our books on top of our desk, and then tidy up what's left inside, and tells us that this evening she's looking forward to showing our mums, dads, carers and family what we get up to when we come to school. She says it with a bit of a smile today, and me and Marcie can't work out whether that's good or bad. "I wish we didn't have to come too," says Marcie. "I don't want my mum to get cross with me in front of Shawali when she mentions my maths." But we've all been asked to come along, like it or not. That's one of the school rules. "It's a chance to get to know each other better," says Mrs Shawali. And there's that smile again.

That evening the lights are all on and the parents are all chatting, but instead of forming a queue, like we expected, like in Crosby Juniors, they're getting into a group and Mrs Shawali is telling us to sit at our desks. Then she announces that the parents have a surprise for us – they're putting on a little play. "O...M...G," says Sally, looking at her mum. "A play?" What happens next is hard to describe, but here goes.

Puna's dad and Jack's dad come on and start talking about what they're planning to do to Miles' dad down the pub that night. "Have you ever met anyone so boring?", they say. "If you ask him to come with us again, we're dumping you too," they bark at Nigel's dad. "All he talks about is computers. Okay, so maybe he did get an award for his hospital database, but who cares? I wish someone would put him in hospital." Miles' dad, Mr Harris, bounces on to the stage telling them he's just come across a new computer program to save on energy bills. "Geek," Puna's dad coughs into his

hand. Some of the boys are sniggering, but I can tell they don't know whether it's supposed to be funny or not. Nor do I. Mum said Miles' dad has made hospitals so much better and that he's a bit of a hero. I wonder if he minds them making fun of him, even in a play.

Next four mums come on to the makeshift stage and my mum starts telling Marcie's mum she looks rubbish in her police uniform. "Think you're strong do you, just because you're a policewoman, Sonia?" she says. Marcie



glances at me, horrified. I don't know where to look. "She always looks like she's pretending to be better than us," says Cathy's mum, Mrs Shaw. "Tell you what," she whispers to my mum. "Let's not ask her to go to coffee on Saturday. Let's pretend we're all going out with our mums." My face reddens, remembering the drive home in the back of Marcie's car yesterday, when we planned to use the same

excuse to dump Alice. Did Marcie's mum hear us? Marcie's mum turns away, looking upset, and they all walk away.

Suddenly another dad I don't know rushes in to say his car is broken and he needs to get home urgently. "I can fix it," says Sam's mum. They leave the stage and then – would you believe it – the other dads start slagging off Sam's mum, saying she's a real know-all and fancy being able to fix cars and what a stupid way to make a living. Sam's mum comes back in wiping her hands, but then the dad she's just helped comes up behind her and makes a really rude signal, and whispers to the other dads he's off to the pub to watch the football and do they want to come. "Just don't tell Sam's mum," he says. "She's such a loser." I look over at Sam. I don't know him very well but I feel awful for him. "But Sam's mum just helped them fix the car," says Marcie, before she can stop herself.

Well you get this gist. The laughs didn't last. Scene after scene saw our parents treat each other horribly, criticising each other's clothes, jobs, talents. Accepting their help then dissing them, excluding them, never saying thank you.

At the end of the evening Mrs Shawali thanked us all for coming. "What was that about then, Miss?" said Ewan, voicing what we were all thinking. "That was about you getting to know each other better," she said. "Didn't you recognise yourselves in those scenes? Did you like what you saw?" Dave's hand went up then. "But what about our books? No one looked at our books?" Mrs Shawali smiled. "Your books will take care of themselves when you take care of each other," she said. And with that she was gone and parents' evening was over.



Jeff Forshaw, author and Professor of Physics and Astronomy

"It is easy to think that clever children are going to sail through school without facing many problems. However, for some children and young people that couldn't be further from the truth. Labelled as 'geeks', 'clever clogs', 'teacher's pet', 'swot' or worse, and being bullied on a daily basis can make the lives of these children with high learning potential absolutely miserable. Potential Plus UK has been supporting families and schools since 1967 to help improve the lives of these children and young people so that they can achieve their best without being held back."



Information for teachers

Gifted children come in all shapes and sizes, and from all social and cultural backgrounds. More than anything they want to fit in with their peers and to stop being singled out as the clever one or the geek or the oddball or the one who doesn't make friends easily. If left in this environment they will try to behave in a way to help them fit in – coasting or causing trouble, rather than excelling in what they are good at. The higher their IQ, the more difficult it can be for them. The level of bullying they experience is unacceptable. Often a child's mental development can be leaps and bounds ahead of their physical, social and emotional development, which is not only frustrating for them (how can they get their thoughts on paper?), but can lead to comments from adults like 'I thought you were bright, but look at your handwriting', or 'how can a clever boy like you behave in such a silly way like that?' – comments that can feed a class's low opinion of a child they already find a bit different.

Potential Plus UK is a national charity aiming to support these children and drive change. A lot of the work they do is helping parents avoid the frustration and anger that many children feel as a result of how they're

treated by their peers. They know that by working with schools they can make a difference. They know that if they don't, all these children have to offer their friends, their school and their communities and this world can so easily go to waste and the child can be left feeling bullied and ostracised and lose confidence in their special talents.

Being gifted is not a special need (although some children who have high learning potential are also dyslexic or have autistic spectrum disorder), but it is an additional need that should be explored, and schools that understand this have demonstrated that simple strategies – a provision of emotional support, the introduction of mentors, the opportunity for mixed aged classes or the introduction of new technology in the classroom so children can work at a pace that suits them without being singled out for doing so – can make a world of difference to these children. Potential Plus UK are working with these families, and with schools around Britain, to help them discover, assess and nurture pupils with high learning potential so they can be both happy and successful in the school where they study.



Room to flourish: Potential Plus work to give children confidence in their talents, and schools an understanding of them

Potential Plus UK | Discover. Nurture. Succeed.

If you'd like to find out more about what Potential Plus can do to support your work, and the training and support they offer visit www.potentialplusuk.org