

Employer Case Study

Health, Social Care & Early Years

Wedgwood Special School

Karen Kaye is a Leader of Learning at Wedgwood Special School in Bradford and is currently completing a Foundation Degree in Early Years at Leeds Trinity & All Saints on the way to qualified teacher status.

Karen left school over 20 years ago with 9 O levels, having had enough of the school environment. She wanted to become a nursery nurse, so she decided to go to college and do the NNEB. On completion she was successful in getting a job at Wedgwood Special School helping to set up a new nursery provision and has been there ever since working with a variety of age groups but mainly at early years foundation stage (3-5 year olds). When the Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualification was introduced, the local authority in Bradford actively promoted it to schools so, in 2005, she put her name forward. As she had already been working at that level for some time, she was able to complete it in just a few months by building a portfolio of evidence.

Karen continues:

“When the school found themselves short of a teacher, I was asked to fill the role on a part-time basis. It meant I had to move up a gear – planning lessons as well as delivering them – but I just got on with it. Then the teacher in the nursery left so I was asked if I would like to run it. Someone suggested that I should train to become a fully qualified teacher but, as a single mum, I didn’t feel I could afford to go back to college,

and although I really enjoyed the new responsibility, I had little confidence in my academic ability.

But then in January 2008 we were inspected by Ofsted and the Early Years Department, including the nursery, was evaluated as 'Outstanding'. This was a confidence boost, but then later that year the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum was introduced, which meant that schools had to have a qualified teacher in charge of the nursery. After having enjoyed the increased responsibility and status, the prospect of having to return to an assistants role because I didn't have QTS was disappointing, especially in view of the recent Ofsted report. Liz Flavell, our Head, encouraged me to work towards becoming qualified as a teacher and suggested the Foundation Degree in Early Years, which is what I am currently doing. As I work part-time I am able to do any study out of work hours, and my fees are funded through the school. My Foundation Stage Manager, the Deputy Head has also been very supportive. I will in future be able to go on to top my qualification up to a BA or Early Years Professional Status. And now that Special School provision is being restructured it puts me in a much better position to apply for jobs.

It has been hard work and adjusting to this level of study was daunting at first, especially the first assignments, but now it has given me more confidence in my own abilities. It has made me more aware of theory so I understand why we do things instead of just what we do. Now I am able to question how things are done and make more informed decisions. If I can do it, anyone can, as I am one of the least likely people to be studying in higher education."

Ofsted commended Liz Flavell, Head Teacher, on her success in identifying the potential of individual staff members, providing encouragement, support and training for them to enhance their skills and take on additional responsibilities. She said: 'Staff wellbeing and self esteem underpin the whole 'Every Child Matters' agenda. The health and wellbeing of support staff and workforce development in school go hand in hand. In special schools, support staff have huge bundles of skills and expertise that need to be harnessed and developed in order for us to provide the excellent educational provision that is every child's entitlement. We have staff who have undertaken training in all sorts of directions, which then enriches the school environment for themselves, each other

and most importantly the children and their families. The school has also achieved a number of national awards in the last 12 months all of which recognise the high quality of provision we make for the children in the mainstream nursery as well as those in the primary special school. We have little problem with staff absence as all teachers, leaders of learning, higher level teaching assistants, key workers, business and administrative staff including the caretaker know how valuable they are as an individual to the running of the school. We have accredited trainers as well as trainees throughout all our staff groups. By raising status, staff value their own efforts more and high morale is evident throughout the school. I am proud of the staff who have risen to the challenge and taken on life changing courses like Karen, of which there are a number. The learning journey they are now on reflects the ethos of the 'can do' culture in Wedgwood.'