



Judith James

Independent Special Education Advisor

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Background and experience:

I qualified in 1992 as a teacher and initially worked in mainstream in a school with two additionally resourced units. In my third year of teaching I established and ran a new unit for a group of children with challenging behaviour. This unit allowed me the freedom to create individualised learning packages that motivated the group, improving their attendance and raising families' expectations of their children. Since that time, I have regularly delivered training for staff and families with regard to understanding challenging behaviour and finding approaches and strategies to support school or family life.

After five years in a Local Authority school, I moved into the non-maintained sector as a classroom teacher where I remained for eight years. I initially specialised in working with KS3 and 4 students with cerebral palsy and developed a sound working knowledge of Conductive Education, becoming the Lead Teacher for Cerebral Palsy. I also taught children on the autistic spectrum and particularly those with Asperger Syndrome and who were academically able in some subject areas while needing significant support with their social communication needs. My teaching was graded outstanding in two Ofsted inspections. I remain a highly motivated classroom practitioner who enjoys helping young people to reach their potential, finding creative ways to enable them to overcome their individual barriers to learning.

I was the Head Teacher of a residential special school for eleven years, and the school was improved under my leadership to achieve outstanding grades across all the education and residential services, I held this post from 2005 – 2016. I was the Associate Director for the same organisation in which I worked as a Head Teacher and therefore also led a specialist college for students aged up to 25 years. I have the skills to scrutinise practice and judge the quality of teaching and learning prior to guiding staff as to how to improve practice. I managed a significant budget, recruited and trained staff, led a large team and worked consistently to raise standards. I am able to analyse data and use it to improve practice, equally I am able to support and guide staff effectively at all levels. I managed an integrated teaching and therapy team and I greatly value the impact of a multi-disciplinary approach with children with special educational needs which, in my own school, was graded a significant strength in the last two Ofsted inspections as well as by the National Autistic Society.

I have a sound knowledge of working with children with a range of disabilities including profound and multiple learning difficulties with additional complex health needs, neurological conditions, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, children with difficulties resulting from autistic spectrum disorder combined with other needs such as visual impairment. I have a significant knowledge of children with severe learning difficulties, some caused by rare and unusual syndromes or medical conditions, others due to an Acquired Brain Injury or an illness such as meningitis. I am confident in working with and advising about children and young people aged 3 – 25 years, who display a range of abilities with some working at an early developmental level; those working at P levels / pre-National Curriculum Levels and some able to access the National Curriculum up to GCSE level in some subjects.

I am familiar with and confident in the use of many methods of communication. This includes understanding very early developmental communicative behaviours and using modes of communication including sign language (BSL and Signed Supported English (SSE)); symbol systems (PECS; SCERTS, and programmes such as 'Boardmaker' or 'Writing with Symbols'); AAC – both low-tech and high-tech systems; gesture, body language and vocalisation. I am a competent British Sign Language user. I understand the use of programmes such as Sulp (Social Use of Language Programme) which I find to be helpful in providing structured activities in which to explore language skills, practising them in the classroom then transferring them into the wider community. For children with PMLD, I believe that behaviours such as crying or specific movements should also be regarded as communicative. I train staff to record their observations and look for patterns, which may explain the communicative intent of a certain vocalisation or action, which can then be utilised to give the child some control over their world.

I am skilled in assessment and fully understand not only educational assessment information but also the implications of therapy assessments. I am able to interpret information and use this to inform planning a programme to help the child to overcome barriers to learning. I am also confident in considering on quality-of-life measures such as sleep patterns, health issues and level of engagement, which demonstrate the true progress that complex children make. I encourage all stakeholders to recognise the importance of an improvement such as a child establishing a better sleep routine. I teach colleagues to use alternative evidence gathering approaches such as photography and video to help to analyse a problem or to share achievement.

I am skilled in positive behaviour management approaches and helping students to recognise their own difficulties where appropriate, having been given the language or tools to let staff know they need support. I am able to train a whole team in understanding that effective behaviour management is vital with high quality analysis of the child's needs, in order to help a student to learn effectively. The use of detailed behaviour management plans can help to ensure consistency in approach, and I train staff and families to use these effectively.

I have an excellent understanding of the clinical work of therapists and learning support workers and ensure they recognise their own contributions to the development of every child. I believe this should be considered when planning a package, which I do when I collate assessment reports.

I have a sound working knowledge of students' individual learning styles and specialist approaches including Sensory Integration and Intensive Interaction as well as understanding guidance from documents such as the Engagement Curriculum. I am able to design and train staff to deliver individual programmes linked to the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs. I am able to write very detailed reports about a child's needs and then follow this up with action plans and guidance documents as required. Within this process I am able to produce risk management documents to ensure all aspects of health and safety are considered plus the safeguarding needs of the child.

I am an experienced and confident trainer and can motivate and engage teams in learning new skills, new approaches or in reviewing their practice in order to consider a child's needs differently. I also present special education lectures at local universities. I have a Post Graduate Certificate in Mentoring, which has taught me to value the role of a mentor, to provide a critical friend and to help team members to recognise the value of ongoing support and advice, thus helping teams to achieve better outcomes for children.

I was the Head of Care and therefore have extensive knowledge of residential school and children's home legislation. I co-ordinated the planning of packages of care, including short breaks, education-based models and 52-week packages. I therefore also led the planning of effective transition packages that start early and are gradually established. Parents often find this period in a young person's life very stressful, and I encouraged team members to consult carefully with family and to support the young person as they explore different ideas. I encouraged all involved to include the young person in the discussion (as much as is appropriate) in making choices about adult life, considering their future education and long term independent or supported living options. Ongoing liaison with all agencies is required to ensure options can be funded and I am ambitious in helping to develop future packages for school leavers to ensure continued progress.

I recognise that a "team around a child" may begin in a school but is complimented by extensive partnership working with colleagues from the Local Authority, the case manager, as well as a range of health professionals including doctors, specialist nurses and psychiatrists. I have excellent working relationships with colleagues from health and social care and always acknowledge and value the support they give to families.

I have attended many medical, legal or social services consultations to support parents and thus actively engage in partnership working. I have also worked extensively with colleagues from a legal background with regard to compensation claims for brain-injured children providing assessment information to independent experts or directly to solicitors. I have experience in writing detailed medico-legal reports, which included having to analyse and comment on independent expert reports in order to support a potential claim. I have completed Expert Witness training via Cardiff University.

I worked for four years as a practicing Ofsted inspector and therefore have a sound understanding of the Ofsted framework and an ability to evaluate and review schools against Ofsted judgements. I completed a significant number of inspections in mainstream primary and secondary schools and a variety of special schools from 2014 – 2018.

I have provided Independent Educational Advice since 2015 and have clients across the whole of England and some in Wales. I now run a small company with a highly specialist team, all of whom I worked with in my previous roles. I very much enjoy this role and we have built a caseload of clients whose families we also support in ensuring they have a full involvement in understanding the evolving needs of their children.

Professional Qualifications and Memberships:

- B.Ed Hons in Primary Education – Leeds University - 1992
- Post Graduate Certificate in Mentoring – Lancaster University - 1994
- NPQH – qualification for headteachers - 2004
- MA in Deaf Education – Leeds University - 2008
- PQSI – qualification for Ofsted Inspectors - 2014
- Expert Witness Certificate – Cardiff University - 2019