



**Claire McKay**

Speech and Language Therapist

### Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your job role?

My name is Claire McKay, and I work as a Band 5 Paediatric Speech and Language Therapist in the school's team. I split my time between two schools: Harberton and Tor Bank. My role is to support pupils with a range of speech, language, and communication needs (SLCNs) while empowering school staff and parents to promote communication in different environments.

### What does your job entail?

My job in schools is to provide therapy to pupils to help support their communication and find and develop the most effective way for pupils to communicate. I support communication through class-based interventions, group therapy, and individual sessions. My job role also involves providing support and training to staff to ensure that a child's communication needs are being met and supported throughout the whole school day. Within the school, I also work as part of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) and complete joint therapy sessions with other professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, and Intensive Support Teachers.

### How did you get into this line of work?

I always wanted to work in a job that helped others, so I knew I would enjoy working in healthcare. As a child and teenager, I was interested in speech and drama, and developed an appreciation for speech, drama, poetry, and literature. This led me to study Speech and Language Therapy at university. During my university placements, I enjoyed working in paediatric teams, particularly in special education. I completed placements in the school's team at BHSCT and knew that this was an area I would enjoy working in as a qualified SLT. Following graduation, I worked briefly as an adult SLT before being offered a job in the school's team at BHSCT.

### Outline your career to date

I graduated in September 2021 and started my first job as a Band 5 adult Speech and Language Therapist in the Ballymena community area. My role involved working with adults with a variety of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCNs), including those post-strokes, with dementia, MND, Parkinson's disease, and others. After completing this post, I was offered a Band 5 position in BHSCT and joined the school's team in June 2022. I work in both Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) schools, providing support to children aged from nursery to 19 years old.

### Tell us about your qualifications and training

I received my BSc degree in Speech and Language Therapy in September 2021. Throughout my career, I have received all necessary mandatory training required by the BHSCT, such as manual handling, personal safety, and disengagement. In addition, I have undergone specialised SLT training in various areas, including Picture Exchange Communication Systems, Derbyshire Language Scheme, Makaton Level 3 and 4, Talking Mats, and Introduction to Solihull. I have been fortunate to have multiple opportunities for extra training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and I am supported by my peers and managers to continue attending trainings and developing new skills.

### What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

When working with children with special needs, I have found that it is important to be flexible. Each child is different and has their own way of communicating. As an SLT, it is key to be able to ensure a child gets the most out of a session, and this can involve adjusting a session or thinking on the spot. Furthermore, adaptability is a useful skill in special schools, as sometimes sessions and groups need to be adapted to effectively manage a child's additional needs such as sensory or physical needs. At times, sessions do not always go to plan, and the ability to adapt a session and think on the spot can be very beneficial.

### What is the best advice you have ever received?

If you see someone without a smile, give them one of yours - Dolly Parton

### Tell us an interesting fact about yourself

I visited seven countries in 21 days on an interrailing trip around Europe in summer 2022 and tried the national dishes of all countries.

### What do you like to do in your spare time?

In my spare time, I like to take the opportunity to socialise and stay active. I try to go to the gym regularly, and this has also allowed me to meet people with similar interests. I enjoy walking with Asher, my dog, and exploring new places such as forests and mountains. Additionally, I enjoy cooking and am always keen to try new food and restaurants. Occasionally, I will bake, and love trying new recipes for my friends and colleagues to try.

### Who has inspired you most in your life?

My brother has been a huge inspiration to me. As someone who used to struggle with anxiety, I have always looked up to his calm and collected nature. His hardworking and composed disposition has encouraged me to take risks and pursue my goals. He has supported me in every aspect of my life and is always there to pick me up when I am down. I am grateful for his unwavering support and encouragement.

### What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

I would tell my 16-year-old self to take more initiative. As a teenager, it can be hard to have the confidence to speak up and ask for help or take the initiative to do something different. Encouraging myself to take more initiative as an adult has provided me with more confidence in both my personal and professional life. Taking initiative in work has opened up opportunities for additional training, as well as helped me to build professional relationships with my colleagues. As an adult who has recently moved out of home, I have found that taking the initiative to socialise and do things that are outside of my comfort zone has empowered me to build new relationships and provided me with the confidence to continue to push myself in all aspects of my life.