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A Day in the Life of... the Ward 15 Primary Teaching Team

Today we talk to Teacher Kate McDonnell and Teaching Assistant Michelle Holland, at the James Brindley School – based at the hospital. The James Brindley School provides education for children and young people aged 2 – 19, who are in hospital or unable to attend mainstream school due to their medical conditions or special educational needs. It delivers its education across [14 sites](#) including school teaching centres and hospitals throughout Birmingham, and provides a successful home teaching service.

Michelle and Kate work on Ward 15 where staff care for patients and young people with cancer.

What does a Teaching Assistant do?

Michelle – I check lesson plans, get equipment and resources ready for the day and chat to Kate about the day ahead. When we get to the ward, we encourage the patients to come and join us in the activity room for morning lessons. In the afternoon, I visit the patients who are too unwell or unable to attend at their bedside and deliver lessons there. We also support parents and get to know the whole family during their stay.

What does a Teacher do at the hospital?

Kate – I plan lessons which are in-line with mainstream schools. I will contact the patient's schools to find out what topics they are working on and what targets they are working towards – so each child has a personalised lesson plan. I also attend discharge, planning and multi-disciplinary meetings. Good communication with the medical teams is really important because the patients could be undergoing planned procedures that may need our intervention because are nil by mouth and so may need distraction. I put referrals in for home teaching and get involved in planning that tuition.

Cancer patients can be off school for many weeks or months, so the continuation of their education is really important. The medical teams are really supportive of the work that the teaching team do.

What's the best part of your job?

Michelle – getting to know children and families and making their day a little brighter. We build up much closer relationships with the children than we would in mainstream school and that's really rewarding. Also, it's lovely when we get visits from the children who have finished their cancer treatment and are living normal lives again.

Kate – seeing the little steps of progress that the children make. Their daily achievements put a smile on my face and brighten my day as much as I hope I brighten theirs.

What's the worst part of your job?

Michelle – seeing the children at their lowest ebb and having really bad days. There are mostly good days but it's hard to watch them go through the bad ones. I do get attached to the children and it's hard not to.

Kate – seeing children upset or suffering and knowing you can't do anything about it apart from be there to support them. We get involved with the whole family and they will often pour out their troubles – I wish I could do more to help.

What's the cancer ward like?

Michelle – it's tired. There isn't a lot of activities for children to be involved in when it isn't schooltime. It needs better facilities for parents.

Kate – we need a dedicated learning environment. At the moment we share a space with patient's siblings, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and large toys. The patients get easily distracted and we often end up relocating our lessons elsewhere – it's vital that these children maintain their education so they don't fall behind their peers.

Michelle – this is why we are supporting the £4million Children’s Cancer Centre Appeal. I dyed my hair pink in the summer and raised £300 for the Appeal. I have also secured fundraising support from a local school and Brownie and Rainbows group.

Kate – and the Cancer Appeal is the reason I taking part in some of the British Gas Great Swims next year.

[Birmingham Children’s Hospital NHS Foundation Trust](#) provides a comprehensive service to children, young people and their families.

We are one of the leading paediatric teaching centres in the country, with international research and development in areas such as:

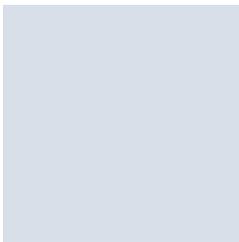
- [Childhood cancer studies](#)
- [Liver disease](#)
- [Infection, inflammation and immunity](#)
- Molecular genetics of childhood conditions (how these are passed on, and how they cause disease in the body in terms of chemistry)
- [Nutrition, growth and metabolism in childhood](#)
- Drug use in children
- Relapsed and refractory acute lymphoblastic leukaemia
- Infant neuroblastoma
- Infant brain tumours

Our facilities include:

- [A 22 bedded Paediatric Intensive Care Unit](#)
- A centre of excellence for children with cancer, [cardiac](#), [liver](#) and [renal](#) disease
- A national transplant centre
- [280 inpatient and day-case beds including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services](#)
- 38 specialties and supporting departments
- [An Emergency Department dealing with over 45,000 patients a year](#)
- [Twelve theatres](#)

- Three MRI scanners
- A CT Scanner
- An endoscopy suite
- A catheter laboratory with digital imaging facility
- [Burn, Neonatal Surgery](#) and [Education Centre](#)
- [Wellcome Clinical Research Facility](#)
- [Renal Unit](#)
- [Teenage Cancer Trust Unit](#)
- [Ronald McDonald House](#) (parent and family accommodation).

Contacts



Anna Sykes

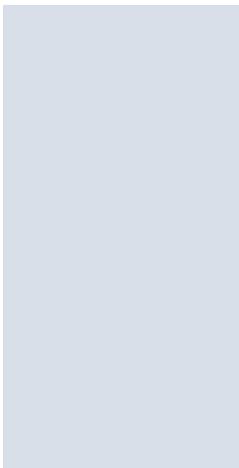
Press Contact

Senior Communications Manager

Press contact

anna.sykes@bch.nhs.uk

0121 333 8504



Gaby Insley

Press Contact

Head of Communications

gaby.insley@bch.nhs.uk

Karen Stevens

Press Contact

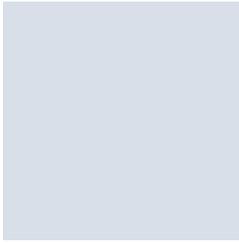
Communications Manager

Media enquiries, BCH Charities publicity, social networking and internal/external communications

karen.stevens@bch.nhs.uk

0121 333 8511

0121 333 9999



Gemma Wilde

Press Contact

Communications Assistant

gemma.wilde2@bch.nhs.uk

0121 333 8513