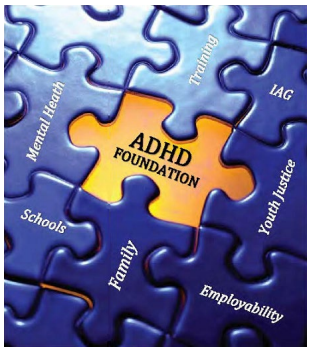


ADHD – the missing piece of the puzzle

A guide for parents of children with ADHD

'Moving up to 'big school'



A Guide for parents written by parents of children with ADHD

Introduction

The ADHD Foundation is a service for children and young people living with ADHD aged 5-19 and their families. We believe that the child, the family, the school and other agencies should work together to make changes. All need to have an understanding and be informed so that they are equipped to deal with the needs of those with ADHD and the unique challenges this can present in the home, at school and during times when the child is under pressure and experiencing stress – such as

- **Transition from primary to secondary school**
- **Examinations**
- **Adverse life events (bereavements, bullying, ill health etc)**

Enabling 'everyone' to understand and manage ADHD will enable the child to realise their full potential, thrive and enjoy their childhood. It is important that we work to the best standards of evidence based practice and to work together and be accountable.

The ADHD Foundation delivers

- **'one to one' and 'group' Information ,Advice and Guidance sessions for parents, teachers and young people.**
- **Parents Skill building training**
- **Children's skill building training**
- **school based groups and after school provision**.

Accreditation ADHD knowledge and skills programme for parents to take their learning on ADHD forward. There is no quick "expert" fix but it is a process of learning to move forward to create positive outcomes.
This handbook is written in a language that attempts to make it accessible to all- parents, children and professionals.

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Transition

Transition is an important issue for all children, but more so for children with ADHD, their families and their schools. It has to be acknowledged that the welfare of the child is most important and to be managed correctly, it has to be fully understood.

****

Children with ADHD have real difficulties with organisation and the prospect of a move to a large school in which self-organisation, combined with establishing multiple new relationships with peers and teachers in 'BIG' school is an enormous challenge for every child but particularly those children with ADHD.
That is why it is really important for parents and schools to understand the difficulties these children face with just the simple everyday tasks such as time awareness, organisation, poor short term memory, establishing a 'routine' and the challenges they have communicating with other children and adults as a result of poor social skills.

Some parents who have been involved with the ADHD Foundation have therefore put their concerns together and have come up with some ideas and solutions to help with this challenging transition from primary to secondary school.

The ideas which have been put together are to-

- enable parents choose the school which is right for their child

- support the child in preparing for the larger more formal setting of a secondary school

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- help the school to understand the difficulties children with ADHD face on a daily basis.

Understanding what it is like to live with ADHD and to have to cope in a world, in which some children with ADHD don't seem to 'fit in' is the most important part of this planning and it is essential that everyone involved in the support of the child is also involved in this process of transition.

Parents of children with ADHD often find it difficult to choose a secondary school for their children. This is often because of the problems which occured at primary level. Children with ADHD can carry the stigma of the difficulties their ADHD can create and when choosing a school, the stigma sometimes 'arrives'' before the child in the form of negative reports but more often because many teachers in secondary school do not understand what ADHD is.

Many teachers still believe ADHD is 'A behaviour problem'. It is not.



So what is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurobiological condition affecting the brain and nervous system that results in

- Difficulty paying attention
- Difficulty in following spoken instructions
- Difficulty staying on task and concentrating / easily distracted

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- Hyperactivity – needing to move and fidget
- Low emotional resilience resulting in the child becoming easily distressed
- Anxiety resulting in the child easily becoming frustrated
- Anxiety that makes the feel stressed very easily
- Anxiety that makes the feel they are unable to cope
- Anxiety that affects their ability to remember what they have learned
- Poor organisational skills and problem solving skills
- Children on medication will seem to behave differently when they have just taken medication or when their medication is wearing off.

Children with ADHD will experience all the above – some more so than others, depending on the severity of their ADHD.

Everyone experiences 'stress' in different ways – and when we are stressed we all say and do things differently. Signs of stress include

- Cant sleep
- Forget things
- Withdraw
- Eat
- Get angry with those around us
- Get stomach pains
- Feel tired

For many children with ADHD – this is how they feel all the time. The chemical transmitters in their brains and nervous systems, results in their 'fight or flight' *survival instinct* becoming easily triggered. This means that children with ADHD can panic easily and feel very easily threatened.

For many children with additional needs, their experience of school can be one that causes them increased anxiety – which affects their ability to learn and achieve. It is vital that parents help teachers to support their child by

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- Explain to teachers how ADHD affects your child
- Give them information that will help them understand and support your child

Parents are often worried that there will not be a school who will 'take' their child. Putting aside the notion that they need to ensure the school is 'right' for their child.

This is why transition from primary to secondary school is so important for all children but more so for children with specific difficulties such as ADHD.
ADHD is seen purely as a behavioural issue by many schools, communities and the media but for many children with ADHD, this is not the case.

ADHD does not = '**bad behaviour'**

Challenging behaviour is a result of un-supported and un-treated ADHD.

Challenging behaviour is often an acting out of the emotional distress felt by the child which they often do not understand themselves or indeed know how to put into words so adults will understand them.

It is not too hard to see why these children find this stage of transition so difficult. In primary school Children tend to be taught by one main teacher in one class room. By comparison, in secondary school they will be taught by ten or more teachers, in ten or more rooms and possibly two or three different teaching blocks covering a large area. This change is challenging for any child, but particularly so for children who have major difficulties with organisation, time concepts and poor memory.

Teachers have a really difficult job in teaching so many children on a daily basis. There is a lot of pressure on teachers to enable children to achieve good grades.

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Often, teachers are not experts on all aspects of child development or child mental health and therefore would not always know how to recognise children with additional needs. By **not** recognising the difficulties these children face daily, schools will never meet the needs of these children **who cannot** and **will not** cope effectively without support.



Where do I get support?

This support can come from school based learning support assistants, community Peadiatricians, GP's and other agencies. The primary source of support is the parents and family. So it is important that parents themselves learn as much as they can about ADHD and about it affects their child so they can explain to staff how to help their child achieve their potential, experience success and be happy and enjoy school.

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A school has a duty of care to enable every child to access the National Curriculum and achieving academically.

To achieve their academic potential, children need

- to feel safe
- to feel they 'belong'
- to feel 'protected' by the responsible adults in the school
- to feel they are understood
- to feel the teachers understand their learning difficulties
- to feel that teachers understand how they 'feel' and be able to identify when they are anxious or distressed.
- Children need to build emotional resilience so they can learn to overcome obstacles to achievement.

Developing emotional resilience requires parents and teachers encouraging children to believe they can achieve and be supportive and encouraging when children fail. 'Learning is a trail and error activity' – everybody makes mistakes when they are learning something new. When it comes to achieving – 'I CAN IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN IQ'

Parents and teachers must recognise achievement and positive behaviours and praise and encourage.

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Often this means ignoring behaviours that are challenging – because we need to understand the child's 'motivation'.

Most children want to please the adult and gain praise and approval – it is human instinct.

When children are being challenging or even 'oppositional' it is often unintentional – rather it is the consequence of their ADHD



Year 6 Questionnaire

We put together a questionnaire for children in Year 6 and worked with a school in Liverpool asking children how they felt about the move to '**big'** school.

They were asked the following questions:

- Are you excited about the move to secondary school?
- Are you worried about the change?
- What do you think will be different from the school you are in at the moment?

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- Are you looking forward to your new school?
- Are you worried about '**big school'**?
- What would make your move to secondary school less scary for you?

We also asked the children what was most important to them. These are some of the statements made by the children.

1.	Knowing your way around the school	15%
2.	Making new friends	11%
3.	Teachers understanding me	5%
4.	New friends understanding me	7%
5.	Knowing the rules	18%
6.	Being listened to	16%
7.	Being accepted for who I am	13%
8.	Have someone to go to when I feel scared or angry	2%
9.	Not being able to do the work set out for me	9%
10.	Not being able to cope	4%

The children we asked felt that 'knowing the rules' was the most important statement choice made. 'Being listened to' was the second most important and in third place came 'knowing their way around the school'.
Here is the '**new'** list children felt were most important in order of priority:

1. Knowing the rules
2. Being listened to
3. Knowing your way around the school
4. Being accepted for who I am
5. Making new friends
6. Not being able to do the work set out for me
7. New friends understanding me
8. Teachers understanding me
9. Being able to cope
10. Having someone to go to when I feel scared or angry.

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Here are the most common answers from the children in Year 6 when asked to complete the following statements.

'It would help me in my new school if……..'

'Everyone was kind to me.'
'My friends came too.'
'If I knew my way around and knew all the teachers.'
'If I get shown round before I start.'
'My mum could come on the first day.'
'Year 7 nowhere near older pupils so we could get to know people.'
'I could get help when I needed it.'
'Teachers to understand my personality.'

'It would help my new teacher to understand me if:'

'If I could 'write a note about what we are like and take us out and get to know us better'.

As a parent you might want to ask what is the 'induction' programme for new year 7 pupils as they start secondary school? How does the school help them settle in? Many primary schools begin this process before children start secondary school but an induction programme in the first week will help your child settle in and become familiar with their new surroundings and timetable – and most of all become familiar with their new school peers and new teachers.

At the ADHD Foundation, we beleive it may help both the child and the teachers to see an 'individual personal profile' written by the child about themselves with information the child wants the teachers to know such as

'I have ADHD, will you understand me like my teacher in my old school does?'

'I have real problems concentrating in class and I find writing difficult.'

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‘I am very forgetful and don’t like asking the teacher to explain something when I don’t understand.’

This kind of information may be really useful in understanding the needs of some of the children who have additional needs such as ADHD as it encourages the child to express clearly what their needs are.

Individual personal profile

We call this a ‘**SAM’ Something About Me!** Profile
*(See appendix2)

It is obvious by some of the comments we received that children have real concerns and by listening to those concerns we may be able to understand their fears. This can help them to overcome their concerns, make them less anxious and make transition a happier experience for all children especially children with ADHD.

The purpose of the questionnaire we gave to the children was firstly to ask the children directly what their concerns were (if any), as they journey from primary to secondary school. Adults often make assumptions about what children’s concerns are without encouraging them to reflect on this for themselves. Asking children these questions allow us to understand and help our children to move through this process of transition as smoothly and as happily as possible, creating a stress free zone for, not only the child, but the school and the parents.

Parents have reported to us how anxious they feel about their child being able to cope in secondary school and often don’t know how best to help them. The first rule of thumb is – speak to the school and explain your concerns and advise them how they can best support your child. Ask to be involved in what is written in the ‘Individual Education Plan’ of your child.

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We also produced a questionnaire for year 7 pupils asking similar questions about the difficulties they faced with the move from Primary to Secondary school. Many children found this move difficult. Recurring comments were

"***It took ages to find their way about'. (especially difficult for children with ADHD)***

" I felt scared", (Anxiety increases the characteristics of ADHD)

"It (school building) was so big and I didn't like to ask anyone for help or directions because they would be laughed at and feel stupid".

"Having to get to know so many teachers is difficult".

"The teachers did not seem to care as much in secondary school as they did in primary school"

"Teachers not knowing how I felt and not caring how I felt was when I stopped enjoying school".

It is important to be fair to teachers and explain to your child that teachers have to get to know as many as a thousand children in a large secondary school and it is impossible for them to remember so much information about each child – especially when they may only come into contact with them for a couple of hours every week. This is another reason why parents need to offer additional support and comfort to their children when they begin secondary school. Many children will experience a sense of loss about the relationships they had with their primary school teachers and can be disappointed by the different relationships they have with teachers in secondary school at first. Explain that it takes time to build relationships with new teachers and encourage them to try and understand how difficult it can be for the teachers trying to get to know so many children.

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The children who responded to our questionnaire were clear in pointing out that the transition from primary to secondary school was not an easy experience for them. It seems that their initial excitement about 'moving to big school' changed to feeling 'anxious' rather than exciting. With more forward planning, thought and listening to what our children are saying, maybe we can make this process a better one in the future, especially for children for whom every day can be stressful enough just living with ADHD.

Forward Planning

We recognised that forward planning was the most important part in this process and that by thinking ahead and anticipating difficulties, parents had more control. This control was reassuring to the children, allowing them to feel secure in the knowledge that 'mum or dad' was there to help support them in this difficult time ahead.

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We came up with the following list of 'things to do' to help support each other and to make the transition process as easy and stress free as possible for all concerned.

- Make contact with the school in plenty of time (Year 5)

- Take time out to build up a good relationship with the school and encourage them to meet with your child and get to know them as an individual not just as a 'name' with a diagnosis of ADHD.

- Explain to the school your concerns about your child's difficulties and offer support to ensure these are addressed, this will help the school and your child to work together towards a successful outcome.

- Request to visit the school when it is empty, times such as after school or inset days so as to allow the child to get his/her bearings without the total distraction of hundreds of other children. We feel that this would greatly benefit children with organisational difficulties in being aware of their surroundings before they attend the school for the start of the new term.

- Children with ADHD have many 'unseen' difficulties including poor short term memory and organisational skills so remembering classroom positions under stress will only cause them and the staff problems.

- Getting a map of the school or a layout of the classrooms and also a timetable will allow the parents and child to work out where each lesson will be taking place. This will help children with poor short term memory to practice where the classrooms are and where their subjects will be taking place.

- List the teacher's name in relation to their subjects. This will allow children to gain confidence when they know that they are going to the right classroom and are with the right teacher instead of arriving late and getting into trouble.

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- Ask for a copy of the Behaviour Policy / school rules and exclusion policy. This will allow parents to discuss and explain what behaviour is expected from the child before they fall foul of the school's discipline policy. Children with ADHD need preparation as change is difficult for them, anticipating this change is very important to both the child and the school.

  It is important for you as a parent to help your child make the transition and to help them understand that as they are maturing, different behaviours and new responsibilities come with moving to secondary school.

- Ask about the school's policy on 'medication'; are the school prepared to administer your child's medication?
- This can be a problem in many schools but without this medication, these children will not be able to access the national curriculum. Medication allows them a 'window of opportunity' to allow this to happen and it is important that schools are aware of this. If the school does not administer medication, this needs to be addressed well in advance of the new term.

Parents felt it would benefit the child if they were allowed to carry a card with all the information required signed by the head teacher and including the name of the person 'named responsible' for administering the child's medication, the dose and the time when the medication is to be taken. 'anticipation not confrontation'



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Having the child's individual needs visually available stating what the child's difficulties were and how they could best be supported can be helpful.

Parents involved in preparing this booklet suggested a card with this statement:

I have ADHD and find it difficult to concentrate. I fidget quite a bit and have problems sitting still. I find it hard to organise myself and sometimes forget what I am doing. I am impatient and find it hard to wait turns. Sometimes I try to shout out answers in class, this is because if I don't I will forget them. I sometimes get frustrated which gets me angry.
Please try to understand me.

The reverse side of the card says:

It might help us if…….
It would help me if we could work together to overcome the difficulties we will both face. Getting time out might help me if I get frustrated/angry. Tell me when I do something right and not just when I do something wrong. Help me to get back on task when I lose my way. I can't help fidgeting; it is the way I am.

Please don't take my behaviour personally



Parents are the best people to access when requesting support and having them as a resource by working together is the only way forward. Teachers will know what ADHD

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'is' but they will not understand what it is like to live with it daily. This is why it is so important to help support schools and for schools to work in partnership with parents to try to understand the chaos unsupported and untreated ADHD can create. This support will only happen if a good relationship is built up between parent child and school.

It is fair to say that parents bear the stigma of a child with ADHD just as much as the child himself does. The right support from school will help to de-stigmatise ADHD and managing it will become easier if we all work together towards a 'win win' situation. Having an open door policy and a support system in place in school (i.e. parent support group) goes a long way towards making this partnership work, not only for parents of children with ADHD but for all parents who are facing difficulties nurturing their children.

Why should we get involved in supporting transition?

> ADHD will not go away by pretending it isn't there, 'preparation' and 'anticipation' are two words which need to be used when thinking transition. Prepare both the child and the school for the challenges they both may face, and anticipate what will happen if the preparation is not done.

Schools have a responsibility to **all** children in supporting them during this difficult time of transition – and being a teenager can be difficult for all of us! - But even more so to children with ADHD who will otherwise find this process an extremely stressful, unhappy and difficult experience.

Many parents feel unsure about 'getting involved' with their schools or the management of their child's education.
Having a child with ADHD gives many parents the 'kick start' to learn and gain confidence to participate and get involved in their child's development.

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At the project, we have found that ‘getting involved’ not only improves the life of their child, but the whole family experience is enriched by learning and understanding about ADHD.

‘The child the family and the school working together to make changes’

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Appendix:

List of questions for New School to enable parents to see if the school can meet their child's needs prior to transition.

1. What level of understanding do you have for ADHD both clinical and pastoral?
2. Would you be able to differentiate between disruptive behaviour and the sometimes 'silly inappropriate' ADHD behaviour?
3. What do you have in place to support my child in helping him/her find their way around the school due to them having difficulties with organisation and poor concept of time?
4. If my child has a diagnosis of ADHD, will your understanding of these difficulties affect your exclusion policy?
5. Do you have a pastoral teacher who my child can access when they have difficulties and who will not judge them, but will listen and try to understand?
6. ADHD is a hidden disability, which unsupported can prevent my child from accessing his/her education, are you aware of this being a disability?
7. How are you as a school going to support my child through this difficult transition remembering their difficulties?
8. Do you have a policy on medication and does this policy include Ritalin, and does it include the administration of this medication?
9. Children with ADHD have a difficulty with literal language, what they say may not be what they understand it to be, are you aware of this difficulty and will you understand and appreciate the loss of this language in its translation?
10. Are you willing to work together in partnership with me to build a relationship to enable us to provide the right support and understanding and more importantly, the happiness and well being of my child?

Possible answers to questions:

1. It is very important that the school has a good understanding of ADHD - both pastoral and clinical. It is vital the parent, child and school, work together.

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2. It is extremely important that teachers understand the consequences for a child's long term mental health and general life chances if their ADHD is not understood or supported as they progress through primary school.

3. What would happen if child made silly noises in class (as where the other children) but the ADHD child was the last to stop due to their impulsiveness and so was caught?

4. A buddy system to help them find their way around school and an understanding from the teacher if they are late to class because of their difficulties.

5. Your understanding needs to accept that children with ADHD do not often learn from their mistakes or understand consequences to their actions.

6. It would be better if they had a pastoral teacher rather than a Senco as the welfare of the child is as important as the education of the child within the school.

7. Are you aware that ADHD is a 'real' disability and is quoted on the disability register? ADHD is a scale of characteristics and some children's difficulties can be much more severe than others

8. How would you differentiate this procedure for an ADHD child with organisational difficulties?

9. Will there be a specific person my child will go to for medication? Are you aware of the importance of my child getting his/her medication on time? How do you feel about my child needing to take this medication in order to access his/her education? It would be useful if all the children understood why some children need medication on a daily basis in an attempt to de-stigmatise having to take this medication (ie. avoid name calling such as 'crack head', 'pill popper' etc). Children who are medicated must be [protected from stigma and name calling.

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10. What is your interpretation of the difficulties they have in understanding language?

11. How are you going to work with parents in engaging them in the development of an individual education plan?

12. Have school staff had adequate training in how to support children with additional needs?

13. Do you offer an open door Policy? Parent support groups? Would you be happy to set up a parent support group if there wasn't one already?

14. Does your school engage with Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)?

15. Do you have the services of a psychologist?

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Transition 1 *(Appendix 1) Examples

Children's questionnaire Yr 6

Are you excited about moving up to a secondary school? Y/N

Are you worried about the change in moving to big school? Y/N

If so, what worries you?

.....

.....

What do you think will be different from the school you are in now?

.....

.....

Are you looking forward to your new school? Y/N

If yes, what are you looking forward too most?

.....

.....

If your answer is no, please say why,

.....

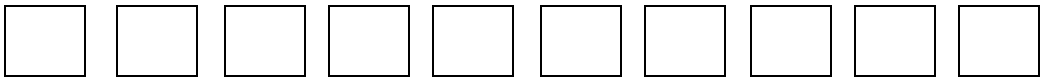
.....

Which of these statements do you feel is the most important to you?

1. Knowing your way around the school.
2. Making new friends.
3. Teachers understanding me.
4. New friends understanding me.
5. Knowing the rules.
6. Being listened to.
7. Being accepted for who I am.
8. Having someone to go too when I feel scared or angry.
9. Not being able to do the work set out for me.
10. Being able to cope.

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Put these statements in the order you think is the most important to you.



.

.....

.....

Write one thing which would make your move to secondary school better for you:

.....

.....

.....

It would help **me** in my new school if:

.....

.....

.....

It would help my new teachers to understand me if:

.....

.....

.....

If you had to list five rules on behaviour, what would they be?

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire about your journey from primary school to secondary school. The information you have given us will help us to understand your needs and how to help make this a stress free zone for everyone.

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Transition 2 *(Appendix1)

Questionnaire for Years 7 & 8

Did you find the move from primary school to secondary school difficult or easy?

.....

If you answered easy, why did you think this was the case?

.....

.....

If you answered difficult, why do you think this was the case?

.....

.....

Could this move to high school have been made easier for you? Y/N

If your answer is yes, how could this have been done?

.....

.....

.....

Would you have done things differently? Y/N

If yes, how?

.....

.....

.....

What tips would you give to someone facing this move from primary to secondary school?

List your tips below:

1.....

2.....

3.....

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Would it have helped you if you had have understood what was expected of you before you went to the new school? Y/N

If so, how could this have happened?

.....

.....

Do you feel you were understood by your teach Y/N

If you answered no, why not?

.....

.....

.....

What would you change improve things for children now facing this situation

.....

.....

.....

.....

What has been the best thing about moving up to secondary school for you?

.....

.....

.....

What has been the worse thing about moving up to secondary school for you?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for finding the time to help with this questionnaire, by listening to your comments; we hope we can help other children overcome the difficulties they face.

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(Appendix 2)

S.A.M. (Something About Me)

Personal Profile

My name is _____.

I am _____years old

The school I come from was _____

Draw a picture of yourself or stick a picture in the box below:



My favourite subjects are (please circle your answer):

Maths, Science, English, (Literacy) History, Geography, Religious Studies, Art, Music, Technology.

My hobbies are _____

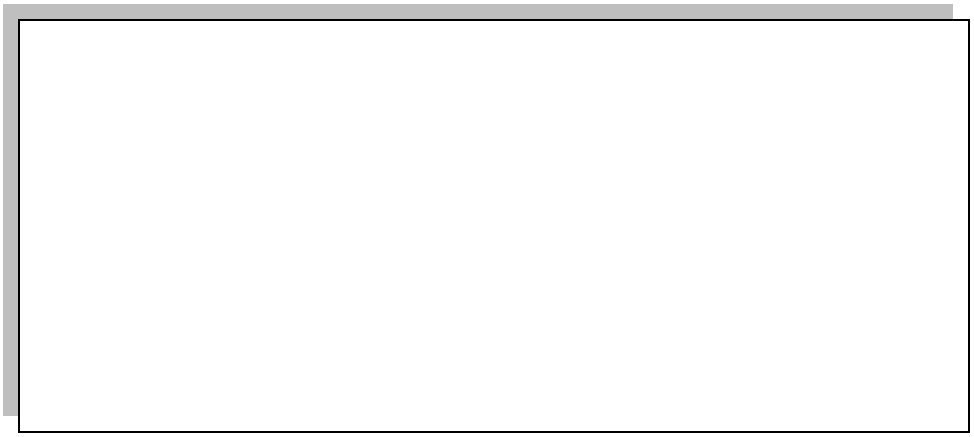
I have_____ Brother and _____Sister.

I learn best by: (Cirlce your answers)

Listening, Touching things, Seeing things, Having things repeated, Sitting near the front of the class.

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In the box below write down any other ways, in which it might help your new teacher to know about how you learn.



Things I am most looking forward to about going to **‘big school’** are:

_____

_____

_____

Things I am not looking forward to about going to **‘big school’** are:

_____

_____

_____

Things that you should know about me:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

It would help if my new teacher could/would:

_____

_____

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When I get angry the best thing you can do is:

_____

_____

When I am sad the best thing that you can do is:

_____

_____

_____

When I am distracted by other people the best thing you can do is:

_____

_____

_____

When I am happy the best thing you can do is:

_____

_____

_____

When I act silly in class the best thing to do is:

_____

_____

_____

When I have too much energy the best thing to do is:

_____

_____

_____

Note to my school……This S.A.M profile is to help you to understand my needs and make my transition to your school a happy and great experience. Thank you for listening to me.

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*(Appendix 3) (sample letters)

Name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Contact No .....

Dear .....

Re: ..... School .....

My son/daughter will be transferring to secondary education in September 200…

My child and I are concerned about the difficulties they face and would like to make an appointment to visit your school in support of this transition and to ensure that this process is made as simple as possible for all concerned.

Yours faithfully,

Mr/Mrs .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Date .....

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Dear .....

Re: Your childs name.....

I am writing to you with a request that my son/daughter be able to visit your school whilst it is empty. I am requesting this due to the difficulties children with ADHD have with organisational skills and the problems they face in remembering classroom positions.

We feel that this would greatly benefit the child in being aware of his/her surroundings before they attend your school in September.

Yours faithfully,

OR

Mr/Mrs .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Date .....

Dear .....

Re: (your childs name).....

I am writing to you with a request for copies of your behaviour policy, Exclusion Policy and a copy of your school rules. It is important to discuss these policies with my child to enable us to understand what is required of him/her.

Children with ADHD need preparation as change is difficult for them, anticipating this change is very important to both the school and the child.

Yours faithfully,

Mr/Mrs .....

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