**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Female, year 6 teacher and deputy head, state school, urban

## General introduction

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so if we…just start off, can you just, tell me a little bit about your teaching career, where you started, how many classes you’ve had, your roles…that kind of thing?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Um…I did a PGCE at XXXX about 19 years ago, um, before that I worked for XXXX as a software engineer, um…I specialised- well, I wanted to specialise in uh, primary, rather than- or junior rather than infant…um, and then my first post was in Year 6, at a school over in XXXX …and I stayed there for 3, 4 years…and then I moved up to XXXX, just because of personal circumstances, worked for a few years in a school up there which was a one-form entry school, so it was very very different, and I was the whole of Year 4, um, and then I ended up moving back down to XXXX n, and came to XXXX, so by that time I’d taught for about 7 years. And I started in XXXX as Year 5 class teacher, I was made year leader the year after that, and I spent a couple of years as year leader and then I had a year off on maternity leave, and I came back as assistant head. Um, and that was an out of class role, um, I did 3 or 4 years as assistant head, which then became deputy head, because we had a restructure, um…I did a secondment up at the local senior school for a term as part of that with their maths department which was very interesting, and it meant that I got to see some of our students when they were up there a few years on, including a particularly challenging cohort that we had had – seeing them when they were in Year 8 was very eye-opening, and kind of, how some of those challenges for them translated into secondary school was really useful to get that perspective. Um, I then went off on maternity leave again with my second, um, then I came back just over a year ago, and my current role, because as deputy, you kind of get farmed out to different places, so my current role is um, part-time Year 6 teacher and deputy, so yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow, so a variety of responsibilities.

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yes, a bit variety, yes, um, I have led various subjects, maths is my deepest love, um, but I’ve led computing, I’ve led languages, I’m a bit of a jack-of-all-trades with it, and…assessment is a specialism as well. But yeah, I’ve worked with a whole range of children.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so…yeah, I was just thinking that with your…the class that you co-teach at the moment, is there a large variety of children, um, yeah?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yes – can you pause it for a second?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

[Recording stopped]

The teacher was supervising a child as we talked and at this point asked the child to go and get his ear defenders and wear them (so that he couldn’t listen to our conversation).

[Recording restarted]

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** So, current class, yeah, I mean this cohort is a very very challenging cohort, the most challenging since I’ve been in teaching, as a whole, because of the number of difficult…learning issues and emotional issues, um, I have 4 in my class who are…very challenging in very different ways, I would say one of them I think has ADHD, one of them is autistic, one of them has social-emotional problems and ADSD, possibly autistic traits, and one them just has incredibly low self-esteem and a very fixed mindset, but that makes him very difficult as well. So 2 of them I think would be ADHD children.

## ADHD as a disorder and its symptoms

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh okay, could you describe some of their...symptoms that make you think that?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** So, um, an inability to settle to tasks, particularly if they don’t…think they're going to be able to accomplish them, one particular just doesn’t seem to be able to stop himself from calling out, he’s never sitting on his chair, he’s crouching on it, or he’s on the floor, or he’s sitting on the table, he…just, he’s very impulsive, and he finds it very hard to settle, and he’s constantly trying to get attention, rather than focusing on anything. Um…the other one, similarly…difficulty settling, he’ll also get hung up on little things like how his handwriting looks for example, rather than the actual quality of the writing…um, he has a very very short fuse and will blow very quickly if asked to do something that he doesn’t understand why…which is why I think that’s kind of more than just ADHD going on there, he needs to understand the reasons behind things so he can kind of slot it together, and then you’ve got more of a chance of him cooperating, but very explosive, finds it hard to – even if he knows what to do, he won’t necessarily do it unless there’s a person there and he’s got that one-to-one input on how he’s doing.

**INTERVIEWER:** So when you think about other ADHD children that you’ve taught, have they all shown, sort of, similar traits, or has there been quite a variety do you think?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think the similarity, is the focus, there’s always something around focus, and inability to focus, often very very short attention span, so when I was an NQT, I had an ADHD child in that class, I remember I had to just plan 5-minute bursts for him, if he could stay focused for 5 minutes I was winning…um, and that was really really hard because, you know, you’d plan your lessons, and this is Year 6 so…tasks, independent tasks, you might assume that they would be able to do something for half an hour, or an hour, or a couple of lessons if it’s a sustained piece of writing, but these children - and XXXX was the child in that class – there’s no way, and would just have to think of something different for him, or how to break it down into really small steps. And sometimes, there would be a teaching assistant…helping that child or working with that child, but that’s a bit of a double-edged sword because when there’s a teaching assistant there, if they are, very competent then they will help the child a lot, but the child can then become reliant, and you as a teacher kind of think ‘Well okay, they’ll get support with that’, but if the teaching assistant isn’t there, firstly the child then thinks ‘I can’t do it without that help’, and secondly, you as a teacher are not *always* having to think specifically about them, because it could be that they can access the task with the teaching assistant, so it-it’s not always the help that you would think it would be.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, so there’s a kind of…there’s an age-inappropriate level of behaviour, but then also…the problem around support and how much support do you offer, and….have you taught many- oh go on.

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I’ve always found, sorry, cause I didn’t- there’s another bit to that, I was- that-that I think is a similarity, there’s been differences in the levels of impulsiveness but there’s always generally been a degree of impulsiveness, so I don’t know whether that’s like a co-morbid condition as well, cause when you’ve got ADHD you’ve quite often got other things in there like…all kinds of stuff, but, yeah, that as well, they are…quite colourful characters, that tend to gain the attention of other people and it can be very disruptive and very distracting for the other children, and that’s difficult.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, I was gonna ask that, yeah, what has been the impact that you’ve seen on other children in the classroom?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, it’s unsettling…it means, first of all, that it’s harder to establish a really calm atmosphere, so everyone can focus, secondly, it means that children whose behaviour would not normally be an issue, can almost encourage, kind of, low-level behaviour, because there’s this child, making these choices, and it’s almost like, ‘Well if they can do that, then I can do this’, and they don’t always understand why you might deal with that child differently, than I would deal with them, and so they, to some extent, think ‘Well that child’s getting away with it, and why aren’t I, that’s not fair’, sometimes they’re kind of like ‘Well why does that child keep doing that’, at Year 6 level you can explain, you know, this child’s got this challenge and actually, we’re gonna deal with that this way, please don’t think that we’re not doing anything about it, but when they’re younger they don’t always grasp that, so I think it can lead to a feeling of…certainly an unsettled atmosphere in the room, they can wind other children up, one of mine at the moment is a real clown, and so, you know, the rest will be giggling about stuff, but that’s not helpful, sometimes, so, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** So what impact does that have on you as a teacher, trying to manage, you know, the different expectations of the children, but then also, this activity, and then, planning, I mean how does that…impact you?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah…on a good day it’s fine, on a bad day it’s very frustrating, and I don’t take things personally, I very much feel that children do well when they can, um, you know, if they're not able to do something, that’s because I haven’t thought it through properly, and something’s stopping them, they’re not doing these things on purpose, but…it is frustrating when then other children get, kind of, drawn in, and the whole atmosphere gets a bit unsettled, because you don’t get your best from a class when it’s like that. Yeah…so it can be…hard.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…and have- yeah…how does it affect you…I mean like obviously on a personal level you’re saying, you know, it can be frustrating, or on a, kind of emotional level, but in terms of…thinking ahead – you thinking, ‘Tomorrow I’ve got this class’, how does it affect how you plan or, how you use other stuff in your room?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, there’s a lot of…’Okay so, X and Y aren’t gonna cope with this activity, they’re gonna need to do it a different way – perhaps they need to do it more actively, perhaps they need to do it in smaller bursts, I maybe need to readjust my understanding of success for them, maybe their objective is different, maybe their success criteria is they’ve done half of it, or they’ve done this part of it, maybe actually, they're gonna carry on with what they did before cause they're finally getting into that story, and although the rest of us have moved on, there’s more they can do, and that’s gonna benefit them more’, so…it’s very much about knowing the children, and I think the more experienced you are at, you know, 18 years on the job, I know I don’t really have to think ahead, I can do that kind of stuff on the fly, however, we've got an NQT in our year group, who has to very much think ahead, with ‘Okay, so they’re not gonna – what can I do for this child?’, and it’s- often the easiest thing to do is to support them, but that’s- then has a knock-on effect on the rest of the children that we also need to be working with, and the progress of them. Um, sometimes, just about having- holding activities up your sleeve, that you can whip out and you know, ‘Alright, you do this’, or, there’s a couple of them that if I’ve got any job involving taking something around the school, they are the ones I think of and sometimes I might manufacture a job, because they need the movement, they need to get out, they need a quick change of scene. I take the class out a lot, we go out and just do a quick run around, just for that…because for those particular children it benefits them, and it will just…reset the balance.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think that actually benefits the other children in the class as well sometimes, just going for a walk round and…?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, it probably does, yeah…although, some of them though, if they're focused, that interrupts them, and then they come back and they find it hard to settle again, so, again, it’s horses for courses, it doesn’t always work for all of them.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you had much…training around kind, of, the causes of ADHD, or, do you understand, you know, why different children present with ADHD, or…the challenges they face?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I don’t think…I can’t recall any training at all…we have had training on autism, and in a couple of different schools I’ve been in I’ve had that, we’ve had…general training about SEN children, and how to cater for them, I don’t think we’ve had anything specific to ADHD. I, um, I think I’ve got a lot of understanding of it cause I’m diagnosed autistic, so…I’m kind of quite well-versed in that and all the things that go with it, and, you know it’s in my family as well, so, personally, I feel quite confident that I understand, but I think there’s other people who don’t know, to what extent it’s learned behaviour, to what extent the child’s putting it on, and tend to believe it’s something the child is doing by choice, and I- there’s not much training out there, it doesn’t seem.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you found out information yourself, basically?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah.

## The diagnosis and treatment of ADHD

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah okay. Another thing that we sometimes find with teachers is that either medical professionals or parents come to the teacher for information, either because they’re concerned and want to look for a referral, or because…the medical professionals are looking to make a diagnosis, but need some information from the school – have you had much experience of that?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yes, we get lengthy questionnaires to fill in, yes, which can be very tricky actually, because they’re very specific, and it’s hard to answer some of those questions, that- yes, now you mention that, yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah…and do you feel confident to give the information they want, or they are asking for?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yeah, mainly, I mean there are some questions it’s kind of an ‘Always’, sometimes a ‘Never’, and if it’s just never something that’s occurred in school, you feel like you can't answer, I tend to send them back with loads of notes on them. But yeah, yeah I feel confident answering those.

**INTERVIEWER:** And uh, have you ever been asked to implement some kind of intervention in the classroom for a child, or not?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yes…um, I have had…XXXX involvement… XXXX …something Outreach XXXX who come in if we are dealing with very challenging behaviour and normal strategies aren’t working, so I’ve had that involvement for a child a couple of years ago, um…and, we sat down and developed a plan, looked at how I was catering for that child, looked at what her needs were, looked at how those fit together and how they didn’t, and what we could do differently, um particularly the teaching assistant who was working with her as well, so yeah, we’ve had that kind of thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, did you find the expectations were manageable, for what you were able to do?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** No…it kind of assumed that I had all the time in the world just for that child, which I didn’t, and I felt awful, saying that, but no it did feel rather over the top, and I know that colleagues have felt the same – somebody comes in and says ‘Well, you know, you need to implement this and this and this and this and this – bye’, and you’re kind of there going ‘…Right, when am I going to do that?’. So- but I have always found that they’re useful suggestions, um, and we also have an educational psychologist who works with the school, and so she will come in, um, once a term, and you can book a meeting with her, and get support with stuff, in a similar vein, you end up being given a lot of things that you could be doing, but…often it’s just time to set something up and then once it’s set up it’s effective, but I think people often feel that that’s rather overwhelming.

**INTERVIEWER:** We’ve obviously talked quite a lot about the challenges, the difficulties, the problems, but…can you see any benefits for having a child with ADHD in the classroom, like, what do they bring that you might not get from other children?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** They bring an energy, an enthusiasm about stuff, yeah, the two that I’ve got in mind, if we need to get something done quickly, or do something that’s kind of fun or more active, they are *there*, driving everybody, and they are very popular, they’re kind of, they’re very well-liked on the playground, they will get everyone involved in games and stuff like that.

## Training and support for teaching children with ADHD

**INTERVIEWER:** Ah that’s lovely, that’s lovely to hear. Okay, can we talk, a bit more specifically, around the idea of training, and particularly for teachers….um, when you think about- you said earlier, that you can't think of any specific training you’ve had around ADHD…can you think of, kind of, more general training that you have had around behavioural challenges or…some of the symptoms maybe that you see in ADHD.

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Um…not off the top of my head. We’ve had…I mean, some of the autism training has been around expectations, and environment, making sure that the place is calm, making sure that children know things in advance when they need to, understanding what might stress a child, and therefore being able to reduce that stuff, so kind of…small bits of information at a time, rather than giving them loads to do, thinking about where they’re sitting, thinking about who they’re working with, thinking about what their behaviour might be communicating, we’ve had some stuff on that, kind of behaviour as communication, and, if you can work out what they’re communicating, and it’s generally ‘I don’t want to blah’ or ‘I feel blah’, then you can do something about that. And so all of those things, I mean I think they’re, they’re kind of common sense things, they’re useful for all children, I-I-I feel that, just because this child may be ADHD and this child doesn’t, the things that are gonna work for this child around collaborating and having an empathy for them, are equally important for everyone. Um…we’ve had…training along the line of actually, sometimes behaviour strategies that would be effective with some children wouldn’t work for this child, because it’s not a choice behaviour necessarily, so, it’s not something that they can just choose not to do, but then I feel like that about all children, nobody does the wrong thing by choice unless there’s a real reason, they’re trying to achieve something, and that’s because they can't do the right thing, so…yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** So if you thought about specific ADHD training, what do you feel as a teacher, would help you in terms of like what the content of what it might involve?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** That’s a really hard question actually…

**INTERVIEWER:** Would it be around the…what causes it, what- how there are changes in the brain, to do with ADHD, why the behaviour…appears, or do you feel that’s something that you as a teacher already know?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I-I don’t think it’s something that…everybody as a teacher knows, so I think that would be really handy, and understanding of what causes it, what is…um, realistic to expect of a child and what isn’t, what’s fair to expect of them, um…strategies mainly, maybe, for quick breaks that they might need…a kind of, an understanding that it’s okay if this child achieves a different thing in this lesson, or less output, or something like that, kind of ‘What does success look like?’ in these circumstances, I think would be useful. I think there’s a feeling of, you know, ‘This is the objective that I want my class to do, and so come hell or high water I need to find a way for this child to achieve it’, and actually maybe that’s not realistic. So different ways we could do things.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think anything around the sort of differences and similarities you might see between different children, or maybe even between boys and girls, we’ve talked mainly about boys, so far, but…maybe some differences or similarities do you think?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** Yep, I think also around how to have conversations with parents, I think that’s always a little bit tricky, you know, if you might suspect something, we can't, obviously, diagnose, but you know, how we can communicate to parents and what we can suggest to them. I think that would be useful. Strategies to work with the child, kind of, to help the child…come to terms, or kind of understand themselves, and to help them to know what is expected of them, and how to be successful in that, is also useful, because I think they can be labelled as ‘naughty’, and they need the skills to be able to talk with an adult and put their side across – which is difficult for them.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what would you think about for the other children in the classroom, that they need to know anything, or do they need to just be taught to accept everyone, and not really know too many specifics, or how do you feel about…?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think it’s probably up to the child in question, what they want other people to be told, but you know, I’ve been involved in a class where there was a girl who was autistic, and she wanted to tell the rest of the class, about her and about how she was different and explain it to them, and so she did that really successfully, and she really felt a lot better, and they had a lot more understanding, but you know, if a child doesn’t want that…I think it’s very up to them. But yeah, I think giving teachers ways that they can explain to the rest of the class you know, ‘This is why this child has a different plan in place than you and so when these things happen this is what you’re going to see and it doesn’t mean that they’re getting away with it’.

**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned as well before about…strategies being realistic, so if an outside agency comes in and says ‘You should do this for this child’, but being able to look at what is actually realistic with your time and…

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I mean their focus is that child, isn’t it, but they maybe don’t quite understand the workload and the load on teachers, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** And then just on a, sort of, practical note, how do you think some ADHD training could look in terms of…when it would be done, so for example on an inset day, or on a twilight, or a conference, would that, you know, what kind of delivery format do you think would- you would like?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think probably shorter bursts, so like a professional development meeting type thing, um…this is a…maybe an odd point but I think it ought to be delivered as if the staff have ADHD, so that they can kind of feel what those strategies might be like, like ‘Okay, we’ve done 10 minutes, now we’re going to have a quick break’, ‘You can do this verbally or you can write it’, just because I think it’s-it’s easy to talk about a thing, but you don’t necessarily understand the child unless you really try and put yourself in their place, like, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** And do you think if you as a teacher, you know, got a new child into your class who did have ADHD, would some kind of online resource that you could go straight to, to get some ideas of strategies, even though they might not be bespoke to *that* child, but just a range that you could maybe try – would that be something useful, or would you want a more specific consultation about the individual do you think?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think that would more helpful – I think for our SENCO, our inclusions team, that kind of resource would be useful, but it’s often them that we would look to, to be able to direct us to that kind of thing, I think one-to-one consultations because every child is different, would be quite useful.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, and then…so that would be the sort of support you might get from the SENCO or the senior leadership, um, is there anything else that they could do that would…particularly help you as a teacher?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think, just…conversations about the child’s progress, and about celebrating small steps and just supporting teachers in how to make that progress with that child, helping teachers feel like they are doing enough, cause they’re often going over and above and still feeling like they're not getting anywhere sometimes, so just that level of understanding, I mean you know, that goes for all children.

## Conclusion

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, I think we’ve covered everything that I wanted to ask you about, is there anything else to do with ADHD or- and your teaching that you want to say, or anything else?

**INV**-**003-T-U-S-STA-F:** I think that in any training, what you said about what somebody- a child brings to a class is really important to talk about, I think focusing on those positives as well, and again it’s like, it’s never ‘one size fits all’, so just because a child has ADHD doesn’t mean they’re gonna bring a certain thing, but I think encouraging people to think, you know ‘What does this child contribute to the class, what makes them amazing?’ is really important because it can feel quite draining and relentless sometimes with these children. And I think just…strategies, yeah, the behaviour strategies for me is the biggest thing, kind of giving people ways that they can work with the child, rather than just be a wall that the child keeps hitting against.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, great, thank you so much, I really appreciate your time, I understand what you’re saying you know, it is a highly pressured job and it’s really helpful to understand from a teacher’s point of view what it is like to help children with ADHD learn, and also, if training was available, how it would look, or what would be included, so thank you – I do have a debrief sheet, so if a bit later on, there’s something that you’re not happy about, or you want to speak to me again, or you can go straight to the university, if you’re unhappy about something, or you want, you know, to change what we’ve talked about, um, I will leave this sheet for you, um-

[End of Recording]