

Looking at practice with a different lens

When I went on a school visit in Birmingham with a member of the Communication Autism Team (CAT), I took with me the experience of having visited schools in Italy, and I looked at the school we visited (an environment I felt I knew and a setting I was familiar with) and viewed it afresh through the eyes of my Greek colleague. The school we visited had received all of the AET training. They were also using the standards, competencies and progression frameworks and were supported by the CAT team. I found a school that was inspirational, engaged and utterly committed to the wellbeing of all of its pupils, using all of the resources available to them and navigating the complexities of a funding system to get appropriate support for very vulnerable students on behalf of parents. I saw the programme I have planned, worked at and delivered in use for the first time and was privileged to see the impact that it made on the work of the head teacher, the SENCO and for the whole staff team. When I watched a little girl running around and playing with friends in the playground I was amazed to hear how the work that the school had done with her had changed her life and that of her mother completely. We were introduced to her mother who was hugely emotional at the progress that she had made. When she joined the school, her daughter had been non-verbal and she was now speaking, playing with friends and joining in class. It was exactly what I had hoped and dreamed for when I started developing each of the programme elements. As a girl born and brought up in Birmingham, I was proud of the city of my childhood, my colleagues in the CAT Team and deeply moved. I walked away from the session with clear examples of really good practice being used in schools today. I use these to present the benefits of the AET programme when I meet with teachers, SENCOs. When I was in the office last week, I was asked by a colleague if I knew of an example of good school practice that could be shared at the 2017 National Autistic Society Professional Conference. As a direct result of this experience I was able to suggest the Birmingham school for a workshop that could reach up to 350 professionals working in autism.

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