

## **HeadteacherChat's Review of Connections in Mind**

**Read the full review below...**

### **How does Connections in Mind describe their product?**

Neuroscience seems scary but at *Connections in Mind* our training helps teachers to understand how their students' brains learn and why some children struggle more than others to access learning and meet behaviour expectations. Our approach can transform the way you understand, and work with, your community.

Start your journey with an '[Introduction to executive functions](#)' talk for teachers and parents. Gather a group of people who are passionate to learn more and then work with us to develop a neuro-inclusive school where every member of the community feels that they belong and can flourish.

Schools who adopt our approach spend less on SEN provision: a whole school approach benefits everyone and means that the environment meets the needs of SEND learners, reducing costs and fostering a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging.

The latest neuroscience is finding that executive function differences are a natural and normal part of being human and that people with neurodevelopmental disorders (such as ADHD, ASD and Dyslexia) tend to have more executive function differences than their neurotypical peers.

*Connections in Mind* describe executive functions:

**Executive functions** are a family of important mental processes, housed in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Executive functions allow us to take time to think before acting; resist temptations; approach unanticipated challenges with flexibility, and stay focused. Challenges with executive functions can impact every part of our lives and learning. They are often mistaken for character flaws, such as laziness. The great news is that we know how to strength executive functions and their associated skills, research shows that executive function skills can be consciously developed in a school setting.

- ✓ Keeping track of time
- ✓ Conceptualising how long a task will take
- ✓ Making plans
- ✓ Getting started on a task
- ✓ Staying focused during a task
- ✓ Regulating emotional responses



### How can Connections in Mind help?

Victoria Bagnall (Co-founder and Managing Director) describes one of the biggest advantages for schools of developing an understanding of executive functioning is a real sense of *'belonging'* for the whole school community. She explains how increased greater awareness can help alleviate children's concerns around 'not feeling normal' and a shared whole-school community understanding benefits the *whole* community.

She recommends schools start by accessing the *'Introduction to executive functioning'* course - a 30 minute online course costing just £5 per person and with a CPD certified option at only £9. Alternatively, one person can screen the training to a group or whole-school staff. The training gives an overview of executive functioning, which Victoria describes as a 'new lens to look at children, their behaviour and learning' but which requires no additions or changes to the curriculum. Live online or in person talks are also available for teachers and parents.

The emphasis is very much on *everyone* in the school being included and gaining at least a basic understanding in executive functions through the introductory on-line course. Once this is achieved, there are a number of options for schools to develop and embed this approach:

#### Pedagogical Training

Connections in Mind state that, 'Training teachers to support students to strengthen their executive function skills is a core part of our mission because we know that these are the skills that underpin self-regulated learning'.

The training they offer for teachers either involves 4 sessions spread over a school year or a full day INSET. Victoria describes how *'Teachers continue to teach the content of their lessons, but shift the language and feedback of their classroom to help all learners develop the structured metacognition they need to become lifelong self-regulated learners'*.

1: Introduction to executive function skills and neuroplasticity

2: Connect Phase – developing executive function skills literacy and understanding

3: Collaborate Phase – working with learners to create strategies which really work for them

4: Support Phase – reduce the need for 1:1 time with praised based executive function feedback

### Coach Training

This online course is for members of staff supporting pupils in a 1:1 situation, for example, TAs, SEND staff and pastoral support staff. The 25 hours of training include some self-study elements and a 2.5hr workshop. The trainings are spread over 5 weeks and lead to an accredited certificate: Level1 - Core Skills in Executive Functioning Coaching. Key skills covered include:

- Questioning and reflection techniques
- Use of specific language and empathy to understand each learner's challenges
- Creating and developing strategies for learners that really work
- Helping learners to embed effective strategies

### SENDCo training

This is a further 15 hour training to enable SENDCos LSAs and TAs to learn how to further and support all staff to develop executive function skills. This course takes place over 5 weeks.

### Belonging Project

Connections in Mind also run a full week's training for the entire school community, which involves a 3-hour INSET for all staff, sessions with the children and Parent Talks, which cover understanding of executive functions, developmental differences, and how executive function challenges can impact learning and behaviour.

## **Links to videos**

Introduction to Executive Functions Course

<https://cimlearning.com/product/executive-functions-an-introduction>

**Schools Support:** <https://connectionsinmind.com/schoolseducators/>

Coach Training - <https://cimlearning.com/coach-training/>. 25 hours - £660 + VAT/person

SENCO Training - <https://cimlearning.com/senco-2023/> - 15 hours - £365 + VAT/person

## **Benefits of using Connections in Mind?**

- Students and teachers learn about their brains and why it can be hard to get things done.
- Help students and teachers to be kinder to themselves and those around them.
- Reduce unexpected behaviours
- Increase school attendance
- Reduce spending on 1:1 SEN support

## **Testimonials:**

*"I learnt so much, and it completely opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking about our children - not just in my classes, but across the school. The case studies in particular resonated with me - as I could see examples of children I'd taught in those."*

## **In summary, HeadteacherChat recommends Connections in Mind because:**

Victoria offers fascinating and intriguing training that helps teachers to understand how children learn and why some struggle more than others. Using their approach will have a great impact on your children's learning and will not only help the child, but it will also help the staff and families too.

Lucy Coy, CEO, November 2022