

Ellie Pettigrew

HIGHLY SPECIALIST SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST

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Health and Care Professions Council number: SL34036

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists registration number: RC0036622

Overview

I am a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist with extensive experience supporting individuals with complex communication needs, including those who have experienced a traumatic or acquired brain injury (TBI/ABI), such as cerebral palsy. I am passionate about empowering my clients by exploring different communication methods and identifying the best ways to support their communication and autonomy. I do this alongside the multidisciplinary team and family. I have had the privilege of working with a range of other professionals, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, assistive technologists, audiologists, and orthoptists.

I specialise in early communication, with a focus on Alternative and Augmented Communication (AAC) for those who present with complex access methods. This may be due to physical presentations or other needs such as cerebral visual impairment (CVI). In previous roles, I have supervised junior speech and language therapists in this area and delivered training. I have experience in assessing communication access methods, including adapted switches, eye gaze, and direct access using equipment such as key guards and adapted stylos.

I have experience in supporting clients in specialist education settings, residential services, care homes, day services, and in their own homes.

Work Experience

Independent Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

(June 2024 - Present) Communicate Your Way

In June 2024, I created Communicate Your Way Speech and Language Therapy Services. I strive to provide neurodiversity affirming and trauma-informed therapy to all my clients and their families.

My caseload primarily consists of children and teenagers who benefit from AAC and have complex access needs. This often means that we explore access methods, including but not limited to adapted switches, eye gaze, a head mouse and joysticks. Additionally, I explore communication software systems with my clients to assess which best meets their needs in terms of access, vocabulary, and other impacting factors, such as any visual needs they may have, including CVI. Quite often, my clients are at the beginning of their communication journey, meaning we might initially explore skills such as cause and effect and anticipation.

I currently work with a number of case managers to support clients who have cerebral palsy as a result of an injury at birth. I work with the family and MDT to assess and embed appropriate AAC systems and communication strategies to best support the client's communication skills and autonomy. Having worked with clients who have ongoing or settled medical-legal cases since 2019, I have extensive experience in preparing reports that meet the standards required during the litigation process, such as equipment justification reports and regular update reports.

Alongside direct input with the client, I also support those around the client by creating programs and documents, such as a communication profile, so that all communication partners support the client's communication in a consistent way. In addition, I think it is crucial to ensure those around the client understand why we are using specific strategies and how best to embed them through liaison in sessions and in individualised training for the client.

Associate Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

(September 2024 – Present) More than talk

I work in a mainstream primary school, where I conduct Speech and Language Therapy assessments, primarily with children who have Special Educational Needs. I complete reports with recommendations and provide appropriate programs and resources. I provide training to the education team. I work with neurodiverse children and complete a range of assessments and recommendations around communication style, speech, language, and emotional regulation.

Associate Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

(October 2024 – Present) Socrates Psychological Services

I currently work on the Socrates Multidisciplinary Assessment and Review Team (SMART) as a part of the Autism and ADHD assessment multidisciplinary team. I am involved in completing screening assessments, individual observations, and both formal and informal Speech and Language Therapy assessments. I also provide feedback to families following the assessment process and support with follow up appointments.

Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

(September 2022 – June 2024) ATtherapy

ATtherapy operates in the medical legal sector, and my caseload was primarily children and young adults who had cerebral palsy and co-occurring neurodivergencies as a result of an ABI or TBI. I supported individuals with complex communication styles and access needs, whilst working closely with the multidisciplinary team to ensure access to communication and promote autonomy. My specialisms included early communication skills and early AAC assessment and implementation. I provided direct and indirect therapy input in a variety of settings, including schools, colleges, day services, residential settings, and in clients' own homes. I also completed numerous witness statements with solicitors for clients whom I was the treating speech and language therapist.

I am passionate about joint working and have had the privilege to work alongside Case Managers, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists (OTs), Orthoptists, Psychologists, Independent Education Advisors, and Assistive Technologists.

I led the Neurodiversity-Affirming team and reflected on our practice to embed neuro-affirming approaches and ethos across the business. I was also the student co-ordinator and the training team lead. As the training team lead, I supported running in-house training days and events and also presented to the team on various areas within my specialism, such as adapted switches and early communication skills.

Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

(January 2019 – September 2022) ATtherapy

I worked in specialist primary schools, colleges, residential settings, and within the community. I had a varied caseload of clients with a range of complex needs, including those requiring AAC. My caseload primarily consisted of children and teenagers who had a diagnosis of cerebral palsy and had a range of complex needs – including multisensory impairments. I provided direct and indirect therapy input.

Speech and Language Therapist

(February 2016 – December 2018) The Seashell Trust

I worked at the Royal College of Manchester with students aged 18–21 who had complex needs, autism, cerebral palsy, multisensory needs, and non-speaking communication styles. I worked closely with the MDT, including OTs, Assistive Technology, Audiology, Mental Health Nurses, and Physiotherapy. I worked closely with the education and residential staff teams, as well as families, to support with embedding and generalising communication strategies.

Professional Qualifications

BSc Speech Pathology and Therapy

(2012 - 2015)

Manchester Metropolitan University

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British Sign Language Level 1

July 2017

Signature

Skills

My areas of skills and interest include:

- Neurodiversity affirming practice
- Autism
- ADHD
- AAC
- Switch intervention
- Communication access methods, such as switches and eye gaze
- Early communication skills
- Designing and delivering training content

Relevant Training and Continuing Professional Development

- Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP).
- Colourful Semantics (Alison Bryan).
- Getting started with Grid (Smartbox).
- Doing more with Grid (Smartbox).
- Switch Access Beyond Cause and Effect: Steppingstone for Effective Learning (Linda Burkhart and Fio Quinn, M.S.).
- Social Story (Carol Grey).
- Therapy Outcome Measures (Pamela Enderby).
- Speech and Language Support for Pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (Elklan accredited).
- Brick by Brick Facilitator training.
- Conferences such as Communication Matters, Communication Works, and information days.
- Talking Mats Training.
- Attention Autism.
- I attend the Neurodiversity affirming CEN.
- Gestalt Language Processing Conference, October 2024.