



Students from Rainhill High School deliver an inspiring performance

# Time to pay attention to ADHD

Untreated or poorly supported ADHD can have serious consequences for a child's future life prospects, yet it can take years to obtain a diagnosis and even then appropriate support may not be forthcoming. **Alison Thomas** attended the ADHD Foundation annual conference to find out more

**'Would all students who are in detention this evening please report to Room 305 immediately. I repeat, all students who are in detention this evening please report to Room 305 immediately.'**

As a student steps forward to issue the summons, her fellow performers from Rainhill High School, St Helens, follow on in groups, chanting in unison as they go. 'We love detention... not! We love detention... not! Room 305! Line up! Shirts tucked in! School badge showing on your tie. Phone on silent and stowed in bag. Room 305! Line up! Shirts tucked in...'

Once everyone has assembled, the teacher starts taking the register and soon discovers that tonight's detainees are no strangers to Room 305. For some, it's the price they pay for constantly forgetting their homework; for others, endless fidgeting or calling out answers in class is the problem. At this point, they start musing about their dreams, which range from winning an Olympic gold medal to recording a number one hit, with the teacher duly putting down each person for unrealistic aspirations.

Finally, we learn the identities of the role models who are keeping the students' dreams alive. Michael Phelps, Will.i.am, Richard Branson, Emma Watson, Billy Connolly... the list is long. All have scaled the heights in their chosen professions. All have ADHD.

'We all have talents, strengths and dreams,' the actors conclude with a flourish. 'We all deserve to have our talents supported, our strengths promoted, our dreams nurtured. Born to be ADHD! Born to be me!'

## ***Born to be ADHD***

The setting is the ADHD Foundation's annual national conference, and the audience comprises a cross section of education, health and social care professionals and commissioners who have gathered in Liverpool to learn from leading researchers and practitioners and share insights and ideas from their respective fields.

The performers' parting shot – Born to be ADHD – is the strapline of a campaign run by the foundation in partnership with other ADHD charities and organisations to dispel the common misconceptions

that continue to surround ADHD and ensure that those affected can be better supported in identifying and managing their condition effectively.

‘ADHD is not the outcome of poor parenting skills,’ says Colin Foley, national training director of the ADHD Foundation, ‘but these and other myths persist, despite scientific evidence to the contrary. Hence the social stigma that still prevails to this day. What SENCO has never approached parents to suggest that their child might be showing symptoms of ADHD, only to be met with the response: “Oh no, we don’t want our child to be saddled with that label. We don’t want to take this any further.”’

‘My advice to schools is always: don’t let that be the end of the conversation. Keep going back to it, reinforcing the message: “ADHD is nothing to be ashamed of. It’s always better that we know. Then we can put strategies in place.”’

### ***A message to policy makers***

Unfortunately, even when schools and parents are united in their determination to get support for a child, in the words of one SENCO: ‘You are fighting a constant battle to get these children diagnosed because you have to jump through hoop after hoop after hoop.’

Her experience is corroborated by the campaign’s latest initiative, a comprehensive research review entitled *A lifetime lost or a lifetime saved* which shows that it can take two years or more to obtain a diagnosis, and that even then, access to effective follow-up care varies hugely from one part of the country to another, with many families ‘just left to fend for themselves’.

Yet, as the report clearly demonstrates, failure to identify and address ADHD at an early age can have damaging long-term consequences, including serious mental health issues, problems with relationships at home and at work, a greater likelihood of experiencing financial difficulties or being dismissed from employment and a much greater likelihood of spending time in prison (nine times more likely according to one survey).

Meanwhile, in the context of education, children with untreated or poorly managed ADHD are:

- over twice as likely to be frustrated at school
- three times more likely to have a reading disability
- over five times more likely than their peers to get involved in fights
- twice as likely to consume excessive amounts of alcohol.



Sports day at Wilds Lodge School provides plenty of opportunities for aerobic exercise

The report also notes that a third of young people with ADHD had been temporarily excluded from school while waiting to see a specialist, while 51% of adults and children had experienced ‘a lack of recognition for ADHD as a real condition’ from frontline professionals including GPs, other specialists and school staff.

**“ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder and a spectrum condition”**

‘Our society today understands and accepts several mental health disorders and many different types of neurodiversity,’ the researchers conclude, ‘meaning that disorders such as depression, dyslexia and autism – which in previous years may have been marginalised, trivialised and even disbelieved in the way that ADHD is today – are now accepted.’

‘We vehemently believe that in future years, we will not only destigmatise ADHD, but celebrate it as a route to creativity, passion and ingenuity. This won’t be easy, and will rely on the help and dedication of many people, but a few simple steps can set us off on the right path.’

### ***Training for schools***

One of the steps the report recommends is regular training for school staff, not just for SENCOs and other designated personnel, but for everyone who interacts with children.

The need for this is highlighted by a recent survey of 803 primary and secondary teachers, which showed that while most teachers recognise the impact of ADHD on students’ life chances, and many are concerned about the risks these children face in terms of bullying and exclusion, their levels of understanding and confidence are mixed, with 42% of respondents having received no ADHD training. The survey also revealed a lack of awareness that ADHD is a mental health condition.

Like autism, ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder and like autism, it is a spectrum condition. The main elements are very poor concentration and poor memory, impulsivity – not just of action, but of thought and feeling – and hyperactivity. Very low emotional resilience is another key feature.

Hyperactivity is not always present, however, particularly with girls. ‘There are a lot of girls who get missed,’ says Colin Foley, ‘which explains the 4:1 ratio of male to female diagnosis. When girls do get picked up, it is often not until their teenage years when they present with things like anxiety, depression, self-harm or eating disorders. Mental health is a really important issue that schools need to be acutely aware of. They should be constantly on the lookout, watching students’ mood and monitoring changes in behaviour.’

### ***Attention is what really matters***

Meanwhile, for those children who *are* hyperactive, although their behaviour can be frustrating for those around them, in terms of academic achievement, it is not a significant impairment.

‘Most teachers are quick to pick up on wriggly little boys who can’t sit still,’ says Mr Foley, ‘and they are often very good at dealing with that in terms of providing fidget toys for the hands and gadgets that allow movement from the waist down. Which is great. But what we really need to do is pay less attention to the H and focus more on the A – the inability to pay attention. That is what holds children back.’

As evidence of this, he points to a longitudinal study of 46,369 children throughout their primary schooling which showed that hyperactivity made no measurable difference to the children’s attainment at the age of 11, while impulsivity appeared to be a positive asset. Inattention, on the other hand, had a significant negative effect on their end-of-school results.

It is important, therefore, to provide children with regular activities to practise concentration and focus. These could

take the form of board games, card games or action games, they might involve matching things up or unravelling a puzzle... anything that is fun and engaging and can support the child to sustain their focus for increasing lengths of time. (For a list of brain-training programs to improve memory and concentration, see pull-out resource, page 26.)

### **Executive functioning deficiencies**

Another common feature of ADHD is an inability to self-regulate thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

‘We have all found our mind wandering when we attend talks at a conference like this,’ says Mr Foley, ‘but we are able to pull it back and fill in the gaps from the context. Likewise, we might have something really interesting we’d love to share, but we don’t, or we save it for later, because we know that will disrupt the flow of the presentation.’

‘Children with ADHD don’t have that facility. When they say they can’t help something, they are not looking for excuses, it is the truth. The same applies to their high levels of distractibility. We talk about ADHD as being about inattention, but some people argue very eloquently that it is about too much attention, paying attention to everything that’s around you, as opposed to focusing on the specific task that needs to be done.’

Executive functioning deficiencies are also likely to include problems with planning, organisation, time management, starting and completing tasks, switching from one activity to another, flexible thinking, working memory, emotional self-regulation and more.

‘Staff need to appreciate just how difficult it is for children with ADHD to inhibit the key features of their behaviour and actions in classrooms,’ says Mr Foley. ‘Then, rather than getting cross, which will only reinforce the child’s negative self-image, they can start looking for strategies that will help.’

### **Movement, activity and collaboration**

Research has shown that providing regular opportunities throughout the school day for children with ADHD to have intensive cardio-exercise leads to improvements in cognition, attention and mood. ‘If you haven’t got one, buy a treadmill,’ advises Mr Foley, ‘and have that as a resource so children with ADHD can go and run and get the dopamine moving in their brain. And get themselves ready to learn.’



Two boys from Wilds Lodge School focus intently

### **ADHD Friendly School pledges**

1. We pledge to work with the ADHD Foundation to provide an ADHD training session for teachers and/or parents.
2. We pledge to provide regular opportunities for all learners with ADHD to have access to physical activity and exercise during the school day.
3. We pledge to provide opportunities for all learners with ADHD to learn self-calming strategies, for example, belly breathing, progressive muscle relaxation or mindfulness.
4. We pledge to provide tactile resources in every classroom.
5. We pledge to produce a display for the whole school and hold an assembly to celebrate the achievements of people living with ADHD.
6. We pledge to set up a parent/carer’s ADHD support group.

He also recommends filling lessons with movement, activity and collaboration to keep students engaged and focused, boost their self-esteem and reduce their persistently high levels of anxiety. ‘Movement in lessons is absolutely fundamental,’ he says. ‘Don’t plan lessons where children are expected to sit in the same place facing in the same direction for the duration. Think about where information comes from. If it tends to be delivered by you or projected on a screen, find other ways of putting it out so the children have to find it, preferably on their feet while they are moving around. (See pull-out resource pages 25-26 for some suggestions.)’

### **ADHD Friendly Schools**

The ADHD Foundation runs one-day courses for school staff at various venues around the country and recently launched a licensed instructor programme which trains staff to deliver the foundation’s parenting course to families, so that school and home can be working hand in hand. Its latest initiative is the ADHD Friendly Schools quality mark, where schools work in collaboration with the foundation to evaluate current practice and put interventions in place to enshrine six pledges into the daily life of their school so that children with ADHD can flourish.

The first two recipients received their award at the conference: Our Lady Star of the Sea RC Primary School, Liverpool, whose SENCO will be sharing her insights in a future edition of *Special Children*, and Wilds Lodge School, Leicestershire, a residential therapeutic school for boys with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Two very different settings, two different types of provision, both equally committed to creating an environment where the Rainhill High School students’ call to action can become a reality. ‘We all deserve to have our talents supported, our strengths promoted, our dreams nurtured. Born to be ADHD! Born to be me!’

### **FIND OUT MORE**

- **ADHD Foundation:** [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)
- **A lifetime lost or a lifetime saved:** <http://bit.ly/sc240-18>
- **For information on ADHD Friendly Schools,** contact [colin.foley@adhdfoundation.org.uk](mailto:colin.foley@adhdfoundation.org.uk)

Marcus and his grandmother at the ADHD Foundation conference, where Marcus was awarded a trophy and a bag of goodies for his contribution to raising public awareness of ADHD and comorbid conditions



# It's cool to have ADHD

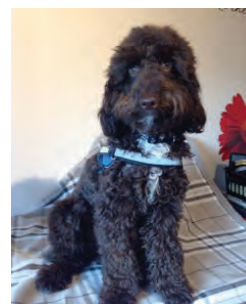
As a spectrum condition, ADHD affects everyone differently, but 10-year-old **Marcus Wilton's** account provides insights that bring the reality of living with the condition alive

## What's special about me?

My special birthdate is 07.07.07.

Grandma said it could have been worse... it could have been 6.6.6!

- I have a great sense of humour and love telling jokes. Like this. Maths teacher to his class: 'If I have five bottles in one hand and six in the other hand, what do I have?' Student: 'A drinking problem.'
- I have a really good memory for facts.
- I am really good with computers.
- I can sing.
- I love all kinds of music.
- I have super powers, ADHD, high functioning ASD and PDA... all with honours...
- I also have a puppy called Cocoa.



Cocoa is 12 months old and is training to be my service dog.

He is my best friend and helps me to be less anxious. He comes to sit with me when

I get upset and

puts his paws on my shoulders. The idea is that when we are both sensible enough, he will sleep in my room to keep me company at night. But we are both a bit giddy for that yet...

It will take about another year or so for him to be fully trained but we are learning together.

## What do I need help with?

Having ADHD and autism means my brain is wired differently; a good analogy is that it's like being a PC in an Apple shop.

I see the world in a different way and some people don't understand that. Sometimes on bad days, I think I don't want to be this boy any more.

Some of the things I need help with are listed overleaf, and include difficulty making and keeping friends.

- I get anxious in certain situations and this can affect my behaviour.
- I am really impulsive and don't think about the consequences sometimes. I also find it hard to concentrate and I am easily distracted... Oh look! There's a squirrel...
- I definitely find it hard to listen when deep down I know I need to.
- I have sensory issues – some clothes don't feel right, and strong smells and tastes make me uncomfortable. I also don't like loud noises... unless of course I'm the one making them!

Concentration

Impulsivity

Distractibility

Keeping calm and controlling my anxiety

Making and keeping friends

Dealing with my emotions

Sitting still

Listening

Completing tasks

Organisation

Some of the things Marcus needs help with

### How does ADHD affect me?

ADHD and ASD affect people differently, but for me it's like I'm living with a brain that races past everything, yet I know I'm expected to notice the important things.

It feels like I'm living in a room with loads of TVs with the volume low, all playing different channels. In that room are also lots of people having six different conversations at the same time. The dog's running around with his toys barking. Someone is trying to get my attention and gets upset because I can't filter out the instruction from all the other noise and activity in that room called my brain.

I'm juggling hundreds of ideas, feelings and thoughts constantly, which often means I can't concentrate on other things, especially conversations, listening, following instructions and just focusing on what I need to.

It's exhausting when you feel like you're switched on all the time just to be able keep up with the world.

### Medication

When you have more than one thing going on alongside ADHD, it's hard to get the right medication, so I have tried lots of different ones over the last few years.

My ADHD nurse has worked hard for a long time to get the right medication for me. I had a lot of side effects from some I tried. Some made me sick, some made me sad, and some didn't work at all. Eventually, after trying loads of different ones, I now have a mixture that works for me and helps me to focus better in the day. There are still some side effects but the positives outweigh the negatives at the minute, and I know without them I wouldn't be doing so well at school.

### My mainstream experience

I started nursery like most kids at three, not that I remember much about it except being moved from one nursery to another and eventually moving into a regular primary school just after my fourth birthday.

Right from the start, I struggled in a class of 30 other kids. Even with one-to-one support and a shedful of meds, I had the concentration of a gnat. No one really understood why I was so distracted, why I struggled to do what was expected of us in class. The ones I found hardest to do were sitting quietly, concentrating, getting on with work and not shouting out.

It didn't help when teachers and teaching assistants said: 'This is easy for you Marcus, you're bright. Just get on with it.' It was easier to be the class clown. Then I would be taken out and given my own workspace. To me that was a result!

The school was great and tried really hard to help me, but towards the end of Year 4, after I managed to get into the school admin system and removed the special programs I hated doing in the afternoon... and later changed the password on all the iPads and wouldn't give it up... the head, my grandma and the local authority decided I needed a more 'nurturing environment'.

### A quieter, less busy setting with more individual support

Rossendale is a special school with really small classes. There are only four other children in my class with a teacher and a teaching assistant. This means they have more time to support me. It's not as noisy and as busy as mainstream schools. This helps me to concentrate better and complete more work. I'm not different

any more either. There are loads of other individual Marcus's.

I've been there just over a year now and although it took a while for me to settle, I really like it there and know it's the right place for me. So much so that on presentation day this year I received the award for the most improved pupil.

### ADHD is cool

After all that, I want to tell you that there's also a great side to having ADHD. I think about it as my superpower.

- I have loads of energy and don't need a lot of sleep. I'm not sure that at five o'clock in the morning everyone in my house would agree with that being one of my finest superpowers, but hey ho!
- I have a really good memory, which means I find learning easy... but only when I'm interested in a subject of course. My head is full of hundreds of interesting facts. Like this. What's the smallest ocean in the world? Answer, the Arctic Sea. Not many people know that!
- I have really good communication skills.
- I'm funny and I'm really good at music, computers and quizzes like Countdown and The Chase.
- I also get to do really cool stuff like speaking at conferences.

In my old school there was no one like me. They called me The Flash because I was always running around, so I used it as my alter-ego superhero. I was different, I stood out by a mile and I liked being different.

That difference makes us individuals and brings out our talents and gifts. We make great actors like Emma Watson and Daniel Radcliffe, great sports stars like Louis Smith, great comedians like Rory Bremner. I just can't wait to discover what my special talent will be when I grow up.

So what's there not to love about ADHD and being a super hero?

### In a nutshell

I wanted to finish with something that I think sums me up, and I found this.

I may not be  
who I ought to be,  
I know I'm not all  
that I want to be.

But I've come a long way  
from who I used to be.

And I won't give up on becoming  
what I know I can be!

*Sabiny Pierrevil*

*Extracts from a presentation that earned Marcus a standing ovation at the ADHD Foundation's annual conference, November 2017.*

# Identifying and supporting children with ADHD

**Colin Foley**, national trainer for the ADHD Foundation, offers some guidelines for school staff

**Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental spectrum condition that can persist into adulthood. Symptoms include difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behaviour, and hyperactivity.**

ADHD has three subtypes:

- predominantly inattentive
- predominantly hyperactive-impulsive
- combined inattention and hyperactive impulsive.

Early identification is key. Time lost has a significant impact on attainment and future life outcomes.

## Things to look out for

**Avoiding eye contact.** The child might appear to be ignoring you, but some children with ADHD find making eye contact really difficult.

**Fidgeting.** Not standing or sitting still, or fiddling with something while you are talking to them. This does not necessarily mean the child is not listening. If unsure, ask them to repeat back what you have just said to check and reinforce their understanding.

**Avoiding work.** When children with ADHD do not understand what they have to do, rather than risk getting it wrong, they may opt out altogether on the grounds that a telling-off is preferable to being perceived as stupid. Failure to get started or complete a task can also be due to their inability to direct focus, rather than laziness or because they just can't be bothered.

## Inappropriate behaviour.

Children with ADHD have difficulty understanding what constitutes inappropriate behaviour. They might, for example, think making rude noises in class is funny and socially acceptable, or they might interrupt the teacher's explanation of a key concept

with a comment about their personal appearance. They say what they see; they have difficulty reading social cues.

## Disregard for consequences.

Children with ADHD make no connection between behaviour and consequences. If you point out a behaviour issue, they may acknowledge it and apologise, then five minutes later do the very same thing again. Lack of executive functioning (analysing, problem-solving and understanding sequence of actions and consequences) results in impulsive and unconsidered behaviours.

**Daydreaming.** Being distracted by what is going on elsewhere in the room or outside is a characteristic of ADHD. This doesn't mean that the child is not paying attention: it is more likely they are paying too much attention to everything and not focusing on just one thing.

**Negative self-esteem.** Children with ADHD can easily become frustrated at their inability to understand or remember instructions and communicate with others. This results in feelings of isolation and exclusion from recognition, praise, reward and affection from adults and peers. This in turn creates anxiety, which exacerbates ADHD characteristics. Inevitably this causes behavioural problems as the child feels impelled to act out, unable to articulate what they feel.

**Being the class clown.** Trying to make people laugh and cause disruption, possibly due to work avoidance: 'I can't do it, so the class won't be able to do it either.' Or: 'I will gain the esteem and friendship of my peers by making them laugh. As I will not be able to gain the esteem of my teacher, I will behave in a way that meets my instinctive need for relationship and a sense of belonging.'

**Impulsivity.** Children with ADHD have difficulty waiting their turn in queues or in group work. They act and speak without thinking. They may be

clumsy or accident prone; they may break things and accidentally hurt others.

**Rule breaking.** Children with ADHD struggle to understand boundaries as they have poor social observations. They need to have the rules explicitly spelt out and they need to know how far they can go.

## A complex picture

Two thirds of children with ADHD have another condition and a third have two or more. Common comorbidities include autism spectrum disorder, specific learning difficulties, Tourette syndrome, anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder and depression.

Some comorbidities stem from the impact of ADHD upon a person's life (e.g. poor academic performance leading to anxiety) while others (e.g. autism and dyslexia) occur simultaneously. Their presence can affect the presentation of ADHD symptoms, or they can mask the condition, making it hard for teachers to get a true picture of what might be going on.

## QbCheck

QbCheck is a new online screening tool from Swedish health technology company Qbtech that can help teachers to make sense of the confusion. Easy to administer, the test lasts 15-20 minutes and generates an instant visual report comparing the individual's levels of activity, impulsivity and inattention with the performance of groups of people of the same age and gender, with and without ADHD.

This provides schools with objective evidence to confirm or rule out ADHD, which they can present to families and use to support the referral process. Some schools also use it to monitor the effectiveness of medication.

See [www.qbtech.com](http://www.qbtech.com) or email [tony.doyle@qbtech.com](mailto:tony.doyle@qbtech.com)

## Key principles of an ADHD-friendly classroom

**If you think that a child is demonstrating ADHD characteristics, act immediately by introducing ADHD strategies into teaching, the curriculum and support, both academic and pastoral. Clinicians will not diagnose children under the age of six years. For older children, the process of obtaining a diagnosis can be very long and drawn-out.**

### *Be positive*

- Understand and accept that when the child shouts out or struggles to conform, their behaviour is not prompted by naughtiness; they literally cannot help themselves.
- Make sure they know the boundaries. Avoid long discussions about what is right and wrong in their behaviour. Tell them what you want, focusing on the positives.
- Have positive expectations. When the child fails to fulfil these, deal with the issue there and then, and move on. Don't bring it up again the following day. Start each new day with a clean slate.

### *Alleviate anxiety*

- Allow 'time out' if the child needs to move or practise breathing/relaxation techniques to de-stress.
- Allow de-stress/tactile/fiddle toys.
- Facilitate a quiet space the child can retreat to in times of need. In a primary classroom, that might be a chill-out tent in a corner of the room; in a secondary school, chill-out zones could be strategically placed within faculty areas to make them readily accessible.

### *Minimise potential distractions*

- Sit the child near you, near the whiteboard, at the front of the room, away from windows and away from colourful displays.
- In primary classrooms in particular, which are often a riot of colour, have one 'calm wall' to reduce sensory or distractibility overload.
- Use large type on handouts and make these as uncluttered as possible.

### *Be clear and specific*

- Display classroom rules prominently;

ensure these are unambiguous and written in a positive way.

- Give directions clearly and, and wherever possible, visually (e.g. notes, a timetable, lists). Provide clear instructions to settle the ADHD learner and ensure they have a full understanding of the requirements of the task.
- Repeat directions more than once, write them on the board, and check that the child understands.
- Provide the child with a checklist of their own – these children need reminders they can access themselves.

### *Gain the child's attention*

- Use deliberate eye contact when speaking to the child (almost 'staring').
- Break down each task into its smaller component parts.
- Make learning fun – all children hate being bored, but boredom sets in very quickly for children with ADHD.
- Allow the child to doodle, make notes or create mind maps if that helps them to focus when they are expected to listen.

### *Sustain the child's attention*

- Monitor progress regularly throughout the lesson.
- Be consistent, firm, fair and patient and give constant feedback and rewards.
- Seat the child next to a good role model or learning buddy to help them to engage and stay on task.

### *Provide predictable structure and support organisation* **In primary schools**

- Establish a daily classroom routine with regular times for stories, desk work, creative activities etc.
- Display the day's lessons on the wall or board.
- Provide lists, timetables, timescales and regular reminders.
- Share changes to the timetable or activities with the learner in advance to avoid confusion and anxiety.

### **In secondary schools**

- Write down homework in the child's planner or use pre-prepared stickers.

- Get the child to create visual reminders of what they need to bring to every lesson, keeping one copy in their bag, and another at home.

### *Support self-management*

- Adopt 'stop, think, do' approaches.
- Encourage all pupils to stop and think before talking – this will help a child with ADHD to learn to slow down before talking. You can do this by waiting 10 seconds before you accept answers from the class.
- Remind the whole class to put their hand up if they want to talk, not just the child with ADHD.
- Likewise, remind the whole class about the rules for interrupting – if someone persists, talk to them on their own, not in front of the class.

### *Help children with a poor sense of time*

- Adopt 'when... then' approaches.
- When children are taking turns in a group, use a timer to set limits.
- Use visual prompts to assist with time on task and organisation of learner time.

### *Make transitions less stressful*

- Count down to transitions within lessons.
- Develop movement systems, such as traffic lights or key phrases, to manage movement between tasks and classrooms.
- In secondary schools, support smooth transitions between lessons by allowing the ADHD learner to set off a few minutes early with a reliable buddy.

### *Make assessments meaningful*

- Avoid timed tests; they will not tell you what the child knows.
- Do not set lengthy homework tasks: go for quality.
- Allow the child to use a laptop for coursework or in place of written work.
- Consider access arrangements for tests/assessments/exams – minimise stress, distractions and anxiety, use laptops for assignments, use a separate room, allow rest breaks and allow the child to move around if necessary.

### Thinking about reward

Thinking about reward is one of the keys to unlocking good classroom practice for pupils with ADHD.

Children who have an impaired sense of time, an impaired sense of working towards long-term goals and deferred gratification are not going to respond to a conventional reward system where points build up to something at the end of the week or even longer. These are children who live in the moment. So what is going to keep them going lesson by lesson during the school day? What is going to keep them going minute by minute within each lesson?

Some schools use time very effectively as a reward. If the child works for the specified period deemed appropriate for them, they clock up a minute. At the end of the morning, or the end of the day, the accumulated time is used creatively for targeted support, such as fun activities to aid concentration.

Homework is another good way to use that time. That might not sound like a reward, but homework is a huge problem for children with ADHD and very difficult for their families. It comes down to the relationship you build with the child, and the conversations you have to find out what they might buy into. If you get the parent involved too and can persuade them both that you are not fighting them over homework, you are freeing the child up to do something they would much rather be doing, you are on to a winner.

I had a case recently where a mother was keeping her son away from his karate lessons, which he loved, because she had to sit with him every night, battling with him over his maths and English. That has to be wrong!

### Supporting self-management

For most children, clear and consistent expectations regarding good classroom behaviour are enough to keep them on track. For example, they know that shouting out is not acceptable and they don't need constant reminders to comply. Imagine you are a highly distractible child and your targets for the lesson include waiting your turn and not shouting out. What is going to keep you remembering to do that all the way through to the end?

You need to externalise what is not happening internally. Give the child



Seating the pupil next to a good role model or learning buddy helps them to engage and stay on task

a visual representation to keep on the desk, where they tick off or highlight their targets every time they meet them, so they can immediately see where they are up to in the lesson and how well they are doing in terms of self-management. How often they do this will depend on where they are on the spectrum. For some, it could be every five minutes; for others, every 20 minutes might be appropriate.

Don't be tempted to throw these sheets away; keep them so you and the child have a record. Then when things are not going well, you can pull out a good one and say: 'OK. You have had a bad day today but let's look back – you did really well last Wednesday.'

### Getting lessons off to a good start

A typical lesson in a secondary school begins with the teacher outlining the aims and objectives or providing an explanation of some kind. Even if this doesn't last for long, a child with ADHD, who has an impaired sense of time, has no way knowing that, no idea how long they are going to be expected to sit still and listen.

The solution is to give them something practical to do as soon as they walk through the door, something to physically touch and manipulate, such as a pairs game where they match up cards that are related in some way.

If this is done as a whole-class activity, it has the added advantage of getting everyone straight down to work, rather than letting things drift as you wait for latecomers to arrive.

### Incorporating movement

Children often spend a lot of time in class sitting down. Ask yourself how many of the activities you have planned could be done equally well standing up, so that a hyperactive child has the chance to move and to fidget. For example, next time you ask pupils to talk about something in pairs or small groups, if you get them to their feet it will change the dynamic completely and can help children with ADHD to engage.

One teacher I know, whose SEN class of eight boys includes five with ADHD, gets them to stand up whenever they want to speak instead of putting up their hand. Every lesson, you have the comical spectacle of children bobbing up and down, but it is working because they are moving.

Movement also helps to embed information and knowledge in the brain. If you combine revision and review activities with movement, so pupils mime, act out, or have different physical symbols and signs for different key pieces of information, that will really help a child with ADHD to remember – and other children too.

### Group work

Positioning and structure are the two key things to consider when planning group work and talk-based activities.

- Position the child within the group to minimise distractions.
- Pay particular attention to giving the activity an explicit, clearly defined end. Children with ADHD have trouble completing tasks. If the activity is allowed to drift, with some groups finishing before others, the child with ADHD will lose focus very quickly.
- Structure in some kind of feedback, follow-on or collation activities where the child with ADHD is taking the lead, so they have to listen to their peers and record what they say as the task proceeds. If they have to report back to the class afterwards, they will have to persist until the end. Plan activities with persistence in mind.

### Memory and concentration

**Quiz Quiz Trade** by Spencer Kagan is a fantastic activity for memory. It also involves waiting your turn, being on your feet and moving, and supporting each other, three more good reasons for using it for with children who have ADHD.

- Prepare a set of cards with a question on one side and the answer on the other. Give each student one card.
- Get the students to stand up, put their hand up and pair up with someone else who has their hand up.
- Partner A shows Partner B the question. Partner B answers. Partner A praises if correct or coaches if incorrect.
- They switch roles and repeat the process.
- After thanking each other and exchanging cards, they put their hand up to find a new partner and start again with their new card.
- The activity ends after specified period of time.

This is an excellent activity for revision and review, but since the answers are provided, depending on the complexity of the subject matter, it can also be used for introducing new material. You don't always have to teach from the front. Give pupils the information in their hands and get them to teach each other. Peer

Structure group work carefully and give the child with ADHD tasks that will help them to stay focused



tutoring is an excellent strategy for ADHD.

### Programs to aid memory and concentration

**Captain's Log Personal Trainer** from BrainTrain offers 50 programs with more than 2,000 games targeting 20 different cognitive skills, including visual and auditory processing speed, conceptual reasoning, working memory and response inhibition. [www.braintrain.com](http://www.braintrain.com)

**Brain Fitness Pro Jr** for children aged 6-11 from MindSparke is a set of video games designed to boost focus and train memory, leading to improvements in academic performance and test-taking. <http://bit.ly/sc240-19>

**Fit Brains** comprises 40 brain-training games played on a mobile device to promote skills such as memory, processing speed, and visual-spatial recognition. The software tailors each exercise to a child's needs. [www.fitbrains.com](http://www.fitbrains.com)

**MyBrainSolutions** is an online suite of games and exercises which give individualised assessments and strategies to improve cognitive and emotional skills, including memory, focus, stress reduction, and positivity. [www.mybrainsolutions.com](http://www.mybrainsolutions.com)

**ACTIVATE™** from C8 Sciences enhances memory skills, improves the ability to pay attention, and boosts other cognitive skills through tasks like memorising sequences, completing patterns, task-switching, and sorting objects into categories. The version for home use comes with an additional physical exercise programme to be

followed three to five times a week. [www.c8sciences.com](http://www.c8sciences.com)

**Play Attention** teaches children to improve focus, ignore distractions, develop memory skills, and finish tasks. When the child is engaged, the brain emits a signal, which is monitored by an armband and transmitted to the computer. In this way, the child's mind controls the action as they play games and complete interactive activities. [www.playattention.com](http://www.playattention.com)

**BrainBeat** uses a metronome-like tool, along with a headset and hand gear. As children engage in the activities, they listen to beats, clap hands, and receive instant feedback through scoring, sounds and light cues. The activities are designed to improve focus, working memory and language processing skills. <https://brainbeat.com>

**ATENTIVmynd™** has a headband that measures attention levels. Children play a video game on a computer or mobile device, using their attention levels to make their moves. The idea is that playing the game helps them identify their 'attention muscle' and strengthen it. <http://atentiv.com>

**Myndlift** is a mobile neurofeedback app which uses brainwave measurements and visual/auditory feedback to improve attention and focus. As children play the games, the characters run faster or slower depending on the child's level of attention, giving them an incentive to pull back their mind when it starts wandering. It is designed to be supervised remotely by certified clinicians. Watch it in action on <http://bit.ly/sc240-20> or contact [inquiries@myndlift.com](mailto:inquiries@myndlift.com) to find out more. [www.myndlift.com](http://www.myndlift.com)