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Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
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COMPLEX LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES RESEARCH PROJECT (CLDD)

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

What is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised mainly by extreme inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. It is thought to result from a neurological dysfunction affecting various parts of the brain, including an imbalance in certain neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and serotonin. (Neurotransmitters carry information between cells).

What are the indicators of ADHD?

The three core features of ADHD may present themselves as follows in school:

Inattention	Hyperactivity	Impulsivity
• Appearing not to listen when spoken to • Easily distracted and forgetful • Difficulty in organising tasks and activities • Reluctant to engage in task • Making careless mistakes in work and other activities	• Difficulty keeping still; fidgeting with hands or feet • Climbing or running excessively • Talking excessively	• Interfering with what others are doing, in class and on the playground • Interrupting and shouting out • Difficulty with turn taking • Acting without thinking • Breaking rules • Little sense of danger.

Implications for teaching and learning

Difficulties for learners with ADHD are likely to include:

- sustaining attention in class
- gross and fine motor skills (particularly in boys)
- slowness in processing information and forming a response
- strong emotional reactions
- rapid movement of high intensity and high frequency
- appearing rude and careless, without thought for others
- social difficulties, including social isolation and possible exclusion from school
- a lack of reflection or anticipation of consequences
- challenging behaviours.

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It is important to be aware that students with ADHD often have some co-existing conditions, such as: autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, speech and language difficulties, anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), oppositional defiance disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD).

General approaches for supporting learners with ADHD

Students who are in large classes may be helped by spending time in a Nurture Group, if the school has one. This can be valuable in giving them a more individualised approach and the chance to develop the skills they need to work in a classroom situation.

Structured teaching approaches, such as TEACCH (the Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children), which is often used with students who are on the autism spectrum, may help them to know what is happening now and what will be coming next. Also, TEACCH uses visually-presented information, which can help to reinforce what is said.

Whether or not elements of TEACCH are used, a multisensory approach will help, which includes giving students the chance to handle objects and to be engaged in active learning. Some learners may find it helpful if they are allowed to have 'concentrators' or some small object to manipulate while listening and working.

Because of their difficulty in staying still, activities should be kept short and there should be opportunities for students to move around in class or to have short bursts of physical activity outside the classroom. This facilitates the coordination of their physical movements and aids the brain in developing neural connections.

Professionals will need to work in a transdisciplinary way when both assessing and planning individual learning pathways.

Strategies to support learners with ADHD

1. Allocate at least one person, with whom learners can develop a positive relationship, to act as a mentor, and address their academic and socialisation needs.

2. Allow extra processing time when asking questions, providing instructions or setting tasks.

3. Work in partnership with parents on appropriate positive approaches to identify and address the students' needs at school and at home.

4. Reduce distractions, including noise and visual stimuli, by giving consideration to where students sit and the environment around them.

5. Encourage learners to increase the time they are able to remain on task and to develop self-help skills and independence.

6. Support students by discussing their behaviour and the effect it has had on others, so that they begin to regulate their thinking and behaviour. Try to stay calm and model the behaviour you want to see.

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7. Use incident sheets to record serious incidents and check for patterns of behaviour. Work on one aspect of behaviour at a time.

8. Vary activities and allowing short breaks for physical activity, interspersed with times when they are expected to remain seated.

9. Make sure that there are opportunities for them to shine and good behaviour by praising or rewarding them when they are behaving well. Also, make sure that they experience success with their work, by using their strengths and their interests.

10. Be consistent and help them to follow the day's routines, using individual timetables (visual or written), diaries or planners. Help them to develop independence and to organise what they need for each lesson, using pictures or lists.

11. Break down instructions so that there is not too much to take in or remember. If in doubt, ask them to repeat back what they have been asked to do.

12. Consider how you can involve the learner themselves (e.g. by engaging them in negotiating their own learning) in making decisions about:
    a. personal targets
    b. preferred styles of learning
    c. preferred styles of accessing tasks
    d. assessment
    e. reflections
    f. what they can do for themselves to self-manage or regulate their responses – for example, helping them to learn to recognise symptoms of raised anxiety or sensory overload, and then enabling them to address this effectively; this may be by alerting someone to help them or by implementing strategies themselves. This may also have a beneficial impact on their self esteem.

Key references

A full reference list can be found on the Information Sheet relating to this project.

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