



**Alison Walker**

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**Background and experience:**

I started my teaching career as an English language specialist in Yokohama, Japan (1992). On my return, I gained a PGCE in secondary English (1996) and then an MSc in Psychology (2020), equipping me to deliver provision in both mainstream and specialist establishments in England. I have also worked in an advisory role for a Local Authority, initially as part of a Teaching and Learning team within the *School Improvement Division* (2007-2011), and then as an Assistant Psychologist within *Psychological Services* (2020-2021). I am proud to say that I have now worked within the field of education for thirty-two years, including an academic year on the Fulbright exchange programme in Baltimore, U.S.A. (2000-2001).

My qualifications as a teacher of English Language and English Literature have equipped me with the knowledge and skills to deliver my subject in a way that allows all children to access the functional aspects of it at various levels, whilst encouraging them to engage with, and gain pleasure from narratives presented in various forms. For a number of years, I have also been an external examiner for GCSE English Language (2010-present), which has given me a valuable insight into the world of accreditation, so I am able to support children for whom GCSE is an appropriate educational option. In addition, I am an experienced internal assessor for all components of Functional Skills at all levels (Entry Level 1-Level 2). I am able to modify tasks appropriately for different levels of need and am adept at the application process for exam access arrangements that pupils are entitled to.

Within school settings, I have also fulfilled various leadership roles, as a consultant, a subject lead, a senior manager and an Assistant Headteacher, in charge of CPD, action-based research and whole school literacy and reading. I have also acted as a Coordinating Consultant for partnerships of schools, securing, monitoring and evaluating both universal and bespoke packages of support designed to improve quality first teaching. To fulfil these roles, I have led a significant amount of CPD for colleagues across the entire workforce, including whole school training and the coaching of individuals, as and when required. I have led the quality assurance of provision within and between schools, synthesising evidence from different sources to formulate action plans to drive forward improvements.

Throughout my career, I have particularly valued working alongside a wide range of colleagues within multi-disciplinary teams. This has enabled me to broaden my skill set and knowledge of the 'team around the child' approach. I was an integral part of the 'Wellbeing for Education Return' training following lockdown, for example, collaborating with colleagues from the NHS and social services to ensure a smooth transition back to school and to equip staff with the knowledge and strategies needed to intervene where necessary. I was also part of a 'Mental Health in Schools' team, implementing a graduated approach county-wide to ensure that pupils and families received the right level of support at the right time, before reaching a point of crisis.

My route into psychology stemmed from my interest in pedagogical practice and children's readiness to learn. My MSc, as a result, involved the study of biological, cognitive and social psychology, as well as intelligence, intelligence testing and individual differences. I was and still am fascinated by models of the working memory and how best to apply this research to the experiences that children have in an educational setting. Paramount to my work has always been the need to consider the range of information available on each and every child, in order to construct a pathway that is appropriate, and pays due care and attention to their wellbeing. Where this has not been possible in a class/classroom context, I have devised bespoke timetables for children, so they can access the therapeutic, pastoral and academic, to ensure they are regulated and learning. If children are unable to attend school, I have adapted resources for outreach facilities to deliver a curriculum off-site.

My most recent teaching/leadership post (2021-2024) was in a specialist setting for children with an ASD diagnosis, many of whom also presented with characteristics of ADHD and autism-related anxiety. I am therefore able to adapt curriculum content to match these needs, applying my knowledge of executive function to support children with their cognitive processing, emotional responses and behavioural actions. In addition to providing support and strategies for use in the classroom. I am a qualified FRIENDS resilience trainer and THRIVE practitioner, adept at constructing and implementing plans that alleviate anxiety and support children to identify their emotions, so they can begin to self-regulate. I think it true to say that I do not believe in a one-size-fits-all blanket approach and will always adapt and adjust to get it right for the children and families that I am working with. As an integral part of this, I have proposed amendments to children's EHC plans to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

In my role as an independent educational advisor, I am therefore able to provide guidance for children who typically have a cognitive impairment. Due to my experience and knowledge, I am able to assess each child's individual needs, liaise with those who know the child well, evaluate their current provision/package and then offer supportive input to the school. I am friendly, people orientated, diligent and produce high quality written reports within specific time frames. I am proud to be part of a team that works together to ensure that the needs of each child are fully met.

### Professional Qualifications:

- National Professional Qualification for Senior Leaders (2024)
- MSc Psychology (BPS accredited) (2020)
- PGCE Secondary English (1996)
- BA Hons. English and American Literature (1989)