

West Essex Schools Toolkit

Supporting Differences in Attention, Hyperactivity and Impulsivity

This toolkit is for teachers and school staff who are supporting a child or young person where there are concerns about:

- attention and concentration
- activity level and movement
- impulse control or emotional regulation

Children do not need a diagnosis for schools to begin support. NHS guidance is clear that support should be needs-led, proactive and started early, using a graduated response.

Key principles for West Essex schools

- Support is needs-led, not diagnosis-led
- Behaviour is a form of communication
- Many small adjustments can make a significant difference
- Consistency and predictability reduce stress
- Strengths must be recognised alongside needs

These principles align with NHS classroom guidance, ADHD Foundation education guidance, and West Essex neurodevelopmental pathways.

What teachers might notice in school

Children with differences in attention, hyperactivity or impulsivity may:

- appear distracted, forgetful or overwhelmed
- struggle to start or finish tasks
- need to move, fidget or leave their seat
- act quickly, call out or struggle to wait
- have strong emotional reactions

These behaviours reflect differences in executive function and regulation, not lack of effort.

What schools should do first

1. Observe patterns

- Is it persistent?
- Is it impacting learning or relationships?
- Is it seen across lessons?

2. Adjust the environment

Quality First Teaching strategies should always be the first step.

[SEND advice and guidance: Ordinarily Available \(OA\) | Essex Schools Infolink](#)

3. Review and personalise

If needs persist, move to SEND Support / One Plan without waiting for diagnosis.

[Search | Essex Schools Infolink](#)



Strategies to Support Children with Inattention in School

Children with inattention may struggle to maintain focus, follow instructions, organise their work and sustain effort.

Support should be needs-led and implemented without waiting for diagnosis.

1. Give clear, simple and structured instructions

- Use short sentences and avoid multi-step verbal instructions
- Deliver instructions verbally and visually
- Ask the child to repeat back the first step only

This reduces working-memory load and supports processing for pupils with inattention.

2. Break tasks into smaller, manageable steps

- Chunk work into clearly defined stages
- Provide checklists or task cards
- Allow the child to complete one section at a time before moving on

Breaking tasks down supports task initiation, persistence and completion for children with ADHD-type inattention.

3. Use visual supports consistently

- Visual timetables and schedules
- “Now / Next / Then” boards
- Written success criteria

Visual supports help compensate for difficulties with memory, sequencing and attention regulation.

4. Reduce environmental distractions

- Seat the pupil away from doors, windows and high-traffic areas
- Limit visual clutter on desks and walls near the pupil

- Be mindful of background noise and sensory input

Children with inattention often struggle to filter irrelevant stimuli, which impacts focus and learning.

5. Use frequent, planned check-ins

- Briefly check understanding at key points
- Use non-verbal signals to redirect attention
- Prompt with supportive questions (e.g. *"What's your next step?"*)

Regular check-ins support sustained attention and reduce disengagement.

6. Allow additional processing and response time

- Avoid rushing the child to respond
- Allow pauses before expecting answers
- Recognise that slower output does not mean lack of understanding

Children with inattention may need more time to organise thoughts and initiate responses.

7. Build in movement and regulation opportunities

- Short movement breaks between tasks
- Opportunities to stand, stretch or move discreetly
- Classroom jobs that allow purposeful movement

Movement can improve attention regulation and cognitive engagement, not distract from learning.

8. Use positive, immediate feedback

- Praise specific effort, not just outcomes
- Acknowledge partial success and improvement
- Provide feedback close to the task

Immediate feedback supports motivation and sustained attention for pupils with ADHD-related inattention.

9. Support organisation explicitly

- Help organise equipment and workspaces
- Use colour-coding or subject-specific folders
- Provide end-of-lesson reminders for packing up

Organisation difficulties are a core feature of inattention and benefit from explicit adult scaffolding.

10. Plan support through SEND Support where needed

If difficulties with attention persist:

- Record strategies in a SEND Support / One Plan
- Review regularly with parents and the SENCO
- Continue support regardless of diagnostic status

NHS guidance emphasises that school support should not be delayed while awaiting assessment.

Strategies to Support Children with Hyperactivity in School

Children with hyperactivity may have high levels of physical energy, a need to move, or difficulty remaining seated. These behaviours reflect differences in self-regulation and arousal, not defiance or poor behaviour choices.

Support should be proactive and embedded within everyday classroom practice.

1. Build planned movement into the school day

- Schedule short movement breaks between learning tasks
- Use stretch breaks, standing activities or movement-based learning
- Plan transitions carefully to avoid long periods of sitting

Movement helps children regulate their attention and energy levels and can improve engagement with learning.

2. Provide flexible seating options

- Allow standing desks, wobble cushions or floor seating
- Permit discreet movement while listening (e.g. rocking, foot movement)
- Avoid insisting on stillness when learning is happening

NHS Trust guidance recognises that physical movement can support, rather than disrupt, learning for pupils with hyperactivity.

3. Use predictable routines and structure

- Consistent lesson structure and classroom expectations
- Clear visual timetables and daily schedules
- Advance warnings before changes or transitions

Predictability reduces physical restlessness linked to uncertainty and cognitive overload.

4. Reduce unnecessary waiting time

- Avoid long periods lining up or sitting idle
- Give purposeful activities while waiting
- Prepare tasks and resources in advance

Long waits increase dysregulation and restlessness for children with hyperactivity.

5. Allocate purposeful classroom roles

- Jobs involving movement (handing out books, collecting resources)
- Rotated responsibilities throughout the day
- Opportunities to help appropriately
- Time out card

Purposeful movement supports regulation and self-esteem while maintaining inclusion.

6. Create calm, low-stimulus learning spaces

- Reduce excessive noise, visual clutter and sensory overload
- Offer access to a calmer workspace when needed
- Use low-key prompts rather than repeated verbal reminders

Overstimulation can increase hyperactive behaviours and reduce self-control.

7. Praise regulation and effort, not compliance

- Acknowledge when pupils manage their movement successfully

- Reinforce attempts at self-control
- Focus feedback on effort and strategies used

Positive, specific feedback supports motivation and self-regulation. [\[ncmh.info\]](https://www.ncmh.info), [\[bbc.co.uk\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk)

Strategies to Support Children with Impulsivity in School

Impulsivity involves difficulty pausing, waiting, or thinking through actions and emotional responses. It reflects differences in inhibitory control and emotional regulation, not deliberate behaviour. [\[adhduk.co.uk\]](https://www.adhduk.co.uk), [\[youtube.com\]](https://www.youtube.com)

1. Teach and model pause strategies

- Explicitly teach “stop – think – do”
- Use visual prompts and cue cards
- Model thinking aloud before decisions

Children with impulsivity benefit from explicit teaching of self-regulation skills.

2. Use clear, consistent boundaries

- Keep rules short, simple and visual
- Apply consequences predictably and calmly
- Ensure all staff respond consistently

Consistency supports learning and reduces impulsive responses.

3. Reduce opportunities for impulsive triggers

- Minimise waiting times and unstructured moments
- Provide pre-planned activities during transitions
- Anticipate known trigger points and plan ahead

Impulsivity increases when cognitive load or emotional stress is high. [\[bbc.co.uk\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk)

4. Respond calmly and neutrally

- Use a calm tone of voice
- Avoid raising volume or emotional escalation

- Focus on repair and learning, not punishment

Adult emotional regulation strongly influences pupil regulation.

5. Reinforce positive behaviour immediately

- Give instant feedback for appropriate waiting or turn-taking
- Praise specific behaviours (“You waited your turn”)
- Use reinforcement rather than delayed sanctions

Immediate reinforcement is more effective than delayed consequences for impulsivity.

6. Provide emotional regulation tools

- Access to calm-down cards or time-out spaces (used proactively)
- Breathing or grounding techniques
- Adult check-ins at emotionally demanding moments

Emotional dysregulation is a recognised component of ADHD and impulsivity. [\[ncmh.info\]](https://www.ncmh.info),

7. Avoid negative responses

- Do not punish behaviours linked to neurological differences
- Avoid public shaming or repeated sanctions
- Teach skills rather than consequences

NHS Trust guidance advises against punitive approaches for behaviours beyond the child’s control.

8. Use SEND Support where impulsivity persists

- Record strategies and outcomes
- Work collaboratively with parents and SENCO
- Review regularly and adapt support

Persistent impulsivity should be addressed through structured support rather than behaviour escalation.

Key Messages for Schools

- Hyperactivity and impulsivity can be neurodevelopmental
- Regulation is supported through structure, movement and calm adults
- Support should be early, consistent and strengths-based
- Diagnosis is not required to meet need

West Essex Local Pathways

If strategies have been used and differences are still causing an impairment, please discuss with care giver/parent about referring to the ADHD pathway. See below

West Essex ADHD Service

West Essex Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Service (ADHD) - Essex Child and Family

(Covers Harlow, Epping, Uttlesford)

Assessment is considered where:

- Referrals will need to show evidence that needs are seen across home and school to be considered
- school strategies have been tried and reviewed.

References and Webpage Links

1. NHS – *ADHD in Children and Young People*

Overview of ADHD, including inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity, and how schools can support children and young people.

- NHS webpage:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/adhd-children-teenagers/>

2. East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust – *ADHD Educational Interventions and Strategies*

Detailed, evidence-based classroom strategies addressing inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

- ADHD Educational Interventions and Strategies by Integrated Service for Learning (ISL):
👉 [ADHD Educational Interventions and Strategies \(PDF\)](#)

3. Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust – *School ADHD Information Booklet*

Guidance on ADHD presentations, executive-function difficulties, reasonable adjustments and strengths-based approaches in school.

- [School ADHD information booklet - Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust](#)
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4. ADHD Foundation

Teacher-facing video explaining inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity and how movement supports learning and regulation.

- Vimeo video:
[ADHD and the classroom: why is sitting still so hard? | Videos & Movies on Vimeo](#)
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Local Pathways – West Essex

7. Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service – *West Essex ADHD Service*

Local information on ADHD assessment pathways, including expectations that schools implement strategies prior to referral.

- West Essex ADHD service page:
<https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/services/west-essex-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-service-adhd/>
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8. Twinkl – *ADHD Classroom Strategies for Teachers*

Teacher-friendly overview of inclusive classroom strategies aligned with Quality First Teaching.

- YouTube video:
[ADHD Classroom Strategies for Teachers - YouTube](#)
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Child- and Family-Friendly Public Resources

9. National centre for mental health: Let's talk about ADHD

- YouTube animation:
[Let's Talk About ADHD – NCMH](#)
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10. CHADD

Lived-experience perspectives from young people, promoting strengths-based understanding.

[Understanding ADHD from a Strengths-Based Perspective - CHADD](#)

11. BBC Bitesize – *ADHD Parent Toolkit*

Trusted guidance for parents and carers covering ADHD, diagnosis, and support at home and school.

- BBC Bitesize resource:
[SEND tips and advice - BBC Parents' Toolkit - BBC Bitesize](#)