



## **Rachel Sykes**

**Current Job Role: Senior Educational Psychologist for the States of Guernsey - Education Services**

### **Brief descriptive snapshot of this role?**

As an Educational Psychologist (EP) I help young people to overcome barriers to learning, social problems or emotional/mental health problems, mostly in educational settings. I work directly with young people, as individuals or in groups. I also help parents, teachers, colleagues in Health and others to understand the young person's difficulties and support them in teaching or caring for the young person. The work may involve:

- Making assessments by observing the young person, interviewing them, talking to people who know them well and gathering information about their progress at school and in other situations.
- Producing written reports and making recommendations on how to improve the young person's learning, or tackle other difficulties such as with their emotions or social communication.
- Training parents, teachers and other professionals on topics such as literacy, school anxiety or autism.
- Advising schools and the Education Department on policies on children with special needs and mental health difficulties.
- Undertaking research or shaping government policies.

I spend around half of my time visiting schools, nurseries, families, running training sessions or liaising with other professionals. Other time is spent in an office. I also spend some time attending courses and conferences for my own professional development.

### **What has been your journey into this role?**

I graduated with an honours degree in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford, then trained to be a teacher. I taught in primary schools for 5 years before completing a 1 year Masters in Educational Psychology in London. I then worked as an EP for Bedfordshire and then Buckinghamshire Education Authorities before moving to Guernsey in 2002. I have worked as an EP for the States of Guernsey since then, gradually increasing my working time as my children have got older.

The work I do is varied and I appreciate the opportunities I have had on Guernsey to develop my skills as an EP. As well as the direct work with schools, children and young people and their families, I have taken responsibility for several projects and areas of research. For example, leading on a joint project with the Paediatric Occupational Health and Physiotherapy Services to provide training and advice to schools on children's motor skills development and Developmental Coordination Difficulties; Leading on a Growth Mindset project within schools and the wider community (and internationally); and most recently supporting schools with Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHWB) as part of their commitment to applying the Education Services MHWB Implementation Plan and Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools Policy.

### **Key skills & qualities for this role?**

There are a wide range of skills and qualities needed to be an effective EP. As well as having an understanding of how schools and educational settings work, an understanding of how to interact with other agencies, and a detailed knowledge of child development and psychology, EPs need to:



- have excellent problem-solving skills
- have excellent listening and communication skills
- have a good grasp of scientific techniques
- have motivational skills
- have patience and empathy
- be skilled at working with children and young people
- be able to inspire trust and confidence in people from a wide range of backgrounds
- be able to explain complex issues to people who have little or no specialist knowledge
- be observant and able to interpret people's body language as well as what they say
- be able to produce clear, concise written reports.

### **How does this role interact across the SOG and other external agencies?**

Although the majority of my work is focussed around schools and with children and young people, I have interactions with a significant number of other agencies. These may be other services within Education, for example; the Communication, Interaction and Autism Service (CIAS); the Les Voies Inclusion Service who support children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs; the States Early Years Team. I also interact with colleagues across other SoG Departments such as Health and Social Care as many professionals in these services are also working with children and young people. For example: Speech and Language Therapists, Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists, GPs, Paediatricians, School Nurses, Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Children's Convenor, Youth Justice etc. Within Education settings I interact with people in different roles, for example: Learning Support Assistants, Class Teachers, Pre-Schools, Education Officers, Inclusion Managers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators, Head Teachers, and for many different reasons, for example; delivering training, seeking information, giving information, joint problem solving and planning. I also communicate with external agencies such as the Youth Commission and Autism Guernsey.

### **Why is this work important to you?**

I love feeling that I am making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people, as well as those who care for them both in school and at home. It is a huge privilege to be able to apply evidence based psychology to help others to understand the children and young people they work with and care for. I enjoy facilitating ways to support and manage children's development and progress, be that at an individual, group or systems level.

If you would like to find out more about getting into a career in Mental Health, contact a Careers Adviser at [careersguernsey@gov.gg](mailto:careersguernsey@gov.gg)



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States of Guernsey  
Education Services

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