



Andrew Heywood

Independent Special Education Advisor

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Background and experience:

I qualified as a teacher in 1992 and have since built a career spanning mainstream and special educational needs (SEN) teaching, leadership, and advisory work.

Throughout my career, I have held a variety of leadership roles including SENCO, Deputy Headteacher, Deputy Safeguarding Lead as well as extensive experience as Leader of Assessment, Curriculum, Standards and as Pathway Lead for a Specialist Autistic Pathway covering ages 2–19. I have overseen the amalgamation of an infant and junior school in an area of high deprivation, focussing upon managing ethos, the curriculum, teaching and learning.

In these roles, I have been responsible for identifying pupils' needs, coordinating tailored support, and ensuring effective interventions. I have worked closely with teachers, parents, and external agencies to initiate and oversee Education, Health and Care Plans, monitor progress, and support transitions across all ages of education phases for children and young pupils aged 3-18 years, and then to facilitate transition into specialist and mainstream colleges. I have worked collaboratively with multi agency teams including local authorities, maintained schools, academy and charitable trusts, social care providers, NHS therapists and independent specialist college providers

My experience encompasses a wide range of special educational needs, including pupils with Cerebral Palsy, Acquired Brain Injury, Down Syndrome, Autism, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs, ADHD and other neurodivergent variations, degenerative conditions such as Huntington's disease, and those with severe, profound, and multiple learning difficulties. I have contributed to professional development by supporting teaching assistants, early career teachers, teachers, governors. My roles have always included guiding parents and carers to facilitate a better understand children's needs, aiming to build inclusive and effective support.

In an advisory capacity, I have been commissioned by schools and have worked with local authorities to establish autism hubs, providing guidance on planning, assessment, provision, strategies, and resources for individuals, groups and cohorts of young people.

Central to my philosophy is the importance of working with families and young people, sharing knowledge, and building collaborative approaches to support learning and personal development. My multi-disciplinary team experience includes safeguarding, Early Help initiatives, Team Around the Family meetings, Core Groups, Case Conferences, SEN Panels, and Appeals processes, ensuring children's needs are accurately represented and appropriate support secured.

Curriculum development has been a significant part of my work. I was instrumental in designing and implementing a 2–19 specialist pathway, incorporating continuous provision and achieving Platinum OPAL status. My mainstream experience includes EYFS assessment and end-of-key-stage assessments at KS1 and KS2. As a teacher qualified across the 4–14 age range, I have co-developed bespoke curricula based on the overarching principle of Preparation for Life, embedding expectations for adulthood readiness through core areas such as My Communication, My Maths, My Creativity, My Physical Wellbeing, My World, and My Independence.

A cornerstone of my practice is the Total Communication (TC) approach. I recognise that communication thrives when every mode including speech, sign, symbol, gesture, and technology is valued equally. I have co-developed, and embedded, with Speech and Language Therapists the TC approach. I also have a particular interest in language and literacy development and have worked alongside both local authority and national trainers to deliver programmes such as How Pupils with Complex Needs Learn to Read.

Strategies I employ include Colourful Semantics, Blank's Comprehension across the curriculum, gestures, vocalisations, symbols, print, verbalisation, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems such as core vocabulary boards and VOCA devices. I integrate multimodal literacy including use of sensory supports, social communication strategies, talking mats and play-based learning. I am familiar with and have used Gestalt Language Processing, scaffolding echolalia toward self-generated language and using scripts and routines to expand communication flexibility.

Assessment is another key area of expertise, where I have monitored progress through evidence for learning, EYFS profiles, KS1-5 assessments, and bespoke awards such as NOCN and AQA. I have also engaged with individualised assessment practices to capture the achievements of pupils with complex needs focussing on their own gains in relation to prior learning using recording and monitoring progress approaches including use of Evidence for Learning. I believe this is crucial as standardised testing does not always reflect the progress a child has made, particularly when they are moving into adult services.

I have experience in positive behaviour support, including THRIVE, the PACE approach, and Team Teach awareness to foster relationships, reducing challenging behaviours, and promoting emotional regulation, resilience, and inclusive learning environments.

In my work with families I have always supported all aspects of the young person's development and this includes providing robust and detailed advice towards specialist assessments including EHCP applications and reviews or for benefits such as Personal Independent Payments.

I am a committed and enthusiastic practitioner and value collaborative working to get the best outcomes for each child or young person I support.

Professional Qualifications and Memberships:

- B. Ed. (Hons) 4-14 Education (Manchester Metropolitan University) 1992
- NPQH- National College of School Leadership
- NASENCO- National Association in SEN Coordination (Edgehill University) 2013