



# A guide for Health Professionals: Education and PANS PANDAS

PANS PANDAS are complex brain conditions, and educational professionals play a crucial role in supporting early identification, addressing the barriers to learning, and holistically supporting the child and their family.

Affected children often present in schools with an abrupt, perplexing, and severe change in functioning. Some children rapidly develop Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) under all four categories of need in the Code of practice. (SEND Code of Practice 2015) A subset of children require support plans, Education, Health, and Care plans, (EHCP), specialised

provision or are unable to access any education for a period of time. Early identification and educational support lead to much better outcomes.

PANS PANDAS are medical conditions that require professionals to commit to a multi-agency, collaborative, responsive and compassionate approach. Awareness of these conditions is currently very low in both the education and health sector.

Informed advice from health professionals can substantially help to raise levels of awareness amongst educational professionals alongside guiding good practice.

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## PANS PANDAS and Education

- Children with PANS PANDAS frequently suffer from a wide constellation of diverse symptoms. These often severely impact on their ability to attend school, maintain relationships with peers and staff, and to learn. (Candelaria, 2016, Patricia Rice Doran, 2017)
- PANS PANDAS symptoms can relapse and remit in type, duration, frequency, and severity.
- Some affected children experience debilitating flares, whilst others function enough to be able to attend school, but not at their previous levels of functioning.

## How do PANS PANDAS potentially impact on a child's education?

PANS PANDAS can affect children in multiple different areas of functioning including physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. This can severely affect a child's ability to attend school and to learn. Educational professionals should be aware of the child's presentation and baseline in all areas prior to onset and consider how 'changes' will be identified and tracked.

PANS PANDAS is known to impact on attendance. It may be helpful for schools to compare pre and post onset attendance levels as a guide, and to prioritise health needs during a flare.



Some children with PANS PANDAS develop Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and will require Special Educational Needs (SEN) support plans, Education, health, and care plans (EHCP) and/or specialised provision.



IN PANS PANDAS, children's functioning can fluctuate, and rapidly change from thriving in school to requiring extensive support. Educational provision should be sufficiently flexible and responsive to accommodate needs within a 'flare' and during recovery.

Some children with PANS/PANDAS will benefit from assessments from an Educational Psychologist, Occupational therapist and Speech and Language therapist. Professionals conducting assessments should be aware of the fluctuating nature of the conditions, and that results should only be seen as a snapshot. Caution should be applied when deciding on permanent placements. Changes in functioning should be tracked following a flare to ensure that the child is returning to their baseline.

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PANS/PANDAS are not caused by poor parenting, but by physiological changes in the brain. Educational professionals should be aware that the conditions are likely to challenge the most resilient of families, and that a nurturing and compassionate approach is required.

PANS/PANDAS can present with symptoms that replicate red flags in safeguarding. These include sudden changes in behaviour or school performance, bedwetting or incontinence, self-harming, poor concentration, withdrawal

and sleep disturbance, sudden speech disorders, eating disorders, signs of distress, attachment issues, and changes in attendance amongst others (see Keeping children safe in Education 2021) All professionals dealing with children affected by PANS/PANDAS need to be aware of this. This should be alongside remaining equally vigilant in terms of safeguarding as with any other child.

PANS/PANDAS are medical conditions. Affected children may benefit from an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) in Schools.

Some children with PANS/PANDAS 'mask' or partially 'mask' in schools. Children do not operate in a vacuum. Educational professionals and parents/carers should both be aware of this and closely communicate.

In PANS/PANDAS, children may also develop secondary impacts from their condition which can affect their ability to attend school in the longer term. Affected children should be assessed holistically and be signposted to educational therapeutic and nurturing approaches as required.



## Glossary

**COP**- Code of Practice – statutory guidance which sets out the duties, policies and procedures including (but not limited to) identification of needs and special educational provision in schools.

**EHCP**- Education and Health Care plan- a plan for children and young people up to 25 who require more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out additional support to meet those needs.

**IHCP**- Individual Healthcare Plan- A plan for children with medical conditions to describe the child's care needs and how their needs will be met at school.

**SEND**- Special Educational needs and disabilities- used to describe learning difficulties or disabilities that make it

harder for a child to learn than most children of the same age.

**Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support plan**- when an education setting has identified a child with SEN, they are required to create a SEN support plan. This might also be called an Individual Education plan or similar.

**SEND Four Areas of Need**- four broad areas of need in the Code of Practice that include a range of difficulties. The areas are Communication and Interaction (CI), Cognition and Learning (CL), Social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) and Physical and/or Sensory Needs (PSN). A child with PANS/PANDAS may have needs across all four areas. A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of their needs are identified.

## References

- Candelaria, J.F. (2016). PANS, CANS, ... & automobiles: a comprehensive reference guide for helping students with PANDAS and PANS\*. Sarasota, Florida: First Edition Design Publishing.
- GOV.UK. 2021. Statutory guidance overview: Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK . [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>. [Accessed 02 December 2021].
- Patricia Rice Doran (2017). PANDAS and PANS in school settings: a handbook for educators. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- GOV.UK. 2021. SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK . [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>. [Accessed 02 December 2021].

## For further information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-health-professionals>

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