



Frances Henderson

Independent Special Education Advisor

📍 North East England

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Background and experience:

I qualified in 1997 and I have over 20 years' experience of teaching and leadership roles in both mainstream and special settings and in maintained and non-maintained schools. While teaching I worked with children and young people from age 3 to 19 years and their families. I spent 12 years working in specialist settings with children and young people with a wide range of special needs and disabilities including children and young people with cerebral palsy; acquired brain injury; complex and profound physical, learning and health needs; Autism and sensory impairments.

I led and managed multi-disciplinary teams of support staff, therapists and teachers and coordinated assessments of need for many children in determining key education, care and health priorities and the necessary provisions required for individual young people to thrive and make progress. Throughout my career I have worked collaboratively with a range of professionals from many agencies including education, children's social care, Local Authorities and health, including medical and therapy professionals, chairing meetings, completing informal and formal reviews and assessments and reports for legal cases.

After qualifying, I worked for three years in a mainstream primary school with an additional resource centre (ARC) for children with hearing impairment. I worked alongside the school SENCO and specialist teachers to support the children in my classes who accessed the ARC to integrate and learn alongside their mainstream peers. After this I worked in two other large schools, one a maintained primary and one an independent 'all age' school, taking on a range of teaching and leadership roles including subject and year lead, Early Years Leader, Assistant to the SENCO and Curriculum Access teacher in an additionally resourced provision.

While teaching, I worked part time for a national project working with parents of young children with additional needs around the UK to identify, review and influence the services in education, health and care for children with SEND in their local areas. This role involved research, collaborative working, and advocating for children and their parents.

After 10 years working in mainstream settings, I moved into a non-maintained specialist school as a classroom teacher. I initially worked with a Key Stage Two class of pupils with cerebral palsy and additional learning needs and gained a sound working knowledge of Conductive Education, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods including low- and high-tech systems. At this school I also worked across the whole school in classes with children with speech, language and communication needs, Autism and other complex needs.

I was appointed Assistant Head in a residential special school where I first worked alongside Judith James. As well as teaching across the 3-19 age range and all cohorts of children with a wide range of needs including Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and complex health needs, Autism with additional needs and Hearing Impairment, I held several leadership roles including Safeguarding Lead, Initial Assessment of new and prospective pupils lead, Pastoral Support and Residential Liaison lead.

I joined Education and Case Management Services Ltd for children, young people and adults with Acquired Brain Injury, including cerebral palsy, who have complex care and rehabilitation needs in November 2018 and have worked as an Independent Special Education Advisor since then.

I have exceptional written and verbal communication skills and I can work to deadlines, producing high quality written reports. I am skilled in the assessment of educational need and progress of children and young people with complex needs and can advise on appropriate educational provisions required to meet a young person's needs.

I build excellent working relationships with children, parents and key professionals and I am skilled in working collaboratively with all professionals working as part of the MDT, education and home settings to improve outcomes for a child in challenging circumstances.

I have experience and knowledge of working with children and young people with a range of needs and disabilities including profound and multiple learning difficulties with additional complex health needs, neurological conditions, cerebral palsy, hearing and visual impairment, children with difficulties resulting from autism combined with other needs such as physical or sensory impairment. I have a significant knowledge of children with severe learning difficulties and needs, some caused by rare and unusual syndromes or medical conditions, others due to an Acquired Brain Injury or illness.

I am experienced in positive behaviour management approaches and working with key people to understand the functions of observed behaviours and to develop strategies to help the young person and people supporting them to learn and use strategies to deal with emotional and sensory dysregulation and difficult situations. I can train a whole team in understanding that effective behaviour management is vital with high quality analysis of the child's needs, to help an individual 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 am familiar with and confident in the use of many methods of communication and supporting individual communication development. This includes understanding very early developmental communicative behaviours such as changes in breathing, eye movements and glances and different methods of supporting communication including observing responses, gestures, expressions and body-language; using Intensive Interaction to engage a complex learner, and supporting a child to begin to anticipate and understand events in their day through the use of on-body signing such as TaSSEls, Objects of Reference and other appropriate cues. I am confident in supporting children and young people who are AAC users including symbol, sign and hi-tech Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA) systems. I am a confident and competent BSL user. I understand the benefits of a Total Communication approach and the need to use a range of strategies and approaches to support a child to communicate their needs and choices and understand what is happening around them.

When working with the most complex youngsters who are at a very early stage in their communication and cognitive development, I am skilled in observing the child and then working with staff to train them to record their observations over time in order to look for patterns of behaviours and consistent or recurring responses, which observed over time, may explain the communicative intent of a certain movement, vocalisation or action, which can then be used to indicate choices, preferences and give the child some control over their world.

I am skilled in the assessment of children and their needs and fully understand educational and cognitive

assessment information and the implications of other therapy assessments. I can use the information gathered through formal assessments and observations to understand the needs of a child and the areas of their learning and development that require particular support and interventions. I can interpret formal assessment information and use this to inform planning a programme of support or intervention to help the child to overcome barriers to learning. I am also confident in considering quality of life measures such as sleep patterns, health issues and levels of engagement, which can impact on well-being, and which can demonstrate the non-educational progress that children with complex needs make.

In my role as Independent Special Education Advisor, I use information gathered in initial assessments and ongoing observations of a child carried out by a range of professionals to support and take a lead in the processes involved in applying for Education Health and Care Needs Assessments, writing Education, Health and Care Plans and the review process and working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the plans are appropriate, up to date and detail accurately the strengths, needs and required provisions for a child.

I support parents in making decisions about appropriate school or educational placements for their child. I have successfully helped parents to secure places for their children in the right school and with the right support. I also support parents and multi-disciplinary teams when a decision to home educate a child has been made, through working collaboratively with parents, MDT and LA colleagues, to identify the resources and provision needed to deliver high quality Elective Home Education and EOTAS packages and where necessary apply for and successfully secure appropriate funding.

I have been part of the recruitment and training of teachers, support workers and teaching assistants to support individual children both in school and for home based packages and have undertaken ongoing liaison and supervision of people working in those roles where appropriate.

Working with children, their families, and professional colleagues to improve the quality of their lives through initiating, developing and influencing quality services and experiences to improve and ensure good outcomes for individuals has been at the core of my entire professional career.

Professional Qualifications and Memberships:

- BEd. (Hons) Primary Education (Northumbria University) 1997
- Leadership Pathways - National College for School Leaders 2010
- BSL Level 2- CACDP 2010
- Post Graduate Certificate in Mentoring (St Martin's College) 2004
- Bond Solon Excellence in Report Writing August 2022