**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** headteacher, urban, southern, state school, female

## General introduction

**INTERVIEWER:** So, if we just start off with a kind of, general…how long you’ve been teaching, what different experiences have you had, how have you ended up here as headteacher, that’d be great.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yep, I was trying to um, just remember – I think it’s 21 years…

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow [laughs].

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** It can't have been 21 – I’m 45, no- no it must be 20 years, I must have started when I was 25. So, I started my career over at xxxx, I worked at xxxx, and I worked there for 16 years before I came over here, and I went from an NQT to head, all in one school – very different school to here, there was a lot of challenging behaviour and probably the…most of my experience of ADHD children would have been from there, as a teacher. Um…

**INTERVIEWER:** So is it nice, progressing from NQT to head in one school, you know, knowing the layout?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, just always had something to- another challenge, to do. I started off um, my degree’s in PE and sport and dance and gymnastics, so I led all of that for years, all the sport; I did a bit of music leading, and then I went on to, sort of, literacy and then became assistant head…developed as a teaching and learning coach, and then became head of school, then we worked across two schools, as we took on a failing school over there, and…worked and developed leaders over there…

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh right, wow that’s a…broad range of experience…

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, so I got quite a lot from one school.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, and now you’ve moved over here.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** And I moved over here on a secondment, and then, from the secondment, they- because they couldn’t appoint, so I said I’d come and help out for a couple of terms. And then I…stayed [laughs].

## ADHD as a disorder and its symptoms

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah, hope you enjoyed it, having a good time [laughs]. Oh brilliant – so when you think of maybe the children at xxxx, or in xxxx, if you think of children with ADHD, what kind of symptoms have you seen in different children?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Um…finding it very difficult to filter…what’s going on around them. Um, so I’ve always felt that, that children with ADHD, when they’re sat in a room, like we are now, and we’re concentrating on each other, that they would find- everything would be of equal value, so the noise that’s happening here, or the noise that’s happening over there, or someone over here, they experience all of those different things at the same level, and are not able to filter it out, which makes them…not…

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, so what impact does that have when they're…in the room…what do you do?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** They’re not able to…concentrate on one thing, because they can't filter out the rest of it, to be able to say, ‘I’m talking to you at the moment’, and if they hear all the other things, they- they see them as the same value, and that’s why they start-

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh okay, sort of, looking around and…

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Looking around and, yeah. Or not being able to keep their body still. And-and, being hyperactive in a way that they find difficult to…ground themselves, and I think um, that they don’t have that- that grounding to be able to sit – so one of the children that I used to work with used to use, sort of, like weighted blankets and things to try and…ground them, and that’s why they move a lot, and have that sort of…sensory-

**INTERVIEWER:** Was that effective, then, using the weighted blanket, for him?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yes, yeah, I had one boy that actually wore a jacket as well, a weighted jacket, to try and sort of weight him down, just so that he felt…able to sit- sit down.

**INTERVIEWER:** So did you see kind of, different children display the behaviour in different ways, or was it quite a general…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** No, yeah different, um, I had one boy who used to, um, pick himself, all the time, so he used to pick his skin, til he bled, pick his face, um, or pull his hair, whereas I-I think, um, girls…are more difficult to spot, I always felt, but they weren’t always as prevalent as some of the boys that I saw.

**INTERVIEWER:** But did you have some girls that were diagnosed, yeah? And did they display things differently then?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, um, I think they were more in-intrinsic almost, that they went into themselves, rather than display their behaviours externally, whereas I think the challenging behaviour came from the boys more than it did the girls.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. And did you find out much about…you know, the cause of ADHD for those children or- or in general?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Um…I-I’d always assumed it was a sort of like a chemical…imbalance.

**INTERVIEWER:** But you weren’t given any information by anyone at that time?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Not really no…no.

## The diagnosis and treatment of ADHD

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Um, and then if you think, kind of, more generally for your role as a headteacher, obviously in some ways you’re kind of overseeing everyone, but…how do you support the teachers in the classroom that are…teaching the children with ADHD, like what’s your experience of that?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** So, um, I still get very much involved in any child that-that displays any type of behaviour or ADHD over and above, the sort of, the general…classroom, so-so if someone needs more support then- and is not able just to sort of cope with the behaviour policy, then generally it would be me that’s involved. Um, so, I-I am very much involved in writing challenging behaviour plans, so I’ve brought all this from xxxx, so there’s a lot I developed over there; spent quite a few years be-being the behaviour support lead, over there, um, and did some training on, sort of, challenging behaviours so, within that, we look at, um…what it is in the classroom that’s affecting their behaviour and looking at the environment and looking at things that we can reteach that child to stop or change the behaviour, rather than just telling the child over and over again, ‘Don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it, you’ve got to behave like this’, actually can you reteach them to behave in a certain way, so for example a child with an ADHD that finds it difficult to manage in particular situations – are they able to self-regulate, and teach them to self-regulate, and go and calm in a tented area, or to use…different strategies themselves, so they become more self-proficient in…managing themselves, and knowing when they feel…that they’re not able to cope.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you’re able to, sort of, have different strategies for different children, according to their needs, and…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yes, yes, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah, so has it been interesting coming over to xxxx and then seeing, ‘Can we use these in the same way or…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, um, I worked a lot with um, xxxx, and the behaviour specialists from xxxx, um, when I was at xxxx, so I brought a lot of that expertise over, so-so when I first came here, there wasn’t that, understanding, that- naughty children were naughty children [laughs], and it was quite a perception, I would have said at first, that…I just, ‘It’s not part of our remit, dealing with children with behaviour, why am I doing it, I-I’m here to educate the child’, and behaviour is someone else’s role. So it was very much, getting that…culture, that emotional wellbeing, and children with behaviour- challenging behaviours is as much as- our remit as it is to educate them, so that’s been a massive change…or shift, in…

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow yeah, that must have been…hard to get everyone on board and…

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, yeah, 3- no 4 years ago, it was you know, ‘Why is this child in our school?’ type attitude, whereas now, they will go- and I’ve done so many of the challenging behaviour, um, things with the staff, that actually my inclusion lead now- will step in, and has that expertise to go and support and to help. There are still times when we can't do it, and we do call in, um, people to- to help us, but that culture has changed to ‘How can I help this child change their behaviour and what will they need to relearn?’.

**INTERVIEWER:** So how- how does it impact, kind of, general school life, having children with ADHD in the school, what differences does it bring do you think?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I think the teacher needs to be very aware of that child at all points, and I think the teacher needs to be very skilled in how they're going to manage a child with ADHD because they can be constantly… in your face almost, because- because they're quite often…not able to- depends on what-what their traits are, cause some children are very much in their face whereas other children will just…you’d lose them out the door, I think, so there are children that-that, because they can't…because of their ADHD, will drift away, and sort of find their…experiences – so we had one boy that wanted to go outside and he used to throw the ball over and over and over again at the wall, because he was getting that feedback from that repetitiveness, and that almost calmed him, or he was, or- well before he did that he was throwing chairs down the stairs-

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh okay, so that was a better strategy.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** But he was- I-I think it was a- seeking some sort of sensory…thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** And does that work, I mean can you let them…just go out, and throw a ball, or does that…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I think it- I think it’s important to, if that is a strategy, but that’s why it comes back to the behaviour plan, to looking at what are the strategies, and what are we trying to reteach, so if we’re trying to get them to self-regulate, or to manage when they know that they can't- they’re feeling in that way, if that helps them then yes. So we’ve got- we- we use tents as well, or a blanket, or a sheet over a table, so it gives them an opportunity to- to recognise that they’re not managing in the situation, and to take themselves to a tent and to have that darkened space, but I think it depends on the individuals.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…do you see a change sort of as they get older, are they…better able to self-regulate, or does it bring additional challenges, is it…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I don’t…I don’t know, I don’t think so. I think it depends on…I would’ve- it’s different for different children, but I think it-it comes- I don’t know, does it come about at a different age, I haven’t necessarily- children don’t always come up with it, ‘ADHD’, they quite often- it’s diagnosed, or ‘identified’, at different points throughout the primary, I know some children have not been helped to be diagnosed until, sort of, secondary school have they, so, I don’t know whether it…reduces, I think it might be just managed. But it’s- we’ve had several children - I’ll just shut the door, someone’s left it open [laughs] - different children who have been on medication or who have not been on medication, and I think that has a- an impact, on whether they are on medication.

## Training and support for teaching children with ADHD

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…have you- so you’ve obviously had a lot of experience from your previous job, and it sounds like, working with people like xxxx as well you’ve had more specialist, kind of input, so have you had specialist…training around ADHD, in particular, or is it a mixture of different…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Um, not really, no, a mixture, I’d have said.

**INTERVIEWER:** And has that come…about just because of your experience – you needed it at that moment?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yes, I’m- I did, um, it was part – or did I have some? It was such a long time ago – but I did do a, um, master’s course in behaviour, and challenging behaviour, and looking at…children with that.

**INTERVIEWER:** So that was specifically really the symptoms isn’t it, rather than looking at ADHD specifically it’s looking at difficult behaviour, and challenging behaviour, yeah. Was it helpful? Sounds like it was!

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, no it was, and I think it’s- it’s trying to, um, sort of segregate the ADHD, which I’ve always thought was more of a chemical imbalance compared to environmental behaviour, and behaviour that’s displayed because of the environment, or because of the social…where they’ve come from or-or their parenting, you know I think there’s quite a distinct difference between…children that have challenging behaviour and children who have ADHD…because…children with ADHD, like I said, it’s that- it’s about that filtering isn’t it, and about that…they're not- they're not *deliberately* being naughty or disruptive on a, deliberate way, they're trying to get some sort of feedback from someone because they're- they're not able to regulate themselves.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, and then if it’s quite individual to different children, it’s- the teachers or the leadership that have to…figure out ‘What does *this* child need, and how do we support them?’, which I guess is a challenge in a busy school, with hundreds of children. So, so when you think of the teachers, you’ve said, you know, a lot of them have come on a journey of…understanding their role, in supporting children with ADHD…what kind of training do you think they would need in order to do their job really well?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I think understanding…why a child- where ADHD comes from…and-and-and knowing the difference, like I said, between social…behavioural difficulties, and a child who has ADHD and why- why it makes them act like they are, and what strategies can be put in place to try and help them to manage it, because you can't…fix a child with ADHD, you- you can re- you can give them coping strategies and you can give them ways to self-regulate, whereas I think with a child who’s got, sort of, social behavioural difficulties, you can reteach and they can relearn some of their…behaviours, or their negative behaviours, whereas that’s a little bit more challenging with ADHD.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, so…you’ve just talked quite a lot there about the sort of, knowledge or understanding of where it- ADHD comes from, or how it displays – do you think in terms of…strategies to manage their behaviour, do you think that kind of thing would be useful?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I think that would be useful. I think it’s very difficult to…so um, one- one young man I can think of, it’s just constant, every day, and you try to think of and come up with different strategies, but you’re not quite sure if that’s the right strategy, um, this- this young man uses quite a lot of, you know, swearing, and-and he’s-he’s very, in the middle of the classroom and he’s there, and you know, sanctions and telling them off doesn’t work, and, so, having a toolkit of…best strategies to deal with a child with ADHD I think would be really useful.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah… do you, in the juniors do you have a teacher, and a teaching assistant in each class or is it a mixture?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** It depends on- it depends on the cohort, um, and it depends on the needs of the children, so if there are a high number of SEN or behavioural needs, there will be, sort of, teaching assistants in there, but…not every class has a teaching assistant. So that is a challenge, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** So that’s quite a challenge for the teacher, with, many different needs, not just one additional need. Yeah, I wonder, have you got much experience of, either parents, or maybe even medical professionals, coming to you asking for information about a child - maybe, they're thinking of referring them for a diagnosis, or they have been referred – do you get much…many requests?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** We do get surveys that come through and we have to complete surveys about the child and about their strengths and their weaknesses, and, um…sort of completed sort of like different sort of…is it Box- is it Boxall? I don’t know – but yes, we do get forms that come in from professionals to ask us to complete it to give an idea of the child.

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah okay, and are you comfortable doing that or is it difficult?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, yeah, no I-I’m comfortable with it just cause- but I’ve had a lot of experience with it so I think…teachers, are less comfortable with it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah okay, so it’s quite difficult for them, if someone starts asking for information, knowing what to say or…yeah, so…in terms of kind of support for teachers, is that another aspect that they…might need some input, in terms of… ‘How do I describe this child or how do I, um, categorise their behaviour’, do you think, or, are they quite used to that?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah I think, no I think it’s very difficult for the teachers because there is such an emotional…they're emotionally attached as well because they want the best for that child…and I think it depends on individuals’ own experiences as to how they view things, and how they perceive those behaviours, and I don’t think, sometimes, teachers…need- have- need support to step back and look at…it, um, without that emotion, without that- their own perceived ideas of ‘What is this behaviour telling us?’, and ‘What is that child- ?’ and I think that’s very difficult, and it does depend on who I work with, what opinion they have, so…

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, I guess every staff member is very different in their approach, and the support they want, and…well, that’s a challenge for you as well [laughs].

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** But I do think, you know, having more awareness of ADHD would give teachers more…ability not to sympathise with them, but to, understand where that child is at, and why they are…behaving in the way they do.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, and like you say, a difference between that and just being disruptive, for a different reason.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, well there’s always a reason, isn’t there, you know, children- children always behave in that way because they’re trying to tell you something or they can't cope with something or they can't communicate or they’ve…they're not having that love and attention at home, but I think that’s very different to ADHD. But I can't tell you what ADHD is [laughs].

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that just because…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Well I’ve always assumed it was, yeah, I always assumed it was a, like a chemical, or some sort of imbalance in-in the body, but I…don’t know the technical terms.

**INTERVIEWER:** So in terms of like teachers generally, having training, obviously you have like inset days, you might have other people coming in doing different scenarios…if you were to think about ADHD as something you wanted to particularly train your staff in, what do you think it would look like, I mean how much information do they need, would it be a one-off…idea of the background we’ve talked about and then some strategies, or would it be a, sort of, ongoing, I don’t know, online programme that they could access when they’ve got a child and they're trying to figure out what to do…what…how would you design it if you were thinking it could be anything?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I-I think the most effective way to get…embed training, is to- to do it as much practically as possible, so having opportunities to go and try things out, or to think of a child or-or and then come back and…I definitely think the theories need to be there, but that practical stage of being able to go and try things out and have a go and actually come back and almost like a, support group or…and obviously not every teacher’s got a child with ADHD in their class at the time, it depends- but…but I think…them being able to try things out and then come back and share with other people or to talk to other people who’ve got children with ADHD would be really really useful. But again I like your online strat- that, that would be…really good, being able to dip into a pot of…resources or ideas…online.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, so I guess a combination maybe, sort of general stuff that everyone needs to know, but then a-

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I think it’s- yeah, I think it’s really important for all- even teaching assistants to have an understanding of where those children come from and why they display what they display. Particularly TAs actually, probably I would have said, that teaching assistants have less of an understanding than the teachers do and can sometimes be much less…patient, cause quite often they're the ones that are picking up the behaviour…and having to deal with it and having to use the correct language, so I think for the teaching assistants, understanding the language and the way that you communicate to a child with ADHD…would be really useful for them…whereas the teachers are more planning the behaviour side of it…the-the-the lessons, and the environment, and making those decisions about the learning.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…so what do you think are the…difficulties with getting training for teachers, what- you know, is it purely the money, or is it the time…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** The expertise.

**INTERVIEWER:** The expertise? Finding the right people?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, finding the right people to do the training.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…and is money a factor, generally?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Well yeah, it is a factor, it does have to obviously be a priority, but behaviour is always a priority, and you have to maintain…a high level of…understanding around behaviour in order to have a high…outcomes for learning…it-it’s key in my book, that you have to have that, culture of- of um, behaviour and expectations and…and yes you’ve got to get that right, so I always would say that you know, I’d commit-commit to training if it was there. It’s finding the expertise.

**INTERVIEWER:** So have you…generally found much training to be out there on ADHD or, no? Anything, that you’ve seen or…?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** I-I might have seen flyers for ELSAs, possibly, but not something that…

**INTERVIEWER:** But it’s not on your radar, but it’s…

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** No, no.

## Conclusion

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Um…well we’ve covered, pretty much what I wanted to cover, but is there anything that you would like to say about ADHD or the challenges you’ve faced, that I haven’t asked about?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Um…I think, in the training or the understanding of…the getting the teacher to understand it is-it…is knowing the child is going to live, like, in that way, and you can't fix the child, with ADHD, but you can give them strategies to manage or to cope better, um…I had a little boy, um…God, must have been 15 years ago, and uh, we went to London to the, um Science Museum, and we all got on the coach and sat there and…what was his name…? What was the surname…? Richard – can't remember, and I went, ‘Have you got your Ritalin?’, and he just popped up and went [shouts], ‘NO!’, like that and I went, ‘Okay!’, [laughs] and I was one-to-one with him and I literally sat at the top of the Science Museum and he ran around, and around, and around, the Science Museum – everyone else was going off and doing their projects, but-but I recognised that there was no point in me trying to- and I think it’s having that recognition and being brave to say ‘Well actually, you’re not in the right place for me to be able to pigeon-hole or shoe-horn you into what I want to do and I’m going to have the confidence to…provide for you in the way that’s needed’, and I think sometimes teachers want to try and sort them out and fix them and put them in a chair and ‘You’re gonna be behaving the same as everybody else’, and actually, we need to recognise that sometimes they can't, and that’s- so he ran round and round and round and there were telephones that you could pick up and listen to, and at one point he had 4 telephones and he twiddled them round so much, he was completely tangled up in all these telephones like this, and we just walked round and it was fine, but when we got back, he knew more than any other child.

**INTERVIEWER:** Really?

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** He had taken in *so much,* he’d listened to so much at such a fast pace, he’d…soaked it all up, and actually…I just believe that, you know, that they can still learn, and it’s this thing with, you know, fiddle toys, and-and different strategies that you can use, and not every child is going to sit still, and-and has to look at you, to watch you, in order to learn and actually, children can still take in information and be able to engage…but, they may need to be sat on the floor playing Lego, or they might need to take breaks, and it’s just, having that, being brave, I suppose, to take that into account, and having that confidence to…it’s okay to recognise that’s what they need.

**INTERVIEWER:** I guess it’s confidence, yeah…and I guess a lot of that confidence comes from more senior staff saying you *can* do that, you know, giving permission to do things slightly differently, or….to, yeah, be adaptive in that moment.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, to do it- yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah, that was a lovely story.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** He’s so sweet, bless him [laughs].

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah, thank you…it’s really helpful…for us to get headteachers’ perspectives, obviously we’re gonna ask teachers as well, but to get that overview from…a senior point of view, and how can we support staff, or what do staff need, and…and your expertise as well, in terms of understanding what the children need, so thank you for helping us with this.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** That’s alright, looking forward to it – seeing the…outcomes [laughs].

**INTERVIEWER:** Well yeah, yeah, hopefully we’ll be able to see that there are some themes that emerge that most teachers…sort of, want the same kind of information, or are struggling with the same challenges, so that…um, ultimately, when we work on the intervention we’ll be able to tailor it to what is actually needed, rather than what other people might think is needed. Um, I do have a debrief sheet, so if there’s anything after I’ve gone that you are uncomfortable about, or anything that you want to…comment on, you can come to me, or…if, um, you want to go straight to the university, if there’s a problem, there is a number on there as well.

**INV**-**002-H-U-S-STA-F:** Okay, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** So that’s for you – but apart from that-

[End of Interview]