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Dear Parents

I am writing to thank you for contributing to what our students have learned about the problems faced by children with disabilities and their families. It is the end of another academic year and I have just finished the last of the 'school reports'. You will remember our students are obliged to write the story of a particular child which includes some medical details but, more importantly, the effect of the don the family and how the family and the school is addressing the problem.

The two week involvement of our students in the schools, observing, taking part, getting to know children and their families, getting to know the 'system', visibility working with teachers, physiotherapists and other allied health people, is unique. I am not aware of any other university doing such a thing. To put it in perspective, some universities have a paediatric programme that only lasts five weeks. Ours lasts ten, two of which are spent in the schools, dedicated to disabilities. This 'hands on' involvement is supplemented by lectures on various topics such as autism, chromosomal problems, cerebral palsy etc.

All our students are obliged to write a report of their experience, focussing on one child. They must present an overview of that child's particular problems but, more importantly, they need to report on the effect on the family and how the family is addressing the problems.

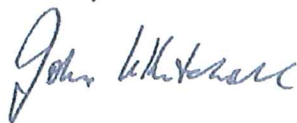
I was never sure that putting the students in the schools would work. I am, therefore, very happy to report it is 'working well'. I am in regular contact with the schools and the reports from the teachers remain enthusiastic. I hear from parents, and they remain enthusiastic. Indeed, the consistent message has been 'why have medical schools not done this long ago' because it is initiating a new generation of doctors into a field that is widely regarded as being not well understood.

I remain very convinced the programme is worthwhile when I read the students' reports. I can perceive their engagement with the child and with the family and how new 'things' are coming into their understanding. Many of the students declare they have been inspired by the experience and, reading, between the lines, I conclude that inspiration is characteristic.

Therefore, I am writing to thank you parents for your participation. I thank you for permission for our students to get to know your child. And, I thank those parents who have been available to discuss their child with our students. I acknowledge you have been very generous with your time and your emotions. It is not easy to give of yourself to medical students...I know! But, I want to reassure you that you have contributed a great deal, probably far more than you can be aware.

I thank you and wish you and the staff of your school a Blessed Christmas.

Yours sincerely



Professor John Whitehall  
Foundation Chair & Professor of Paediatrics & Child Health