

Spotlight on Pip St John

Pip St John was the winner of the 2018 Communication Champion Award at the Shine a Light Awards.

With over 30 years of experience in mainstream and special schools, Pip is well known and well respected in a number of schools in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, delivering training and raising awareness on children's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). However, it was Pip's work with the Wensley Fold CE Primary Academy that brought her to the attention of judges.

Beginning her relationship with Wensley Fold as SLCN advisor with the Local Authority, Pip expanded her role to become the school's Language for Life coordinator while overcoming a personal battle with stage 3 breast cancer in the process.

Pip's impact at the school, and in the wider Lancashire community, has been significant. That's in no small part due to her creation of the Pre-Teaching Vocabulary (PTV) programme, which she developed to help children needing extra language support.

PTV is a free resource, accessible online to anyone who needs it. In Wensley Fold, PTV is now used in every year group of the school, with pupils who continue to struggle being personally assessed by Pip, and referred for further speech and language therapy (SLT) where required.

Pip's efforts do not end there: she is also much admired for routinely sharing advice and information with classroom staff pro bono, in addition to the formal training she is paid to do. Her room at Wensley Fold is packed full of useful resources for staff and children, many of which she has purchased with her own funds.

Wensley Fold's special education needs coordinator, Karen Jack, who recommended Pip to Shine a Light, spoke warmly of the initiatives she has introduced to the school. These include a Chatty Hands group for children and parents who use Makaton for communication, and a Speaker of the Week Award. Karen praised Pip's "special knack" of communicating with parents, adding that one of her greatest achievements "was when a child who was virtually mute on starting school, and who had a severe stammer, read aloud in church to an audience of more than three hundred."

The judges noted that Pip's many achievements have included bringing parents, carers and professionals together. One judge said: "She has gone above and beyond her commitments, using her own funds to expand resources in the school, training other SLTs, and creating important support groups – that much of this was while battling cancer is simply outstanding."

For further information about the 2018 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL