



Salma is articulate, curious and often contributes thoughtful ideas during class discussion. She demonstrates secure understanding when speaking and can explain concepts clearly.

However, her independent work does not always reflect what she knows. She may appear reluctant to begin, distracted, slow to complete tasks or disengaged from learning.

At times, this can be mistaken for laziness, poor behaviour or a lack of effort.

In reality, Salma struggles with the executive functioning demands hidden within learning - the mental processes needed to plan, organise, initiate, sustain attention, monitor progress and manage competing demands.

1. Struggles to get started

What you might see	What helps (low-lift)
○ Staring at the page or task ○ Asking for instructions again ○ Delaying with equipment or tidying ○ Appearing avoidant ○ Saying “I can’t do it” ○ Looking lazy or disengaged	○ Give one clear first step only ○ Use “do this first” visual prompts ○ Model the opening step aloud ○ Provide worked examples to begin from ○ Break the task into visible mini-steps ○ Quick teacher check-in before independent work ○ Reduce choice at the point of starting

2. Loses track of thinking

What you might see	What helps (low-lift)
○ Repeating ideas ○ Forgetting what they were doing ○ Going off-task ○ Abandoning tasks halfway through ○ Becoming frustrated suddenly ○ Distracting others	○ Encourage quick jot notes or sketching ideas ○ Keep key instructions visible ○ Use regular pause points to reset thinking ○ Prompt with: “What are you doing now? What comes next?” ○ Chunk tasks into shorter sections ○ Provide verbal rehearsal opportunities ○ Use simple retrieval prompts

3. Difficulty organising and sequencing learning

What you might see	What helps (low-lift)
○ Steps completed in the wrong order ○ Missing key information ○ Jumping between tasks ○ Work that appears careless ○ Confused responses despite secure verbal understanding	○ Provide clear task sequences ○ Use visual checklists ○ Model how to organise thinking aloud ○ Offer simple planning frames ○ Highlight the order of completion ○ Use structure strips or step cards ○ Signpost transitions explicitly

4. Difficulty sustaining effort and attention

What you might see	What helps (low-lift)
○ Fidgeting or scanning the room ○ Frequent chatting ○ Calling out ○ Disruptive behaviour ○ Rushing to finish ○ Giving up quickly ○ Looking “switched off”	○ Set short, finite work periods ○ Use clear time boundaries ○ Break longer tasks into achievable bursts ○ Give specific effort goals ○ Use non-verbal check-ins ○ Build in brief reset pauses ○ Reduce competing distractions where possible ○ Provide immediate acknowledgement of progress

5. Limited self-monitoring

What you might see	What helps (low-lift)
○ Saying they are finished too quickly ○ Not spotting obvious errors ○ Ignoring success criteria ○ Becoming defensive when corrected ○ Struggling to act on feedback	○ Give one checking focus at a time ○ Use self-check prompts ○ Build routine reflection pauses ○ Model noticing and correcting errors ○ Use simple success criteria ○ Prompt pupils to explain their thinking aloud ○ Use “stop and review” moments before completion