

EDUCATION Why Education Reform Isn't Optional A Lived Experience

I wasn't a troublemaker. I wasn't disruptive. I had Global Developmental Delay and in primary school, I was lucky enough to receive some real support. I had a 1:1 helper a few sessions a week and a personal laptop so I didn't have to struggle with handwriting like the others. That small bit of recognition made a big difference.

But I was still bullied. I was still abused. And even then, there were cracks cracks that would become full-on collapses the moment I moved to secondary school.

In secondary, the help vanished. No 1:1. No laptop. No consideration. No dignity. I was left to sink. For the majority of my school years, I was entirely unsupported. I was bullied constantly, targeted by both students and staff. My bike was vandalised repeatedly sometimes beyond repair. But the system didn't care. I was in detention more often than not even for things that weren't my fault.

In my final year, just before my exams, my mother passed away. Grief consumed me. I took time off school to try and recover, to function. When I returned, I sat my exams anyway. Unsurprisingly, I failed a few. I got an E in both English and Maths. I was never told I could retake them not a word. No encouragement. No follow-up. Just silence.

Years later, as an adult, I gave it another go. I sat both GCSE Maths and English at my local college. This time, my disabilities were formally recognised. I was granted extra time and a computer and I passed. C in English. B in Maths. Proof I could do it all along if only someone had believed in me, or helped when I needed it.

And then there was the DofE. I wanted to take part. I could've done the volunteer work, the

skill-building, even trained for the hike. But my teacher flat-out told me I wouldn't manage. No discussion. No option. Just exclusion.

The team that went? They failed. I never even got a chance.

This is why our education system needs ripping up and rebuilding from the roots. Not patched. Not reviewed. Rebuilt.

No child should suffer because they don't fit the template.

No child should be punished for needing help.

And no child should grow up thinking they were the problem because the adults failed to show up.

This isn't just about reform.

This is about justice. This is about survival.