

Classroom assistant

Louise Dedrick works as a classroom assistant with the reception class girls in the junior department of Portsmouth High School. The school is in the independent sector, and is part of the Girls' Day School Trust.

What is your role?

I provide support to the classroom teacher in a class of four- and five-year-olds. The classes are much smaller than you often find in most other schools. Much of my time is spent working with small groups or individual children. I also supervise larger groups during the breaks and help during school trips.

Describe a typical day

I usually arrive up to an hour before the children. I start on playground duty until the bell rings for the children to go inside. During registration, I provide extra help with reading for Year 2 and 3 girls. Back in the reception class I help with activities organised by the teacher, including maths or writing. I work on a rota with the other classroom assistants to cover playground duty. At the end of the school day, I take some children to the after-school club, and ensure that others are safely on their school bus. I go home about 4 p.m.

What sort of practical work do you do with the children?

The children have been learning about plants and growing recently, and I have been taking groups from the class to the outdoor area. The children are encouraged to plant seeds themselves, and to handle the soil. When we do painting, I ensure the children experiment and mix the paint themselves, which is all part of the learning process. I mount their artwork to make a varied colourful display for the classroom. We also have practical cookery sessions in the classroom.

What sort of person do you need to be?

Flexibility is essential, as you must be prepared for anything. If a child is sick or unwell, you have to help. A love of children is vital, along with patience and understanding.

What do you like about your work?

I love the variety of the work, and it is never boring. The atmosphere with the staff and children is wonderful, and it is such a caring environment. The classroom teacher allows me to contribute by using my own ideas.

Are there any challenges?

This work is demanding, but very rewarding. It can be a challenge to take a group of children for an activity, although you can also learn and develop your skills at the same time.

Louise's route

- Diploma in nursery nursing.
- Nursery nurse in a nursery.
- Nanny for family in Italy.
- Part-time course in office skills.
- Office work.
- Veterinary nursing.

Louise's tips

- Obtain experience in a creche or school nursery to see if you like this type of work.
- Make the most of any available training.
- Working with children is very satisfying and rewarding so enjoy it!

Related jobs

Nursery nurse
Playworker
Care assistant
Registered nurse: Child branch
Childminder
Teacher: School
Teacher: Special educational needs
Teacher: nursery school
School lunchtime supervisor

Salary information

The pay of classroom assistants and learning support assistants can vary. Many are paid on a scale from £10,278 to £13,864 (full-time rates, although many posts are part-time). Experienced staff may be paid slightly more.

Getting in

There are no set minimum entry requirements for this work. Personal qualities and previous experience of working with children are important. The following courses are offered by CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education):

- CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education. You will need three GCSE/S grades (A-C/1-3) or equivalent for entry.
- Specialist Teacher Assistant (STA) Award, a one-year part-time course for those already working in primary schools. You normally need GCSE/S (A-C/1-3) English and maths.
- CACHE Level 2 Certificate for Teaching Assistants. This is a part-time course for those working in a school on a paid or voluntary basis. Qualifications are GCSE D level or above or equivalent.
- CACHE Level 3 Certificate for Teaching Assistants. This part-time course is aimed at experienced teaching assistants, whether paid or voluntary. GCSEs (A-C) or equivalent normally needed. This course can lead on to higher education courses, and could provide a route into teacher training for teaching assistants.

