SCHOOL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

FASD: Information for Teachers

A short guide to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in the classroom.

FASD Compass
fasdcompass.co.uk/school-toolkit/

What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong condition caused by alcohol exposure before birth. It affects how the brain develops. Most children with FASD have no visible signs, so it is often called a hidden disability. Difficulties can include memory, attention, language, planning, impulse control, social skills, sensory processing and motor skills. Many children also have real strengths, such as kindness, creativity and determination.

What you may notice

- Knows something one day and not the next
- Talks well but understands less than it seems
- Struggles to follow several instructions
- Finds unstructured times, such as break, hard
- Repeats the same mistakes despite consequences
- Gets overwhelmed by noise or busy rooms
- Easily led by others
- Says they understand when they do not

Key mindset

Can't, not won't. Many behaviours reflect brain-based difficulties, not deliberate defiance. Reward and sanction systems alone rarely work, because the link between action and consequence is often hard for these children to learn.

Think younger. Development is often uneven. A child may need the support and supervision expected for a much younger child in some areas.

Strategies that help

- One instruction at a time, backed up visually
- Visual timetables and now and next boards
- Warn before changes and transitions
- Plain, literal language. Avoid sarcasm
- Check understanding by asking them to show you
- Repeat and reteach often
- Movement breaks and a calm space
- Supervision at break, lunch and on trips
- Specific praise and daily chances to succeed

Try to avoid

- Long verbal explanations
- Asking why they did something
- Removing break or PE as a sanction
- Assuming that knowing a rule means they can follow it
- Public reprimands
- Surprises and last-minute changes

Working with the family

Parents and carers know their child best. Agree a simple way to share information each day, such as a home and school book. Use the child's pupil profile and support plan, and share them with all staff, including lunchtime staff and supply teachers. Children may hold things together at school and release stress at home, so listen when parents describe difficulties you do not see.

Learn more: fasdcompass.co.uk/teachers/ · nationalfasd.org.uk

FASD Compass · Reviewed November 2026 by Dr Inyang Takon, Consultant Neurodevelopmental Paediatrician. For information only. This does not replace advice from professionals who know the child.