

Learning support worker

Suzanne Boston As a learning support worker, Suzanne works alongside a year 4 teacher at a junior school. She helps children who are having difficulties and, under the teacher's guidance, helps prepare material for lessons.

What is your role?

It's difficult to describe my job because what I do depends on what the class is doing and what the teacher needs to be done.

So what kind of thing do you do?

The class I work in has 31 children, aged eight to nine years old. If some of them are finding a subject difficult I'll go over the work with them, to make sure they understand. When a child has been off school and needs to catch up, I'll work with him or her on a one-to-one basis for a while. I might do this type of work in the classroom. Or I might take the children out to somewhere quiet, like to the school library.

At other times, when the class is doing an activity such as an art and craft or a maths project, I'll move around the classroom helping everyone as they need it.

Are you always in the classroom?

No, sometimes I might be out of the classroom completely, preparing material for future lessons, photocopying information sheets or putting together maths games. On another day I could spend my time putting together a display of the class's artwork. Sometimes we take the children out on day trips to museums. Recently the class has been preparing for their SATs tests and I've been helping the teacher with the practice tests.

What is the difference between a learning support worker and a teacher?

The teacher plans the lessons and carries them out in the classroom. I am there to help a teacher do the best job possible, by helping in whatever way is needed.

What training have you had for the job?

I've been on several courses since starting the job. One course was on behaviour management where we learned to be positive but firm in the way we deal with children.

This was very helpful because it's not easy to walk into a classroom for the first time and face the children! I found it quite daunting.

The literacy courses I've attended have helped me support children in reading and writing activities. I've learned how to encourage children to sound out words they don't immediately recognise. I've also been shown how to examine children's writing to see what they can and cannot do. For instance if a child misses out one full stop, it's likely to be a slip. If they miss out quite a number, they're probably not too sure of that particular punctuation rule and could do with some extra help.

I'm booked on to a numeracy course and I'm sure that will be just as helpful.

What hours do you work?

My job is part-time and I work every morning between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

How did you become a learning support worker?

A friend has a similar job and she told me about the work, which I thought sounded very interesting. She convinced me I could do it even though I had never done anything like this before. However, I do have experience of children as I have two of my own. I also helped out at the school when they were there. So I applied for the job and got it.

What is the best part of your job?

There's nothing I don't enjoy. I love working with small groups of children and get a lot of satisfaction from helping them. I also like the display work, making children's work look as good as possible. It can be quite creative.

What are the difficult parts?

There's never quite enough time to do everything I'd like to do.

What are your future plans?

I certainly want to continue working with children and I'm looking into gaining a qualification as a learning support worker.

Suzanne's tips

- Ask at your local school if they want some help.
- There are lots of different types of child care jobs and different ways in, so it's worth spending time finding out what's available.
- Experience with children can be as valuable as qualifications in this job, although you must be willing to learn and obviously have a good basic education to begin with.

