

Hello, my name is Laura Austin. I work in an international school, currently as an administrator, though I will always consider myself a teacher at heart. I am also the parent of neurodiverse children, which means I have experienced the power of inclusion from multiple perspectives—both as an educator and as a parent.

The story I would like to share today highlights the transformative power of inclusive education. It centers on a high school student I had the privilege of teaching and supporting within an inclusive International Baccalaureate (IB) school.

I first met this student when he transferred from a local public school. Over his first three years with us, he faced challenges with academic English, attention, and unexpectedly low achievement, which eventually led to concerning behaviors. During his first year, he received support for English acquisition. While he could communicate in English, his academic language skills were not yet strong enough to fully access the curriculum. By his second year, assessment data indicated that his English was no longer a barrier. However, his academic struggles and behavioral frustrations persisted.

At that point, the Student Support team recommended a full evaluation. The results revealed very low processing speed and working memory, as well as low reading fluency and comprehension. With this clearer picture, I began working closely with him, teaching strategies for more effective studying and revision. We introduced graphic organizers and provided explicit instruction on how to use them. Initially, he resisted—especially when it came to trying testing accommodations such as extended time and having a reader.

Through encouragement and practice, however, he began to recognize their value. I still remember his turning point when he exclaimed, “These are great! They help so much—I want to use them for all my subjects!” With these supports in place, he took his IB Diploma exams with accommodations in all subjects, passed with a score above 30, and was accepted into the university of his choice.

After beginning his university studies, he reached out to thank me—not only for teaching him strategies, but also for believing in him and encouraging him to trust the supports available. He has stayed in touch over the years and

continues to tell me that he would not be where he is today without that belief and support.