Task Completion and Concentration - Teacher Strategies

First, give some thought to the mix of activities that you offer over the course of a school day/week. Are there opportunities for more active modes of learning: action maths, collaborative problem solving activities, team project work, exploring the indoor/outdoor environment? There are lots of resources available to support ideas for differentiation of learning mode, ‘Teacher’s Change Your Bait’ by Martha Kaufeldt is a particularly good one. See the NEPS Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties Continuum of Support for a checklist of whole-class structures and supports.

The following strategies are also likely to be helpful in supporting individual children:

- Have ‘quiet working times’ when children are expected to work in silence (requests for help can be indicated through an agreed non-verbal signal)
- Seat the child away from the main thoroughfares in the classroom and out of direct eye-line or reach of likely sources of distraction. Remove unnecessary equipment, books etc.
- Build in opportunities for the child to move around over the course of a learning session – this might be through having a special responsibility like sharpening pencils, tearing used paper or short burst movement activities such as those within the Brain Gym or ‘Wake Up, Shake Up’ programmes.
- Make directions clear and concise, repeat key words and ask the child to verbalise his/her understanding of the task.
- Break tasks into workable chunks. These could be listed (using pictures or words) and ‘ticked off’ as each section is completed
- Give extra time as needed to experience the ‘reward’ (sense of achievement) of a task completed.
- Provide feedback on completed work as soon as possible
- Supplement words with visual prompts action, demonstration, photos etc.
- Encourage the child to close his eyes and to think through a problem before beginning, asking questions such as, ‘What is the problem here?’, ‘What equipment do I need?’; ‘What do I need to do first?’

- If there is concern that the child tends to give up before really giving the activity a chance, it may be useful to have ‘having a really good go, even when it’s hard’ as one of his personal targets in a support plan. Encourage him/her to talk through tasks saying, ‘I know I can do this even if it’s hard’ and award a star or similar token when the strategy is used.

- A red card/ green card system can also be useful in getting children to take responsibility for getting on or asking for help. A card, one side of which is red and one side of which is green, is placed on the child’s table. Green side up means ‘I’m okay. I know how to do this’, red side up means ‘I need help’. The child takes responsibility for turning the card as appropriate. It may be necessary to limit the number of times the ‘red card’ can be shown in a given time period (perhaps linked with the star system suggested above).

- Specifically comment on the child’s successes in focusing on tasks, linking to a reward system if appropriate.

- Encourage the child to increase the amount of work done in a given length of time e.g. if s/he produces two sums in ten minutes, give him/her the objective of getting first three, and then four and five sums done in the same amount of time.