

How can different
behavioural
management
techniques positively
influence the learning
experiences of
children with ADHD?

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Identification of Research Problem

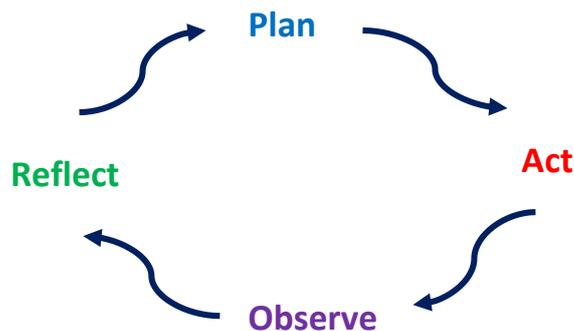
There are a high proportion of SEN students within the school in which I currently teach, all of these are so varied and we have a wide range of them. This, combined with mixed ability classes creates some very challenging teaching/learning environments.

ADHD affects everyone differently, but I have noticed that these students seem to struggle the most at finding a coping mechanism within lessons that will aid them to control their behaviour enough to enable both them to be able to concentrate to learn and also to not be a distraction to the rest of the class for them to be able to learn.

This is why I have chosen the question 'How can different behavioural management techniques positively influence the learning experiences of children with ADHD?' for this action research project. I aim to try and find some workable solutions to this problem.

Action Research

Action research is a study that is carried out in the course of an activity or occupation to improve the methods and approach of those involved. Its concept was derived by Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). It is an active rather than a passive study, and is cyclical in nature, with the purpose of everyone within the organisation it is being carried out in having the same end goal in improving the problem. The stages of the action research process is easily displayed using the action research cycle:



Within the planning stage you identify an area or problem to be studied. Within the act stage you develop a plan of action of how you are going to collect data for this problem. Within the observe stage you collect data, interpret it and analyse it. Within the reflect stage you draw conclusions from the data gathered and look at how to adjust current practice from this. You then implement this new plan and, if needs be, start the whole process again.

Action research can be carried out on a range of levels, from individual teacher research right the way through to district-wide action research. For my action research project I am dealing with something that I have an issue with in one of my classes, but I also know that other teachers have a similar issue within some of their classes. This puts my research into the collaborative action research category; although I will be carrying it out on my own my findings may well help other teachers going forward.

There are several implications whilst carrying out this collaborative action research; for this I require the aid of the SENCo to make sure the methods I am using are not breaching anything with regards to students' privacy. I will also require the input of the principal and vice-principal to ensure I comply with the school ethos and policies whilst conducting my action research project. I am also aware that the different behavioural management techniques may not have a positive effect on some/all of the students within the classroom, and if this is the case I need to adapt as and when this occurs. I need to inform teachers of those students who are undergoing this research of what is happening so that they can enforce it and give me feedback, as well as the potential for a negative effect. I may not get much or any feedback from some of the teachers, however I may also get some invaluable feedback to aid me with this.

Current research analysis

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) originates from the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, 1994. It was first proposed as a medical condition back in 1902 by George Still, an English paediatrician. Over the 92 years between these documents the medical diagnosis of ADHD has changed considerably due to both research into the condition and medical advancements. This has led to three main types of ADHD:

- 1) Predominantly Inattentive Type (PIT) – symptoms include a lack of attention to detail, being easily distracted, does not seem to listen, disorganised and resisting engaging with tasks.
- 2) Hyperactive Impulsive Type (HIT) – symptoms include fidgeting, leaving seat and/or classroom, constantly 'on the go', talks excessively, difficulty writing and interrupting.
- 3) Combined Type (CT) – symptoms of both the predominantly inattentive and hyperactive impulse types.

To be diagnosed with ADHD a person needs to meet several criteria:

- A minimum of 6 symptoms from either the PIT or HIT list
- Show these symptoms for a minimum of 6 months
- Have showed these symptoms before the age of 7
- Had these symptoms in more than one place (for example at home and at school)
- Have impaired social/academic functioning
- The professional who is diagnosing the potential ADHD needs to observe these behaviours first hand

It is estimated that 1%-6% of school-age people have ADHD, which is broken down as such:

- HIT - boys outnumber girls 4:1
- PIT – boys and girls are roughly equal
- Approximately 80% of ADHD students are behind in at least one academic subject
- Approximately 25% of ADHD students will end up being expelled from secondary school owing to serious misconduct

This means that within the UK there are roughly 1-2 students within every classroom that have ADHD, so every teacher should be aware of the condition and how to manage it effectively. It should also be noted that ADHD overlaps greatly with other SEN categories of learning difficulties such as Asperger's, dyslexia, dyspraxia, giftedness and emotional and behaviour difficulties.

Because ADHD causes a child to have such erratic behaviour it can easily get overlooked and thought that a child is just being lazy or deliberately disruptive, as they can spend one lesson working solidly and totally focussed and then the next be completely off task, argumentative and disruptive. To add to this there does not seem to be a set pattern for this behaviour either.

Structure has been shown to be highly important to people with ADHD. They need a set routine that changes as little as possible, as this helps them be settled due to the familiarisation and consistency of it. This will, in turn, enable to student to manage their time better.

Students with ADHD do have positive behaviours, not just the negative ones shown by their condition. These positive behaviours are being creative, flexible, enthusiastic, spontaneous, energetic and driven. These can be easily overlooked by the negative behaviours that they display, which can lead to people believing that students with ADHD do not have any positive qualities.

It is a difficult condition for both parents and teachers to manage within their own environments. Both can become frustrated and exhausted trying to manage their children/students with ADHD. It is important wherever possible that both parties are consistent with their rewards and sanctions, so that structure and routine is there for the student with ADHD.

Medicating ADHD is an option given to everyone who is diagnosed with the condition; although this is not the only treatment option available it is the most common. It is something that will not cure the condition, but it aids in managing some of the behaviours of the person with ADHD; some days it will be more effective than others, and there is no pattern to when this happens. You can either get short-acting tablets, which last a few hours, or long-acting tablets, which last 8-12 hours.

There are some drawbacks to taking medication, the main one being a change to a person's personality, which can include them becoming withdrawn and they may even develop symptoms of obsessive-compulsiveness. They also raise the heart rate, blood pressure, can effect brain development and can cause psychiatric problems. Medication is most effective when combined with other more controllable methods such as regular exercise, healthy eating and regular sleep.

At the moment it seems a very trial and error way of managing ADHD behaviour, as there can be many different triggers and behaviours. This makes it difficult to manage as a teacher, and this is why I am carrying out this action research project – so that we can try and find some manageable methods for ADHD to make classroom behaviour better and therefore make the students learning experience both better and more effective.

Research plan

For my project I plan to carry out the following research:

- Questionnaires for teaching staff with relation to teaching ADHD students. (1 week)
- Questionnaires for students with ADHD to gauge individual coping mechanisms and triggers. (1 week)
- From these answers, create a variety of intervention strategies to use with the students. (1 week)
- Trail each method, using 2 per student. Take notes in own lessons of positives and negatives. Get other teachers, where possible, to take similar notes in their classes and pass them on to me. (2 weeks per method)
- Obtain feedback from teachers and students (1 week)
- Feedback information to SLG and maybe permanently implement some if they have been found to work effectively with certain students. (2 days)

I have given these timescales as although the questionnaires will only take a few minutes to complete I need to allow time for the staff to fit it into their busy schedules and the students normally only have one session a week with their support staff member, so this allows for time for them to carry out the questionnaire too. Once I have collected the questionnaires in, I have given myself a week so that I can analyse the answers, come up with some strategies to put in place and create anything relevant for these to be implemented. With using the chosen strategies I have given 2 weeks each time as I believe that one week is not enough to gauge any positive or negative impacts, as they have to adapt and engage with each method. I have given a week for the feedback for the same reasons as I have given a week for the questionnaires to be completed. I only need around an hour after this to present my findings to the senior leadership group, however as they are so busy I have given a few days so that I can book in some time to meet with them.

To protect the confidentiality of anyone taking part in giving information with regards to this project, all staff and student questionnaires are anonymous. Neither students nor staff have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable with, and the students will answer. The students will also fill these out with their support member of staff as they will feel more comfortable carrying out their questionnaires with them rather than myself.

All questionnaires were given to the SENCo to check for suitability before they went out to the students and staff, to make sure that they were appropriate and did not pose any potential ethical issues.

Activity	Week							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Questionnaires – staff								
Questionnaires – students								
Plan appropriate intervention strategies								
Trial methods 1 & 2								
Trial methods 3 & 4								
Feedback from staff and students								
Feedback to SLG								

Methodologies

When conducting an action research project you need to make sure that your research is something concise, meaningful and has not already been answered. The question cannot simply have a yes/no answer, and must be something that as a teacher you can actually investigate and be relevant to you and your teaching practice.

There are many ways of collecting data for your action research project. These include interviews, notes, meetings, records, questionnaires, photographs and samples of students' work. The different methods depend on the topic/question you are researching. For example, because my research is to do with behaviour of certain students it is not something that can be measured quantitatively, so the data I am collecting will have to be qualitative (observed rather than measured).

You should use a minimum of three different methods for data collection, so that you get a good overall view, as if you use just two methods then they could contradict each other and you would not give you anything you can draw conclusions from. For my research project I 'm gathering data by questionnaires, observing behaviour inside the classroom and report cards.

Once I have collected the data it can be analysed in a variety of ways; I can group it by gender, age of students, the behaviour in different subjects, days of the week and how many students are within the class in these lessons. I can then see if there are any general and/or individual trends from this data. From this analysis I can present it to the SENCo and senior leadership team to see if there are any effective methods discovered that can be implemented within the school system.

Data results & analysis

Student surveys

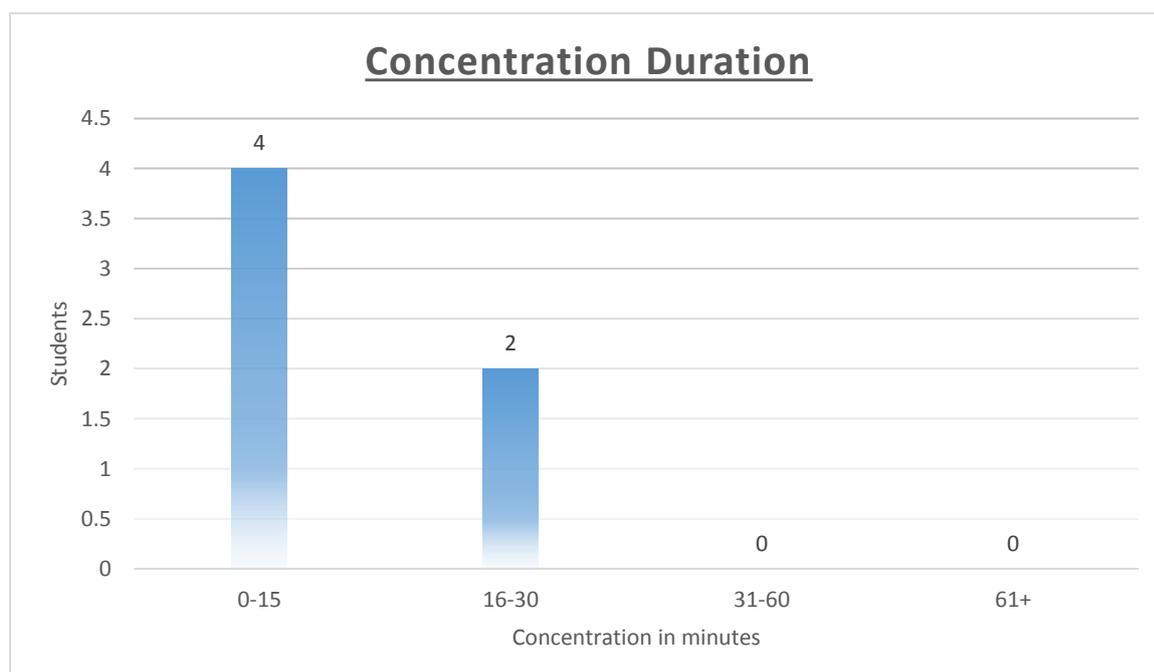
The results from the students' surveys show that they are affected by noise levels within the classroom; it causes them to become distracted by it and want to get involved, no matter what the distraction may be.

Their current coping mechanisms are either nothing or using headphones when allowed. Although they know when their behaviour is getting unacceptable, they seem to not really know how to control their behaviour to make it better. This reinforces the need for this action research to be carried out, so that in future these and other students will have a source of coping mechanisms to try and see what works best for their own ADHD traits and behaviours.

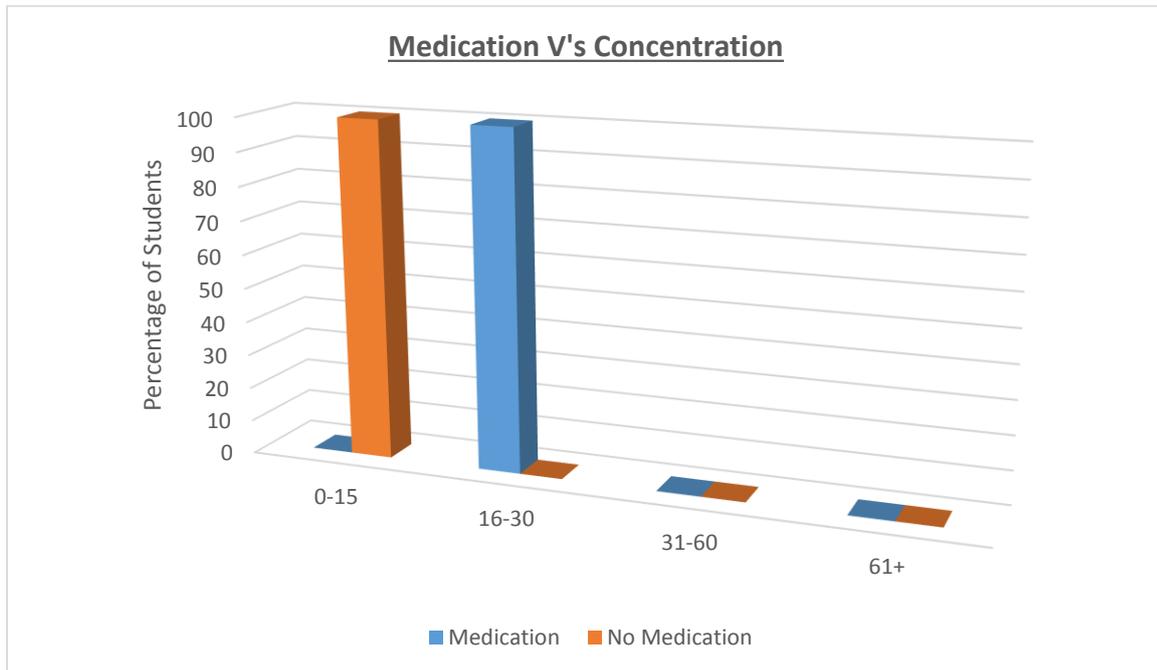
None of the students were able to identify what makes their behaviour worse, however two-thirds of them were able to identify their strengths, which means they are able to see positives within themselves and not just solely focus on the negativity they feel they have with their ADHD. This is a pleasant outcome of the surveys, as the students often negatively about themselves due to their condition.

Although all students surveyed have been offered medication, only one student takes it. The others choose not to take it because they do not want to be controlled by their ADHD or let it prevent them from achieving their ambitions.

The time they can focus in lessons are as such:



There is a direct correlation to students who take medication and their increased concentration time in class:



This shows that the students who take medication for their ADHD can concentrate for twice as long as those who do not take anything. The taking of medication is something that is a personal choice for each student and is something that we cannot control as a school, however the findings are interesting and telling nonetheless.

Staff surveys

The results from the staff surveys showed that there are similar behaviours within students with ADHD behaviour, although there are a lot of different ones. Common behaviours highlighted are:

- Being off task
- Distracted by others and objects around them
- Lack of focus
- Attention seeking
- Requirement of constant supervision/intervention
- Short temper/aggressive/argumentative
- Poor organisation
- Easily frustrated
- Fidgeting & out of seat
- Noisy/outbursts/swearing

There is not going to be one method to deal with such a variety of behaviours, however I aim to try out some methods developed from what works well and poorly for staff at the moment with those who have ADHD within their classroom environment. The table below shows both positive and negative management techniques tried so far:

<u>Positive techniques</u>	<u>Negative techniques</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mini tasks ▪ Running errands to break up activities ▪ Clear rewards ▪ Distractions (toys, stress ball, etc.) ▪ 'Wacky' alternatives (writing on walls, posters on the floor, etc.) ▪ Given instructions on an individual basis ▪ Ignore attention seeking behaviour ▪ Be clear about what you want them to stop doing ▪ Praise positive behaviour ▪ Relaxed atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Threat of punishment ▪ Raised voice ▪ Invading personal space ▪ Excessive attention ▪ Embarrassing them in front of others ▪ Backing them into a corner ▪ Arbitrary commands with no explanation ▪ If the classroom atmosphere is either too loud or too quiet ▪ Any form of confrontation ▪ Shouting at them

From this data I am going to trial the following methods within the classroom for the students with ADHD who have agreed to take part in this action research project:

- 1) Having something to fiddle with – I will obtain some small toys for this purpose.
- 2) Ignore any attention seeking behaviour
- 3) Promote and enforce positive rewards for staying on task and focussed – look at sweets or school points.
- 4) Allow the use of headphones to listen to music whilst working on tasks – permission of the teacher.
- 5) Give them time out when behaviour is escalating out of control – use a card and time limit for each time out.
- 6) Intervention – have them taken out of class and taught by someone else.

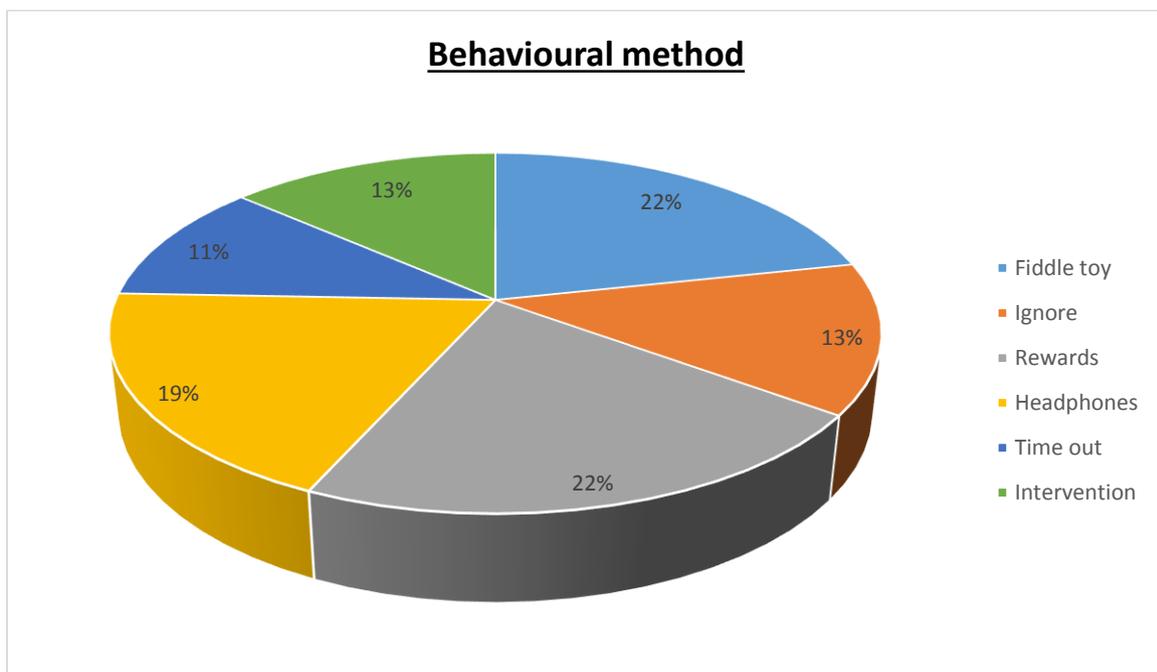
Results from trialled methods

- 1) Having something to fiddle with:
For something so basic this actually worked incredibly well. For all students it helped keep them more focused because they were able to channel their fidgeting through the rubber toy rather than getting up out their seat and distracting others. This helped the students be more settled within their classes; however, on occasion when their behaviour was uncontrollable they threw the toy at others, which resulted in them having to be removed from the classroom. Also, although it helped settle the students in general it was not enough to prevent them from getting distracted by other students in the class or the noise level.
- 2) Ignore any attention seeking behaviour:
This method had mixed results. For some students it reduced their disruption and noise levels, however for others it just compounded their attention seeking ways and caused massive issues with unsettling the rest of the class. It even caused some students to get angry because they were being ignored, which lead to swearing and them being aggressive.
- 3) Promote and enforce positive rewards for staying on task and focussed:
This generally had a positive outcome on the students' behaviour. They liked to be praised for doing well and have something to work towards. The reward of positive school points worked well with them, as did the reward of sweets for having a good week of lessons. The only time this didn't work was when students' were unable to control their ADHD behaviour, and there was no reasoning with them. It was evident that they did not want to be acting up, however they were unable to be in control of their actions. This only happened with the non-medicated students.
- 4) Allow the use of headphones to listen to music whilst working on tasks:
Having access to technology is part of the school's ethos, as the students are treated like young adults and given the means to carry out research themselves for various topics within the curriculum subjects. To this end it means that because the students have tablet devices they have easy access to music within lessons. Having the option to use headphones whilst working on a task is something that was given to everyone in the class, not just the students with ADHD. It had a massive impact; all students got on with more work than they normally would, even those who chose not to listen to music. I feel this is because the classroom was much more settled and quieter so those who were usually disruptive were distracted and 'in their own world' so were able to concentrate on the tasks they were carrying out more, which, in turn, let those who were capable of being settled and working usually anyway, get on with their work in peace.
- 5) Give them time out when behaviour is escalating out of control:
I did not find giving students time out of lessons to be very effective. They know that their behaviour is getting unmanageable and asked to leave, however once removed from the classroom environment/situation they did not know how to calm themselves down. None of the students could work out a coping mechanism, so when they were reintegrated within the classroom their behaviour was no better.

6) Intervention:

To try and help them focus, the students with ADHD, as well as others within the class who struggle to concentrate, were taken out of the normal class and taught the same lessons by someone else. This was good for those left in the class as they were able to focus and carry out their work without any distractions and they got more focus from the teacher due to them not having to deal with behavioural issues. However, the ADHD students still achieved a similar amount of work as to when they are in their normal classroom, and by taking them out they felt that they were being isolated and treated differently because of their ADHD, which they did not like. This stems back to the students' not wanting ADHD to run their lives and make them be treated differently from everyone else.

The pie chart below shows the effectiveness of all the different ADHD behavioural classroom methods used:



Conclusions of research

There are a wide range of behaviours that are displayed within people with ADHD, and each person can have multiple behaviours. This can make it very difficult to be able to manage within a classroom environment. Although the students vary in their own combination of behaviours, the negative management techniques highlighted on the staff questionnaires seem to have a negative impact on all ADHD students, no matter what their behaviour traits are. During the action research project I saw this when a few teachers confronted students with ADHD and they both reacted negatively to this. So, although the types of behaviours shown in individuals seems to vary greatly, the reactions from negative techniques used are similar.

None of the students knew what make their ADHD behaviour worse, which i believe is linked with them not being able to come up with their own coping mechanism for when their behaviour does deteriorate during lessons, even though they know when it is getting worse. Those on medication had greater concentration in lessons than those without, however, only the students can decide if they wish to take medication for it, and i cannot fault them for wanting to stay medication free so that they can try and achieve their ambitions in life rather than being controlled by their ADHD.

With regards to the behaviour methods trialled within this project, some of them worked better than others, however it is clear to see that there is no 'one method fits all' solution, so the classroom behaviour techniques need to be tailored to the individuals.

From the research carried out there are some methods I will use myself, and recommend for the school to adopt some I will not use again. I feel that students having something to fiddle with worked really effectively in reducing them causing disruptive behaviour within the classroom. To eliminate the occasions where the objects got thrown, boundaries and consequences for such behaviour need to be clearly and simply set out for the students.

Ignoring attention seeking behaviour is something that can be done to some extent, however, as it does not always work the situation needs to be assessed on an individual basis, and if behaviour is in fact not getting any better or worsening then it should be abandoned in favour of another method that is known to work with the particular student in question.

Promoting positive behaviour is something that should be adopted for all students, not just those with ADHD. You do, however, need to break up and write a simple aide memoire or similar for the students to see every lesson what they need to do in order to get rewarded. This will help them not be treated differently from the rest of the class, but help them to stay focussed.

When appropriate to do so I would let the students use headphones, but they must be clear that this can only be when independent tasks are being worked on and not when they are carrying out group tasks or listening to information from the teacher. I would also let the entire class do this so that they are not isolated from their class.

I did not find that the time out cards were really effective, and I will not be recommending using this. The ADHD students do not know how to improve their behaviour once it has deteriorated to an unacceptable level, so all this method does is take them out temporarily before coming back to class in the same or worse behavioural state that they left in.

Although intervention is good to aid some of the class, I do not feel it is something that should be used to segregate those with ADHD. Intervention also requires additional resources and having another subject teacher free when you are teaching to carry this out is fairly unsustainable, and therefore I would not recommend this as an option either.

Following these results I feel that further action research should be carried out using a variety of schools and a wider range of behavioural methods, as it is very limiting carrying this project out within just one school due to the percentage of SEN students. It would also be good to see if different geographical areas have either different ADHD behavioural patterns and/or different responses to the various classroom behaviour management trialled.

Effectiveness of this action research project

Before carrying out this action research project I did not really know what action research was, let alone how to implement it within my job. When I started my investigation work I realised that I do actually carry this out, just in an informal way. I find that I try different methods of dealing with students and their varying behaviours, and if they are unsuccessful then I will try something else. We also have school systems in place for dealing with both positive and negative behaviours, which I have just adhered to in the past; however, carrying out this project I have realised that some of our systems used with students (especially those with ADHD) are not effective and there are better ways in which we can deal with the students. I have spoken with the SENCo and senior leadership group to try and implement some of these ideas going forward.

I have a good relationship with the students and staff, which aided me in smoothly carrying out the research and trial methods for this project. I managed to utilise nearly every student with ADHD within the school, which helped produce the best balance of results I could. I feel that I probably went into this project slightly one-directional in my thinking, and the information I have discovered has really opened my eyes. To this extent I can improve on making sure I think from various points of view about a topic, rather than what I have been lead to believe in the past from others.

As we are part of a group of three schools, I plan to expand and extend this project to cover research and trials to include the other two schools and collate the data and see if we can gauge a better overall schools policy to deal with our ADHD students in the best way.

In future years I would also like to look into other SEN students to see if we can find some ways of aiding them with their classroom behaviour techniques.

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- What behaviour management have you tried with ADHD students that has had a negative impact/made their behaviour worse?

- How do you differentiate for ADHD students within your classroom to enable them to work/learn effectively?

- What do you not like about ADHD?

- What things make your ADHD worse?

- What is your best strength?
(E.g. teamwork, kindness, creative, etc.)

REMINDER: Although your answers will help me understand ADHD better, you do not have to answer any of the following questions if you do not feel comfortable in doing so.

Medical

- Are you medicated for your ADHD?

- If yes, what medication are you taking?

- If no, have you been offered medication?

- If you have been offered medication for your ADHD but do not take any, why have you refused it?