Twitter Thread by Pete 'stay' Wharmby 'the fireplace'



Pete 'stay' Wharmby 'the fireplace'
@commaficionado

Why do #autistic students get excluded so frequently from school?

Some thoughts, based on my own experiences. If we have an understanding of the 'why', it's easier to address the results.

Please read and share! /1

Autistic students often find themselves being punished more than average at school. Frequently this can escalate to temporary exclusion and similar 'punishments'. Are autistic students generally just more naughty? Of course not. So what's the deal? /2

Everything about the fundamentals of a school day is designed around neurotypical children. Most school day elements are also very old, and have been around since long before people became more 'autism aware'. /3

What we see as the core experience of doing subjects for around an hour, before moving to the next subject, between the ages of 5 and 18 dates back *decades*. So where do autistic students fit in? /4

Well, they don't. Students with an autistic or ADHD neurotype quite simply do not slot into this structure. The only way they can is by essentially squashing their own needs in order to fit in with the majority. If they can't do this? That's where the 'punishments' come in. /5

So what we end up with is a sizeable portion of the demographic either masking themselves into depression or fighting against the system. Not ideal, is it? /6

So what aspects of a school system do autistic children struggle particularly with? There are hundreds of things, but here's the main stuff. /7

1. The quick fire change between lessons and subjects is not brilliantly suited to an autistic brain. It's too sudden, too rigid, too huge a change (no more drawing, now sums!) This can cause a low level stress that goes through the whole day. /8

2. Schools can be far too predicated on social interaction. Group work, paired work etc are not necessarily going to help autistic students. Viewing social break time as a 'rest' period is a huge misunderstanding of how an autistic child may view it. /9

3. Behaviour management systems can be punitive to autistic students who have a strong sense of justice. Hypocrisies, unfairness and cheating can be extremely serious triggers for autistic people, and how adults interact with this can be toxic. /10

4. Blanket, unchangeable expectations over the school day are unrealistic for many autistic students who drain their energy quickly just trying to fit in. By midday thryre exhausted and by 2pm they may be ready to explode. /11

5. Overemphasis on attainment and scores can cause disproportionate damage to anxious autistic children who are terrified of yet another failure. Arbitrary grades can be a problem too. /12

6. Lack of clarity about what work should look like is a huge problem. 'write as much as you can' sounds reasonable but to an autistic student is infuriatingly vague and meaningless. How much can I write anyway? No idea. /13

7. Social interactions can be incredibly toxic for many autistic students. Bullying can be rife, endless low level mockery of isolation can make a student quick to anger or retaliate. Autistic students need different advice to neurotypicals. /14

8. Noise and busy visuals in a typical school can drain an autistic student's batteries very quickly, causing meltdown. /15

Ultimately the biggest issue is that too many things in the typical school day seem designed to induce meltdown in most autistic students. It becomes a case of adapt or collapse. /16

Considering that adapting (masking) leads to enormous problems down the line, there are no good outcomes here. Something has to change. /17

Schools need to be more aware and alive to what it actually *is* to be autistic. They need more empathy with how it actually feels, rather than just trying to mould the kids into an unsuitable format. /18

This needs to come from the top and bottom - from government initiative to school initiatives. /19

If you like my stuff you can support me here - it's hugely appreciated as it's starting to get tough at the moment.

https://t.co/qonxXX3C91