

NEURODIVERSITY > ADHD > AT SCHOOLS

At schools

Full transcript · 12 video clips · generated 22 September 2026

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1. ADHD and schools - What can parents do to support their child

I'm Matt Egwiston, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at Cape North. I am Erin Cape, I am a parent. Kia ora, I'm Emma Walsfold, Deputy Principal and SENCO at Hone Hei Te Kutukawaka School in Christchurch. Kia ora, I'm Sarah Pardah from Te Puna Waiowai Papa Hagley College, I'm a Learning Support Teacher and Year 9 Advisor. Kia ora, I'm Helen Orntwell, I am an RTLB Cluster Manager, so that is Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour, and we work with a range of schools across the North and West of Christchurch. Awesome, so I'm just wondering what can parents be doing to work with the school around supporting children that might be ADHD diagnosed or suspected ADHD?

Yeah, so I think often parents pick up on things much sooner than schools do, and having a chat to the teacher, finding out if there's someone in the school that could be the key person. Like a SENCO or a Learning Support Coordinator, whoever fulfils their role. Coming in with, as a parent, coming in with your thoughts and just being curious about what that looks like in a school environment. So in our school context, if a parent came to me and talked to me about those sorts of things, I would ask them lots of questions, because they have a unique perspective on what's going on for their child, including things about what their sleep's like, what's their eating like.

What were they like as a preschooler, what did the kindy say about them, all of those sorts of things. And then we would perhaps look at filling in SNAP forms, talking to the teacher, I would do some observations, and then we would look at doing a referral to the GP to see if the GP felt that it was something that could be referred on. If a child already has a diagnosis, and they arrive in our school with a

diagnosis, then hopefully we're going to get some really good feedback. Really good information. And I think whether there's a diagnosis or whether there isn't a diagnosis, it's actually all about working together collaboratively, so the child can be successful at school and at home.

And that means successfully academically, but also socially, and with all of those other things. I agree. And what about, would that be the same for children that get a diagnosis while they are in the class as well? Absolutely. So we have lots of children that are diagnosed once they start school. Often parents have been told, wait until they get to school and see what it's like when they're in a school context, so that's quite common. I will sometimes attend appointments with families if they want me to go to initial appointments with them, and then we look at all of the things that we can do to support.

It's so individual for every child though, so it might be that it's all around sensory processing. We need to put lots of supports in for that. Or it could be around some lagging social skills. Or it could be around using that child's absolute strength and passion as a way into learning. It really just depends on what the child needs.

2. ADHD and schools - SNAP forms - differences at home and school

Awesome, and so what's a SNAP form? So a SNAP form is a quick diagnostic tool that often GPs will use, just looking at a variety of different behaviours. Usually GPs are looking to see if the behaviour is presenting in different environments, but Matt might be able to talk a little bit more about a SNAP form. Yeah, no, that sounds good. Yes, SNAPs, the ones we usually use have 26 items, and there are nine inattentive items and nine hyperactive-impulsive items, so they're the symptoms of ADHD. And then there are eight questions on oppositional defiance, sort of symptoms, more behaviour issues. And, yeah, as Emma said, it just gives you an idea about how is that particular person presenting in the school environment, how are they presenting at home.

And you have to take it with a wee bit of a grain of salt because if it teaches depreciation, then they'll rate the kid quite high, or vice versa, if parents are struggling, often they'll rate higher. But it just gives you a really good idea about how they're doing in cross-context. So with ADHD, usually you need symptoms both at home and at school or in two environments, and it gives us an idea of that. So really helpful. Is that like the CADRA forms? Yeah, the CADRA forms, yeah, they use an absolutely similar thing, basically a SNAP. Okay, cool. Yeah. And so... If a child is presenting differently at school than at home, is that something that's going to be difficult to navigate?

Yeah, that's interesting. So, you know, sometimes a parent might find a lot of ADHD symptoms at home and school says they're fine in our environment. And that could be that the teacher's just not seeing behaviours that are there, but it could be a guide to that there are other issues at home that might be important to be thinking about. And vice versa, often if kids say they have a learning problem like dyslexia or, you know, specific learning difficulty, you know, you'll expect some inattention and off-task behaviour with that because school, you know, isn't keeping their interest. So that's sometimes a pointer towards, you know, more education things being important.

So, yeah, it can help SENCOs and GPs just kind of navigate is it more likely to be mainly a learning issue or mainly... ADHD or more behaviour issues, which might need different treatment. OK.

3. ADHD and schools - Communicating with the school and transitions

So I know from a couple of other sort of experiences and my own as well that sometimes it can be a little bit difficult to sort of maintain communication between parents and between the school and things and absolutely teachers, they do so much and they're very valuable and they have an amazing job and they do so well. But do you have any sort of tips or information on what the best ways can be to really be, you know, communicating with the school and to keep that positive communication up? I think it's about having really good solid communication and working together collaboratively in quite a non-judgmental way.

So ideally you would like parents to be able to talk to you about issues that are going on at home and you would like teachers to be able to talk to parents. About issues that may be going on at school and try and solve them together. Parents will have really great knowledge on what might be causing an issue or what might be a strength that you can build on. And the same with teachers in other situations as well. So keeping that communication open and also not judging anyone is really important. I think sometimes people hear that. This child with ADHD got this and so why isn't my child getting this?

But actually we're working on a model where children have access based on their need, not on their diagnosis. And things work very differently in different schools. So it's about what the need is and then how people can work together to meet it. Definitely. And so in regards to sort of communicating, is there, do you think, better ways or, you know, the way that you can communicate? Whether it be, you know, through an app that the school has or maybe emails or phone calls or whichever way. Sort of what do you encourage is one of the better ways to be conversing or even going into school if possible.

But some parents obviously can't, you know, it's not that accessible as well. I think it's great if schools can be really flexible on that. I've got some parents who texting is absolutely the way that they like to communicate. They can read it, think about it. And then respond. I've got other parents who say, ring me, don't text me. But my door's also always open so people often just pop in in the mornings. Some people prefer email. I think one thing that is important is if you're talking about something that's a concern, to not have those conversations in front of the child and not have those conversations anywhere around other families or parents.

It's really important to protect the child's privacy and their dignity and their mother. Absolutely. Definitely. I agree. I might just jump in and talk about this from a high school perspective because I know that often people have a really close relationship with their primary school and the students have gone through sometimes for eight schooling years and then high school system can often be quite difficult to manage in terms of communication. If the student has seven or eight different teachers, they might have a form tutor. There's a SENCO. There might be a learning support coordinator. There's deans at the school as well.

So I think for parents often that can be quite intimidating and it's good to find one person that you do that communication with and a good person would be your learning support coordinator, your SENCO or the head of learning support or perhaps your school dean if they've made that first contact with you and keep up with that person and they will help guide you through the rest of your communication. Sometimes it can be quite hard as a parent sending emails out. It can take up to eight different people and sometimes it's nice to maybe do the initial communication via phone, have some sort of personalised contact and request to come in to have a face-to-face conversation.

High school teachers often are harried sometimes with lots of different classes and it is good for your child to get that individualised attention and sort of raise it as a need and be able to share it. Share some of your own experiences with them. So my advice would be find your person and they will advocate for you as well with your other teachers. Awesome, that's really good. I'm not at that stage yet. I didn't think about the high school stage. Transition is really important as well as they're moving from year eight into year nine or even year six into year seven and intermediates are amazing places for transition.

They do transition really well. And some schools do transition well and that's a really big piece for them. And sharing that information and making those connections early is really helpful and even requesting from your current school, I'd like to have a transition plan in place for my child just so I know that they're getting the best start at intermediate or high school. And those connections can start early. They can be happening in term four with school visits, with you coming in and having face-to-face conversations with people. And just taking the stress off what can feel like a really big change for everyone.

And I'll jump in there too because quite often, just talking about transitions that Sarah's just mentioned, if a student, if you think your child's really going to struggle with a transition or you know that they've struggled hugely with transitions in the past, your school, you can have a talk to your school and they may decide to put in a request for our support, RTOB support, to help transition that student as well. So there are lots of different ways of supporting them. And transition can look different for different students as well. So in term four there may be lots of opportunities for the child to come and visit the school, to meet their new teacher, to meet a tutor or their form teacher or their dean.

But there may be school tours available, but there may be more formalised meetings as well. So if the RTLB servers are involved, you may be invited to a couple of hui so that your voice is shared with the current school and the new school as well. And it's helpful as a parent because you'll get a sense of the philosophy of the new school as well. So that handover's really helpful for you and to make you feel like you are joining that new community as well. Yeah. Definitely, yeah. That's some good things. I'll just note that down for a few years' time.

4. ADHD and schools - Gathering information to support the child

Okay, so how important is incident recording when it comes to, you know, wanting to look into getting some support from RTLB? Well, most schools record information, all sorts of different information, for a wide range of reasons. So they might record information in order to sort of look at their planning, what's going to work for students. It might be around what's going to support students with their social learning, as well as their academic learning. So recording information is sort of a normal, everyday sort of piece of work that goes on in schools all the time. When schools look at that information, they make decisions on, OK, where do we need to focus our attention?

So it might be that they focus... There's an issue in the playground, and they'll focus their attention on that, and they might make a plan about what that's going to look like. So it could be that there's a particular part of the playground that's causing a problem, so we might ask our teachers to spend more time in that part of the playground. So when they're looking at those, all of that data that they collect, they start to see patterns and trends. The same would occur if, for instance, a child... who's constantly or frequently coming to the attention of the schools, sort of crops up, and they might start looking at that and think, well, there's a reason for this, and they may, well, make a plan and sort of try some strategies or some interventions to see whether that will support that child.

If it isn't really working for them, and they then think we need some additional support, at that point, they would start to think about whether... Is that a request for support? Is that a request for support to the RTLB service or to Midas Street? They would use that information to help write that request for support, but they would always do that with the consent of the whānau, and then, you know, they would frame that up into what is it that they particularly want support with. So it's helpful, and it is part of the general sort of run of what schools do.

And is that sort of blanket between all schools, so I know that I've heard of different sort of systems that schools use, and where they record or different ways that things are recorded, no matter sort of how small, but is there a general, you know, from the Ministry, is there a general idea of what they have to record and what is going to be helpful? For example, you know, things that might happen and then eventually they can go back and say, oh, yes, this happened in term one, and that in term two, however, the parents may not have been contacted in those incidents, but they're still there, located for, you know, the service referral, or what do you think?

Schools, most schools, and actually these guys can probably answer that as well, but most schools will have some sort of a behaviour management sort of recording system. A lot of schools use what they call majors and minors, which is through the PB4L system, so if you're at PB4L school, and yes, they do stay in the records, so you can actually start to see whether there is a pattern to any of that. If they're all minors and they just do this one here and one there and one over there, generally it's probably never going to come to much because it's dealt with at the time, but if you see a repeated pattern or an increased frequency or an increased intensity of those sort of behaviours, then yes, that's probably when it will be very useful and they'll go back and have a look.

But if it's something that happened in term one and then there's something similar in term three, that in and of itself is probably not enough to sort of say, well, actually, we need some additional support here. Is that multiple sort of, you know, ways that it's been recorded, for example, you know, if other parents had mentioned incidents and things, then is that something that's recorded on there? And even if the teacher wasn't the person who had initially dealt with it or that had been there when the incident had happened, that it was still sort of recorded because that can, you know, go towards helping support that child, I suppose.

Yes, and generally in the systems that schools use, so if it's HERO or whatever their sort of SMS system is, there will be a structure to what's recorded and how it's recorded. So it will be things like, you know, what's recorded and how it's recorded. Yes. So it's like, where was the incident? Who was involved? So you start to see whether there's always the same children involved or it's, and there'll be a time and there'll be, you know, there's a pattern, there's a, you know, there's a record to what all of those things look like. So they're collecting data that is apples with apples, not, you know, apples and oranges and, you know, he said, she said sort of thing.

So it is, there is a structure to it. Yeah. And I have heard other parents before saying things like, oh, you know, it's just more paperwork for them and they don't want to have to do the paperwork and, you know, at most workplaces it can be the incident reporting sort of thing, but is that sort of something that it's, you know, it's still, there's a process to be, you know, to be done and if that's not in there then, I mean, it's harder to get the support for the children as well and for the teachers. I think some of it's about looking at patterns. So if you, you know, if you're looking at, you know, if you're looking at, you know, if you're looking at, you know, if you're looking at, you know, if you're looking at, you know, teachers are okay with entering data if it's purposeful and if it's just part of the culture and the norm of your workplace.

So as Helen said, in our system it will be telling us what time it happened, what day of the week it happened, which teaching staff were involved, which other children were involved, what was the trigger, what was the motivation for this behaviour to happen and that gets analysed every five weeks so we're looking for children, you know, it's normal for for kids to have something one incident you're looking for children who may have had more than one thing okay so what's the common theme is it always when this particular teachers in the room or is it always when they are in a group with that particular child or and then you can start to form a plan around that you can also look at is it this particular age group or this specific class do we need to put some more support into that class so it's not always about one particular child and accessing more support for them it can be about the bigger trend as well yeah you know for example this year we found that our trick yesterday the week was actually a Tuesday and we had absolutely no idea why it was a Tuesday and it didn't matter how we pulled that information apart we couldn't get to the bottom of it so we just put a new system of behavior and that was the Tuesday system and it disappeared so you know just being able to see those sorts of things it's really helpful you it's awesome it's good to know that that sort of it's something that's being done you know whether it be by all schools or in general for teachers that might be looking for that sort of thing to say hey hang on I'm noticing that this trend is happening or more of my you know students are starting to display this or that or yeah and I think being able to notice okay so this child had six incidents that have happened in the last five weeks but actually last time they had 15 so this is a big improvement what I've never seen their name in the data before what on earth is going on for this child and our school teachers sit down together and analyze that data I produced the report and every teacher sits down and works on it together and then have to find next steps to change for the next five weeks so you're constantly looking to improve things I think the other thing is with that data is that when it comes to reporting things back to parents you won't necessarily know information about other children we have to be really careful around privacy so and there's always two sides to everything yeah it does mean however if a parent comes in and says my child's really clashing with this particular student you can look and see is that what the data is telling us was that an issue last year

5. ADHD and schools - Developing individual learning plans ILP

Awesome. And so would you be able to explain, sort of help people understand what an individual learning plan is? So, you know, what it is and how it can be, you know, started or what you would need to do? It possibly looks different in all of our contexts. Yes, it probably does. It would have the same, similar or the same key elements, but it could be written in different ways. So we could have a plan that was all around something academic. We could have a plan that was around a specific behaviour. We could have a plan that was huge and had every eventuality in it. We could have a plan that was very, very simple.

Yeah, they really should be tailored to the individual child and what they need. Sometimes plans are actually about, you know, not so much what a teacher needs to do, but what a teacher needs to understand about this child. So particularly if there's sensory needs, knowing that on a rainy day it's going to be tough is really important and then knowing what you can do on that rainy day, for example. And what would the process be for, you know, for getting an individual learning plan? Is it something that's usually going to be asked, you know, by the teacher or by the parent or what would just the process look like?

I think it can be driven by either. I think it's driven by the needs of the child. So sometimes it's about everyone just having a meeting, coming together and getting on the same page about things. Sometimes you might have a meeting once and you might never come back to review it because actually everyone felt heard, everyone got everything out that they wanted to say and things settled down. But certainly with other plans, you'll be constantly meeting to review them and look at what's working and what's not working, perhaps set some more goals. They really need to be strengths based as well. And a lot of the time the student voice needs to be considered as well, as well as the family voice.

So perhaps a teacher requests an individual learning plan, but it may not be what the family is looking for or what the child is really needing. So it's important that it's collaborative. It's not being done to someone, it's with. And at high school with a number of teachers working with a child, it's important that they are getting that information and that learning plan. A lot of the time at high school is information being shared with them so that they know how to do what they're doing in their classroom across different settings. So it could include sensory needs, it could include learning needs or behavioural needs.

But essentially it's there to help raise awareness of the needs of that individual. It's not necessarily about saying, yes, it's because they have ADHD, because we have lots of students who may have that diagnosis who won't need an individual learning plan. So keeping the student on top, like that child on top and working collaboratively with the school is really important with anything like that. But a lot of the time you can request it as well. If you know this is what they need, if you know you really need everyone on board with the same information, then as a parent, it would be fine to say, hey, we've had this in the past, we really needed this in the past and we didn't get it.

I'm thinking this is what we're needing for high school. And sometimes that data that you were talking about might be the trigger for the learning plan. So across the classes, we might have noticed it's PE, it's just happening in PE or health. Maybe it's happening across the board. And so a more collaborative approach is needed with you, with your child and all of those teachers as well, which can feel a little bit intimidating. So again, you go back to your key person and they'll be the one who can help work with you on that and get some feedback off you, have some student voice in there as well so that you're not having to sit there with all those eight teachers, which can be quite an intimidating process for a parent.

So it's nice to have that one person who will advocate for you and for your child and help create that plan. And so it would be beneficial for the child to be sort of, I mean, you know, depending on the age as well, to be included in that, whether it's, you know, I know with my son it was asking, you know, what do you think might help you when you're sitting on the mat? And, you know, we decided to potentially look at something like a fidget or something that he can be doing. And if he's sitting on the mat, that's easier for him to pay attention or, you know, it was just trialling that. It didn't work very well.

But, you know, it was different things that we wanted to look at trying and it wasn't him sitting there with us going through the plan, but it was maybe me reflecting back to him. What do you think might help? And sometimes it was, I don't know. And then other times it might have been, oh, I really get distracted by this. And then I could be like, oh, that's good information for me to then let the teacher know. Absolutely. And you may already have the solutions to the issues that have come up, that have bubbled up in that classroom. So that's why that student voice is so important and why your own experiences of parenting will make that a really living document.

It's not set in stone. It might, what they're needing in year nine could look really different to what they're needing in year 11 or 12. So it is good to keep coming back to it. And to go back to it as a parent and not assume that that's going to keep working in two years' time or they've got a learning plan in place, but that was from, you know, 2023. You need a different one for 2025. I think not just what do you need to help you, but also asking children, what do you like about school? What's your best bit? You know, what are the things, what do you not like about school? How can we help you?

Is there anything that really is important? Yeah. Is there anything that really annoys you? Just all of those little things are a bit of a window into a child. And then, I mean, our children are often quite little and sitting through a meeting is not something they're going to be very excited about. But talking to them before the meeting and then coming back afterwards and saying, well, we talked about how you created this. You made progress with this. And we want, you said you'd like to have a fidget. We found some fidgets. Which one do you like? Those sorts of things. So they feel like they're part of the process.

Definitely don't want to. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Definitely don't want to be part of a process. Definitely don't want to have them feeling like they're in trouble or they're having to sit. So no, that's definitely a vibe that can sometimes be how it can feel for children that might have those sorts of feelings. And during school time, if they are behaving where they're being pulled up for their behaviours quite often as well. Recently, I had a meeting. And I'd spoken to a child about what they were interested in.

And they said something to me that was just completely off the wall. everyone in the meeting was quite blown away by the thing that they wanted to learn about because this child hadn't communicated that to anyone until then because he hadn't been asked and then because we knew this we were able to tailor everything we did around that child's special interest which meant it had a lot more chance of working. I think the other thing to keep in mind too is often there may be a number of things that need to be addressed it's then about prioritising. Okay what's the first thing we want to work on so that a plan doesn't seem totally overwhelming to either that you know the staff the teachers in the family and possibly the child if they ever get to have a look at it.

But you might prioritise this is going to be our initial focus then you can start moving.

And if the RTLB team is involved they may have one particular aspect of the plan that they're supporting so you know it's the school's plan but we might have one aspect that we're supporting within that plan and then that would be okay what does that look like what resources do we put you know into that so if the school needed some support to implement that plan that would you know that the resource would be attached to that and are there often other sort of organizations that might be involved depending on the schools and things so sometimes with those sorts of individual plans there might be you know like mana ake or swiss like social workers and schools things like that where they might be allocated those sorts of things so is it sort of everyone coming together to collaborate on how that can be and maybe who delivers certain parts and things like that and who's who's delivering into that plan and again there might there might be a need to prioritize those actions as well so the group collaborative we might decide that this particular action is the most important one and we'll start with that one and then the next one will come sometimes it's about pulling all the information together so a child may have just had a cognitive assessment a sensory processing profile an adhd diagnosis and you've got all of these bits of information and it's about sitting down with parents and going through and making sure you're all on the same page

6. ADHD and schools - Strategies for the student and the class

Definitely I was going to ask as well what sort of things do you have as examples of things that you know teachers could be doing potentially to support children that may have suspected or diagnosed ADHD within obviously there's going to be a range of different things whether it's sensory or um you know they're over stimulated or they've you know got um highly distracted things like that but are there certain things that are more commonly used um strategies or things like that that are easier to sort of implement without making too much of an effect on everybody else and on the child as well I think it is about normalizing some disciplines that you would put in place generally something that's going to be good and helpful for a child with ADHD is actually going to be good and helpful for all children in the class so you'll hear people talk about things like fidgets or move and sit cushions or those sorts of things but a lot of it can also be around regulation and that's something you can be teaching your entire class um there's plenty of programs that work on things like that and it might be that it's tweaked slightly for one child but the rest of the class know the language if it's zones of regulation they know what the red zone is and the green zone is and those sorts of things um sensory things can be quite tricky because what one child's seeking another child can be avoiding so it's being aware of that sort of um and it's understanding things like sometimes our children with ADHD um find noise really really challenging but they are extremely noisy themselves so they can be there yep that kind of dynamic going on um and also understanding about preempting some things so not waiting until they've had enough to give them a break but giving them a break preemptively so that they can just get on and stretching children when they need to be stretched outside their comfort zone but also knowing when not to go there yeah yeah okay i think i'm sorry but i i was going to say like at high school it's quite interesting hearing what you're saying because you know the kids will have you know six periods a day and it um the intensity of that can um overload people sometimes and what i've noticed is um being able to have a break and self-exit from class take a break be able to go for a walk have a drink of water um have something to eat as well and having again that key person that they can go to who can do that little check in with them are you okay today have you eaten have you slept um when was the last time you weren't wearing the headphones or um how much screen how much screen time have you had today and really just noticing what that day is looking like what that pattern is and um looking for those little moments where they could be taking breaks because um by the time someone gets to high school it's about building up their capacity to do it on their own as well so having some sort of tools that they've got for themselves that they can self they can manage themselves rather than having someone manage for

them is really helpful so being allowed to leave the classroom for 10 minutes and then re-enter or have that time to to regulate and then maybe go oh i'm still not quite in the zone i need to be and be able to go to that safe person to say can i just work in this quiet place um having being able to work somewhere else outside of their classroom especially if they're in a big collaborative space can be helpful noise cancelling headphones the loop earbuds can be helpful too it just really depends on the individual student what what they're needing and how they're feeling about about themselves on that day in all settings um having learning that perhaps encourages more hands-on more active sort of learning approaches can be really helpful um and adjusting sort of some of the um sort of the workstations so for instance you you might have an opportunity to sit at your desk or you might have a standing desk or you might be able to go and you down on on the carpet and do something there so again it's what emma said if it works for one student it's bound to work for another student as well so i think there's a whole range of different classroom adaptations that teachers can make as well and using strengths and passions as a way into whatever the learning intention is can be quite helpful and i think in the high school system you know that being able to get up and leave after a period and go to a new class there's some exercise probably a drink along the way and a fresh start with a new teacher is actually quite helpful sometimes yeah yeah and that ability to better choose what you're doing at school as well i think makes a massive difference so we do find if kids have got um they get to do those subjects that they're passionate about and they've got that to look forward to then those little hard moments during the day as you're saying that they can stretch it a little bit further um and it gives them that sensory time that they're needing because they've chosen it again always thinking about what what do they need what are they passionate about what's going to help them because it's about that long-term growth as well rather than the short-term games

7. ADHD and schools - Talking about Neurodiversity within the school

Okay, so I'm wondering what sort of conversations are currently being held or what's the best way to sort of educate other students and parents and teachers and things about neurodiversity and differences and things in the best way so that, you know, everybody's informed and understanding without having them feel like they're excluded or being shamed for being different, I suppose, and how different brains are working. Schools schools celebrate difference in lots and lots and lots of ways. So difference, sameness, they're things that are sort of cropping up all the time. You might, you know, celebrate a student for a particular you know expertise and something out on the field or it might be, you know, doing a really good job of, you know, reading something or it might, you know, there's a whole lot of different ways that schools celebrate difference.

And so, I think there there are opportunities right through a school day in a school year for children to understand that difference as specifically or differences in all or all different and that it's it's not just about, you know, you have a diagnosis so there for you're over here and everybody else is over here.

So I think that happens quite sort of of organically in schools but also at times deliberately through the curriculum um you know through the health and sort of well-being curriculum through um you know literacy numeracy they're always looking at you know similarities and differences i don't really want to add to that yeah i think sometimes like at really big schools those conversations can become quite formalized as well which i think if you've got informal discussion about diversity but more formalized discussion then it totally normalizes the experiences of um for everybody and everybody feels like we're all you know we're all part of this together so at the school i'm at with our year nine orientation week we have two sessions which are specifically about teaching students about diversity and what a diverse community looks like and talking anything from lgbtqi plus to neurodivergence to people from different countries ex-refugees and understanding that people may look different may think differently and that that is part of life and part of living um as well so formalizer having formal discussions around it i think is really helpful for students because it creates a safe space for them but it also allows them to see people who are like them in that community too and to have that mirrored approach but also those informal ongoing discussions um where people are not being pigeonholed where it is a um it's it's just it's who we are we are all different we are all diverse and accepting that as as we are all part of this community together sometimes it can be helpful for teachers to have that conversation with individual parents perhaps if if perhaps an individual parent who's has a child who's having little stumbling blocks around those issues themselves maybe the parent needs a little bit of quiet one-on-one education around that too that can be really helpful as well but i think most of the time it's taking place in the classrooms in lots of small ways and i think that that's probably the most important part that it's always ongoing it's always a discussion and then sitting beside understanding that this is actually who we are as a school or as a community too so that people understand this is this is what we do here sometimes a student sometimes um there may need to be a conversation with a class or with a group of students around something quite specific you know for another student and i think that that needs to be done in a you know with consent from the family um and in a very empathetic and understanding way and it might be for instance um talking through how to interact in a social situation with that particular student if they have um you know one way of dealing with things and the rest of the students are finding that difficult or it might be around how do you support that student because they may have a sensory issue that at times impacts the way they interact with others so i think there are opportunities or there may well be times when you you might be able to have a conversation with a group of students and you do need to do that but you do that in a very empathetic way with the consent of the family um yeah and with often without that student there or it may be that the family decides that yeah it would be useful with that student there as well so that you've got their voice and

sometimes the student might want to be the person that yeah that says things i think in a primary school context it's very similar celebrating difference and celebrating things that are the same as with an i'm a very difficult student um it's very it's very very hard to stay in the same level the way that you know i'd like to be with a third school class or may be a lot of kids as well um but you know that you're there for the kid and you're doing all these things and so um so i think it's especially helpful as well um knowing the level of diversity and the children can make a difference um i think that's also what i did with my character and other learning things um you're saying with the materials and the Indoor dobo books or novel studies to kind of share about diversity in a context that's not right in the school so children those and say these are for you because you can't cope with noise we would put six pairs in the classroom and say these are for the class and of course everyone wants to use them in the beginning but then the people that end up wearing them are the ones that actually benefit from them so instead of trying to create difference it's about normalising things as well not just this child needs to go out for a run this big group need to go out for a run that kind of thing

8. ADHD and schools - Responding to the “naughty” label

Okay, so I'm just wondering what are the best ways that we can be responding to people that might be thinking that, you know, the misbehaviour of a child or labelling a child as naughty and how we can sort of respond and work with that and to really rewrite that narrative for our children that might be experiencing those difficulties and behaviours and things. Yeah, so behaviour is communication, so we need to understand why the child is behaving that way, what need is it meeting for them, and from there we can figure out where to go next. Everything we do should be protecting a child's mana, so there shouldn't be a reputation building for a child that they are naughty or misbehave or have an anger management issue, which is something that's quite a tricky...

Yeah. ...trendy thing to say at the moment. Yeah. Why is the child behaving this way and how can we teach them the skills that they need to be able to be successful, and that needs to be done without any judgement around things. It's very easy for people who don't understand ADHD to say it's parenting, it's diet, it's screen time, and it's not any of those things usually. It's usually something that needs quite a bit of thinking about and a bit of reteaching. So it's probably, as Emma said, it's about unpacking what it is that that need is communicating to you.

But going back to what we were talking about earlier, that's where if you're collecting data, whether it be what's happening in the playground, what's happening in the classroom, you're noticing things, you're just making a note of them, you can start to then see where perhaps there are patterns, particular times, maybe particular times. Yeah. Behaviours that crop up time and time again, and then you've got an opportunity to sit down and look at those. It might be with another teacher. It might be with your learning support coordinator or your SENCO, and look at them and say, okay, what's happening for that child here?

What can we do to disrupt that pattern? Do we need to teach them another skill? Do we need to introduce something that's going to support a sensory need? Yeah. Are the blocks of time too long? Are they sitting on the mat for too long? Do we need to give them a break? So it's not just about what's happening for the child, it's actually thinking about what's happening in the context of that environment at the time as well. It's always interacting with their environment. Oh, that does. It might be other students, it might be every time George goes along and he chooses to sit next to Fred. Well, there's always a problem.

If there's a problem then, what is it that's creating it? So it might have nothing to do with ADHD, but it might actually be something to do with the diagnosis as well. I think we also know that punishment doesn't work, so just because we came through schools that use punishment doesn't mean that it's going to work. So we need to be looking at how we can teach children what they need. I'd love to get a bit of insight from you, Matt, around how you do that. No, I totally agree with that. Communication and thinking about things broadly and systems and skill-based things, I think is absolutely where it starts.

I think kids with ADHD that I see, often they haven't got intent, you know, they're actually trying to do the right thing, but they're so impulsive and so restless that it's very difficult for them. Yeah. And kids with emotional regulation problems. Yeah. Often they have an idea about what they should do, but in the heat of the moment, that's just too hard for them. I don't get it. And it's kind of identifying when they're just starting to move up the, you know, colours on the emotional regulation, zones of regulation stuff, and intervening as early as you can, and all those other sorts of things.

Everything that's been said sounds good. Is it quite detrimental if, you know, punitive ways are sort of what is pushed on for those children as well? Or is it potentially safe? Yeah. I think it's something that can always sort of be like a repair, and you can always kind of alter and work with that child. Yeah. Things are, you know, there's always going to be some issues out there, and it's kind of how you manage that and what you learn from it. And hopefully you just work in a direction where that's less frequently happening in the future, and heading in the right direction. But if it's heading in the wrong direction, sometimes getting some advice from somebody else is quite helpful.

Just another set of eyes, because you can get caught up in what's happening. And from your own view, you know, no one's got all the answers. There's quite, I think there's also a large part of this is around educating the adults around the student, or adults generally.

Just understanding the behaviours of communication. Understanding that it's always contextual, those sorts of things. And the fact that what they do can have an impact on that behaviour as well. So they might impact it positively or negatively. Which might increase the behaviour or decrease the behaviour. So it's not just about what happens with the child, it's actually about everybody that's around that child.

9. ADHD and schools - Input from the family

the key to it is probably knowing that child well and that's where the family and that connection with the school is so important understanding what's happening for that child and it might even be on a day-to-day basis you know it's it's sometimes it might be setting up that check-in with from the family to that key person in the school each day you know if he's had a great morning tell us he's had a great morning because then we'll expect a great day something's gone a little awry don't just hope it sort of disappears because the child suddenly got to school but keep that communication open can be really helpful for the school to hear from the parent as well if if they've had a bad weekend if there's things going on in the family talking to that key person and just saying i'm giving you a heads up i'm a little bit he's come he's here today but it might be a little bit wobbly letting that person know so that then they can go oh this is i'll go in and check on them and you know in this class or i'll get the teacher aid or someone else to do that check-in if if they're comfortable doing that and just sharing that information because as a parent you will be seeing things and experiencing things as a family that the school won't have insight into so it can be quite helpful to know yeah Mondays are always a tricky day because that's the day my child changes houses and so that transition is a transition at school as well as well as at home and all of that can feed into how any incidents are managed and perhaps that will help build some strategies and you know across school and home as well and coming back to that sort of collaborative approach of looking at school and home environment and in looking at ways to you know to work together really nice open communication between the two yeah really important i think remembering that these children i can't remember the exact statistics but these children generally have had 10 000 more negative messages by the time they're five than neurotypical children so negative if negative messaging was going to work it would have worked yeah definitely

10. ADHD and schools - Addressing concerns about a child's teacher

Okay, that sort of reminds me of something else I was going to ask around, you know, what would it be suggested to do if it did appear that, you know, maybe your child's teacher was not super supportive or maybe they were not being, you know, massively accommodating and they were doing, you know, one thing but sort of not wanting to look at doing other things and working with you a bit more on what else can be done, you know, is there sort of a process of, you know, say the teacher and then maybe you might talk to the principal and then obviously you can talk to the ministry as well or what do you suggest in that way that when there are schools or, you know, certain staff members that might not be as accommodating and understanding and really solution focused, what can a parent do in that instance because, yeah, it's definitely...

In the first instance, most schools will have a policy or a process so it might be that you find out... What their process is, if you can't get anywhere with the teacher, you go to that key person, whether it's, you know, someone in Emma's position or someone in Sarah's position and if that still doesn't get you anywhere, then you sort of move up till you've sort of spoken with the principal and then after that it might be, you know, on to sort of your ministry, the Ministry of Education and the service manager for that particular school and then they can help facilitate that conversation, so, yeah.

It's about keeping the relationship open as well, so it never works to go in and say, this is what I want to happen, try and work alongside people and if that's not working, who's the next person you can get on your side? Was last year's teacher actually a great match? Can they be someone that's an ally for your child as well? You hear of people saying they're going to take their child out of the school and maybe they want to move schools and things. Yeah. Obviously, you know, as much as that can sometimes be maybe one of the solutions, it's not always going to be, you know, the main solution because sometimes, you know, the issues may actually move with the child and the family and the, you know, everything as well, so it might not be always based upon that certain school or their process or anything like that, but, yeah.

And in Christchurch, nearly every school is owned, so actually people don't have a lot of choice. Exactly.

11. ADHD and schools - Strategies to avoid exclusion

and another thing I was thinking of as well is an approach that sometimes is used of you know exclusion for children so when they're excluded from an activity or from a trip or from an event or whatever that may be due to maybe behavior that they've had or anything I know that's definitely something that has stuck with me since not being able to go on my year 7 camp that I wasn't able to go because the teacher actually didn't see she couldn't handle me for that time so you know it was honesty there but also I missed out because

there was no you know so is there something that can be you know like a different way and approaches that might be able to be taken by schools and things if that's something that they indicating might happen so that a child may be you know eventually not being able to do a certain thing or whether they also come home and see that I didn't get to do this today or things like that so what sort of the you know it depends on whether it's being used as a punishment or whether it's a safety concern but there's always a way of finding a solution for these things and it is sometimes about being really creative and the approach that you take you know sometimes we can get really serious safety concerns if you're the only teacher on the school camp responsible for children and you've got a child who is non-compliant and you know when they're not medicated at night things could be tricky that doesn't mean they shouldn't go on camp but it means you might need to wrap another plan around them you just try and be as creative as you can because we know that if the kids have a really strong sense of belonging they will do well and when you see the messages about well you can't go on camp and you can't go on this trip and you're not allowed to do this it just erodes the whole sense of whanaungatanga and that's not going to make things better for them.

So sometimes it's about parents and schools working together collaboratively to okay well this child might be able to go on camp for the day or actually I'll go on camp with them or I won't go on camp with them but I'll be just down the road in a motel so if something goes wrong I can whiz in or actually I'll be on the phone or can we think really carefully about who's going to be in the bunk room you know just being really careful about the way that you present things and also preparing a child so they can be successful so do they need a social story do they need some visits out to the camp beforehand do they need to know exactly what is expected for every activities is there one activity that's going to be particularly anxiety provoking that needs to be managed in a different way you know how can you how can you do things creatively.

What about schools that might not have or you know families that might not have the ability to you know get time off work to go or to be you know in a motel down the road or even teachers that just you know to feel they don't have the capacity and there's no other options and they might not have as much funding and things like that so what about sort of any recommendations on that sort of how that could be dealt with from in perspective of different design schools and things like that and I suppose this situation in the environment they might be in.

I still think it's about being solution focused and thinking so this is what we want and now how are we going to get there okay so mum's not available to come on camp can nana come on camp is there a teacher aide that could come on camp that's happy to come out do we just need mum I mean our camps are generally quite close to school so do we just need mum to come out and stay the night after work and then head off to work at 6 in the morning so that she's there you know there's always ways around things it's just a matter of thinking creatively.

Yeah and I think doing that together coming into the school physically sitting down having a chat about it talking about what is it that the school is concerned about and what you're concerned about as a parent as well and maybe it's sharing a video of the camp so that the student knows what to expect it might be looking at the timeline of activities it might be like you were saying being flexible about how they're going to be at camp are they gonna stay the night or not stay the night can a teacher bring them for the day and then return back often school camps it's not two teachers they're there for the week it's you're know people are coming in and out all the time so looking at it well ahead of time as well um not sitting on it and stewing and worrying think well i feel like i'm getting this messaging um my child's getting this messaging at school i'm going to be proactive with this and say look i am concerned for their safety as well because i you know we've all experienced this together how can we make it a really positive mana enhancing experience for them so that they're part of the class they're getting these this cool stuff that everybody wants to do in new zealand especially camp is such a big deal but really breaking it down and looking at what is camp what do we get from camp what do you want to get from camp as a parent why do you why do i want my child there and really articulating that as well schools are flexible and even if they don't feel that they are all schools have the capacity to be inclusive and it's actually the school's job to be creative and to work that stuff out with you and is that irrelevant of the child having a diagnosis or not so even if that is you know i would have you know thought previously oh if my child doesn't have anything diagnosed then they're sort of not able to get any help because there isn't anything sort of there but is that also something like you know look you maybe you're in between trying to look into getting diagnosis or you're not being able to afford it or you haven't sort of looked into that but you know that there are needs that aren't being met for your child or that you're trying to navigate working that with the teacher so you can still sort of look at those yeah it's about looking at the student and knowing them who they are and knowing what those patterns of behavior might be and where those um planning for that yeah planning for that and seeing and hearing from them whether they're nervous or anxious maybe these things that they are worried about as well um it doesn't have to be about a diagnosis a piece of paper there's patterns of behavior there and it can be it's part of that whole person and um working in that in a positive way and proactively i think is the most important part especially when you're thinking about big events like camp which is such a big deal for students particularly um in year seven eight i think when they get to intermediate it's such a high point and um it's important for those accommodations to be in place for them yeah you want them to look back as an adult and remember that they went on school camp not remember that everyone else they didn't yeah and i think we do make accommodations for other children you know a child who's got um epilepsy we just wrap a plan around them they've got diabetes we wrap a plan around them they're in a wheelchair we wrap a planner on them so we need to be wrapping plans around everyone and if for whatever reason

that communication breaks down don't feel that the school is taking on board what your concerns are or if you think that your child isn't getting the support that they need.

I mean in the first instance it's do your very best to sort of talk to the school and try and get them to sort of understand your perspective and if that doesn't work you always have access to your local ministry of education and each school will have a service manager or an education advisor that they work closely with. So a general call in there will put you in touch with that person and then they will support you and the school to work through what those issues are.

12. ADHD and schools - Key messages

So I think a key message from my perspective is keeping that communication open and respectful with schools on both parts from both sides and the fact that schools are working with neurodiverse students all the time so you know they they know how to adapt and you know access services as and when they need them.

I think the key message for me in terms of high school again is be open, be collaborative, be flexible in your own thinking about what schools can do and be willing to walk that journey with the school and take the time there won't be any quick fix for anything and because there is no quick fix for everything we are talking about maintaining and building relationships be ready and willing to build a relationship with the school and feel positive about the choice of school that you have made or if it's a school up the road say yeah it's a school up the road but I want to work with them for my child and we're going to do this together.

I think a key message from a primary perspective would be that this looks individual for every child and it's a matter of educating everyone being educated being curious about that child and then adapting things looking for solutions and looking for ways for their child to be successful.

I think a key message that I've sort of you know observation of this all is that a child doesn't need to you know have a certain label or diagnosis or anything you know for them to get support and that yeah it's important to be communicating as much as you can and to be persistent maybe with the communication as well so you know if you're not getting support with one place then there's always more places to go and just to continue on being the advocate for your child and trying your best to work with the school and realising that you know they're not there to be against you you're all there for one thing which is for you know the the best for your child so or children so yeah it's really good to know that yeah that there's definitely things to be expected and that we can always just keep persisting to get the outcome that we need for ourselves.

Info to school, info to chalk.