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UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING  
CHILDREN WITH ADHD

*Strategies for Teachers, Parents and Other Professionals*

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can be hard to include in a mainstream classroom, and managing their behaviour is often a challenge for parents and teachers. This book draws directly from real classroom and home experiences by exploring the reality of living with ADHD and identifies how effective management strategies can improve children's behaviour in and out of the classroom. The book adopts an inter-disciplinary approach, to provide teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), newly qualified teachers, teaching assistants, learning mentors and student teachers working with children who have ADHD, with:

- strategies to deal with disruptive behaviours
- ways to channel children's positive characteristics
- advice on how teachers can support and guide parents
- behaviour management techniques to promote positive behaviour
- advice on collaborative working that will help teachers to build partnerships with other professionals.

The case studies incorporated into the text of this book are a composite of numerous children in various settings and are not specific to any one child, practitioner or setting; they are based on research undertaken for Lesley Hughes's PhD thesis at the University of Bradford. The names of all interviewees have been changed in order to respect the privacy of individuals involved.

The purpose of the research was to understand the reality of day-to-day living with ADHD, so that the knowledge and insight of individuals could inform the rhetoric theory that guides treatment and management programmes. Keeping in mind the recent government paper, *Every Child Matters* (DFES, 2003), which specifies, amongst other things, that whatever the child's background or their circumstances they are eligible to receive the support they need to be healthy, enjoy and achieve, and make a positive contribution, it is imperative therefore that children with ADHD have their needs understood, and met. However, considering the sensitivity of doing research with children, and especially children with behaviour and attention difficulties, an 'informant style' of interview was used to retrieve information: this is similar to the cognitive interview technique described by Roy (1991). The process, when related to the child's behaviour, encourages the child to recall any aspect of their behaviour occurring on that day. Reliability of the child's accounts came from obtaining reports from parents and teachers

about the child's behaviour. Although the detail of the accounts will vary from that of the child's, the general observations of the event will be similar. In addition, the accounts from parents and teachers can be used to gain access to the child's deeper levels of thinking by allowing the researcher to use this information to encourage the child to elaborate on specific events occurring in the classroom or in the home.

The book draws on the authors' knowledge, and research experiences, to provide readers with insight not only about ADHD, but also about the lives of the children with the diagnosis, and the impact their home and school environment has on them and their behaviour. The authors take this information and provide readers with approaches and models that will enable them to rethink their approaches to managing and supporting children with ADHD.

Throughout the book there is an emphasis on the importance of collaborative working for achieving and maintaining support for children, and, where appropriate, examples from the research study explain how these models can be implemented in practice.

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*For ease of reading the terms in the glossary are in **bold** when they first appear in the text.*



## Understanding ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (**ADHD**) is a diagnosis of the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1994) (see Appendix). It describes behavioural symptoms of **inattention, impulsiveness** and **hyperactivity** that are presented to a degree that significantly interferes with a person's family and peer relations as well as their educational and/or occupational functioning. This chapter focuses on:

- ◆ ADHD: its nature and origins
  - Inattentiveness
  - Impulsiveness
  - Hyperactivity
  - Correlates of ADHD
- ◆ The evolution of ADHD into an educational issue
  - Evidence base for ADHD: **cognitive** process
  - Evidence base for ADHD: **bio-psychosocial** construct
  - ADHD and cognitive ability
  - Assessment and diagnosis of ADHD
- ◆ What children, parents and teachers say about ADHD
  - Case studies
- ◆ Points to remember
- ◆ Key points to remember

### ADHD: its nature and origins

There are, according to current diagnostic criteria, three types of ADHD seen in children, the:

- hyperactive/impulsive type
- inattentive type
- combined hyperactive-impulsive/inattentive type.



## ADHD and Schools

In this chapter, we consider the relationship between ADHD and schools. Central to the discussion that follows is the issue of **inclusive education**. After an exploration of the meaning and implications of inclusive education, as it is commonly defined and operationalized, we return to the day-to-day experience of our case study children, their parents and teachers. The aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which these pupils can be said to be ‘included’ in the schools they attend.

- ◆ Inclusive education – what does it mean?
- ◆ The experience of schooling
  - Case studies
- ◆ The educational challenges of ADHD
  - Should children with ADHD be in mainstream schools?
  - Defining **educational engagement**
- ◆ Key points to remember

### Inclusive education – what does it mean?

Children with ADHD often present a significant challenge to teachers in mainstream schools. For this reason some teachers are not unsympathetic to the demand made by some parents that their children should be educated in specialist schools for children with ADHD. There are, however, good reasons why this proposal should be questioned. The education systems in the UK have moved a long way since the 1940s when children who were deemed ‘handicapped’ were placed in segregated educational provision, under the direction of medical officers. Since the 1980s it has been a legal requirement that the education of all children should be in the hands of qualified educationists, and that educational provision for children and young people should conform to a common set of quality standards. This applies in modified form to children who are not in schools, owing to illness or because they are incarcerated.

This universal entitlement to a broad and balanced education means that children’s educational needs are the primary concern when it comes to determining the educational provision that is

made for them (DES, 1978). Within the logic of this framework, the presence of a formally diagnosed disability is only of educational relevance if it can be demonstrated to hinder a child's access to standard educational provision. In these circumstances, local education authorities (LEAs) are required by law to make additional provision, with a view to enabling the access to his or her educational entitlement. Where it is demonstrated that the extent of the additional provision goes beyond what can reasonably be expected of a mainstream school, LEAs are required to fund the child's placement in government-approved alternative provision, such as a special school or unit.

The positive side of this situation is that LEAs and mainstream schools have a duty to make all reasonable efforts to accommodate all pupils to a degree that enables them to take advantage of their entitlement to state-funded education. The down side of this laudable and socially just intention resides in the difficulties of deciding what is reasonable and adequate in terms of the level of access to educational services. Associated with this is the problem of determining when a school's and local authority's efforts are at an acceptable, adequate level.

This is a controversial area that begins with the agreeable contention that any society which values social justice and equality of opportunity must make social inclusion one of its primary aims. Furthermore, it is argued that social inclusion is achieved through the identification and removal of barriers to social participation that are experienced by socially marginalized groups and individuals. Education is a major sub-system in such societies. It is a vehicle for socialization, the development of individuals' sense of identity and the fostering of skills necessary for active, constructive and rewarding engagement in the local and global, social and economic community. It follows that an inclusive society must have, as a key component, an inclusive approach to education that prioritizes equality of educational provision and access to that provision (see Booth and Ainscow, 1998; Dyson et al., 2002; Sebba and Sachdev, 1997).

It is when we attempt to translate these highly desirable values and justifiable observations into policies that can be implemented in practical ways that we encounter difficulties. The major difficulty relates to how we define inclusive education. A highly dominant perspective equates inclusive education with the placement of children in their local mainstream schools. The argument that follows on from this is that although many mainstream schools have, at present, a limited capacity for meeting the educational needs of all the potential students in their immediate localities, they should work towards extending their capacity to include as many students as possible through the development of policies and practices that enable them to identify and cater for diversity. It is for this reason that inclusive education is often referred to as a 'process' rather than a 'state' (DfEE, 1997; Sebba and Sachdev, 1997).

The problem with this definition of inclusion is the difficulty that is created when attempts are made to put it into practice and to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation.

Because inclusion is a 'process' rather than a 'state', an emphasis is placed on the progress that is being made in a given school towards becoming more inclusive. One of the most widely used tools for evaluating the effectiveness of a school's progress towards becoming more inclusive is the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth et al., 2000). This is a document that has been widely distributed amongst schools in the UK as a guide for developing and evaluating inclusive practices. The authors of this document state:

*... inclusion is a set of never ending processes. It involves the specification of the direction for change. It is relevant to any school however inclusive or exclusive its current cultures, policies and practices. It requires schools to engage in critical examination of what can be done to increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students within the school and its locality. (Booth et al., 2000: 12)*

Whilst this statement reflects a realistic view that mainstream schools differ widely in their current level of inclusiveness, the exclusive focus on mainstream schools as the major vehicle for promoting social inclusion is a serious flaw in the inclusion argument. Large-scale studies of inclusion tend to focus on the location of pupils, rather than the quality of pupils' educational experience (Norwich, 1993). Governments, and some researchers, seem to equate the success of their inclusion policies with the numbers of pupils placed in mainstream schools as opposed to non-mainstream settings. The smaller-scale studies that have focused on the nature and quality of the educational experience of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream and segregated settings, on the other hand, present a more complex picture. For example, studies of students with social and emotional behavioural difficulties (SEBD) in the UK and the USA have repeatedly shown that small-scale, specialist provision is associated with the development of improvements in pupils' social and emotional functioning, improved educational engagement and higher levels of pupil satisfaction (Cooper, 1993; 2001)

It is important to acknowledge that there is evidence of some mainstream schools being successful in these areas too (Cooper et al., 2000), and more may be achieved as a result of *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2003). However, at present most of the schools successful in including pupils with SEN, and in particular SEBD, are associated with low socio-economic status and social deprivation as well as low educational attainment (Cooper et al., 2000). Educational achievement is still highly correlated with socio-economic status (see for example, O'Neil Rand Corporation, 2005; Webber and Butler, 2006). The highest concentration of pupils with SEN therefore tends to be found in mainstream schools located in relatively socially deprived geographic areas. It follows that these schools have relatively low levels of academic achievement, which in turn make them unpopular with parents who have the cultural and economic capital that enables them to make informed choices about the schools to which they choose to send their children.

The problem with mainstreaming is that it assumes that so-called 'mainstream' schools share a quality standard and uniformity of educational opportunity that make them superior to non-mainstream provision. These are patently erroneous assumptions. In the UK, for example, the attainment gap between pupils in the best and worst state secondary schools, as measured by examination performance at age 16, indicates that pupils in the best schools are approximately five times more likely to achieve results that will qualify them to pursue an educational career that may lead to higher education than pupils from the so-called 'worst' schools. Furthermore, when we look at access to the most prestigious higher educational institutions, these will tend to draw their students from the most privileged schools.

These observations form the background to the rest of this chapter which considers the educational experience of those children who were the subjects of the research study reported in this book.