A guide for Health Professionals: Education and PANS PANDAS

PANS and PANDAS are post infectious autoimmune and/or neuroinflammatory medical conditions that affect both physical and mental health. They can be triggered by common infections (for example strep throat, chickenpox, or influenza).

These conditions, often triggered by common infections such as strep throat, chickenpox, or influenza, primarily affect children, with the onset of PANDAS typically occurring between the ages of 3 and 13. However the symptoms can persist into adulthood, and PANS can also affect adults.

An exacerbation of symptoms is known colloquially as a flare.

Children with PANS and PANDAS can abruptly go from doing well in school to experiencing a range of difficulties. These can include developing obsessive thoughts and compulsions, urinary issues, tics, anxiety, a regression in skills, distressed behaviours, eating issues and problems sleeping. In some cases, children can develop unexpected special educational needs.

Sometimes children also have sensory issues, hallucinations and thoughts of harming themselves. These issues can come and go with symptoms changing a lot over time.

The key is to note any new difficulties that represent a change from the child’s typical level of functioning. Children can have more than one condition.

Health professionals should be aware that it is not unusual in PANS and PANDAS for children to present very differently at home and at school. Many of the signs may also be difficult to observe in a school setting or could be internal such as obsessive thoughts and mental compulsions. Some children also mask their symptoms in school. The signs of PANS and PANDAS also cover a wide range and severity. The shifting symptoms can be very confusing for educators and families alike, and it is important that any professional evidence has given due attention to the breadth of impacts.

*The term children/child is also used to refer to young adults
PANS PANDAS and Education: Key Points

- Children with PANS and PANDAS can often quickly begin to struggle in school across all areas
- Wide areas of functioning can be impacted. These include physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural domains
- A deterioration in handwriting including margin drift can be a sign
- The unexpected development of special educational needs, distinct from many other conditions where signs typically emerge over time and are more stable
- Atypical deterioration of developed skills such as fine or gross motor skills
- School attendance is often affected
- A continually shifting profile of signs and symptoms within a relapsing and remitting course. Assessments should be interpreted with caution as difficulties may be transient rather than chronic. Some children may benefit from assessments from an:
  - Educational Psychologist
  - Occupational therapist
  - Speech and Language therapist
  - Optometrist
- Shared and overlapping profiles with multiple other conditions for example Autism, ADHD and anxiety disorders
- Symptoms can easily be misinterpreted as neurodevelopmental conditions, poor behaviour, purely psychiatric conditions or as a result of parenting

- Overlapping symptoms with red flags in Safeguarding
- Can effect a longer term change in a child's education profile
- Limited research available suggests that early identification and treatment leads to better outcomes, and schools have a crucial role in spotting the early signs and providing professional evidence to support clinicians

PANS and PANDAS cover a wide range of symptoms. Levels of awareness are currently low and therefore any education professional assessing children with a suspicion of these conditions needs to ensure that due attention has been given across the breadth of impacts

Whilst some of the content may also be relevant across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, this information is based on the Education system for England