Locala Community Partnerships CIC

Specialist Provision
Complex Communication
& Interaction

Kirklees COUNCIL

Environmental Sensory Audit and Checklist for Schools and Classrooms (Specialist Setting)*

This sensory audit and checklist is designed to help school staff assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with sensory differences associated with complex communication and interaction needs including autism. It gives some ideas on the ways in which a setting might be adjusted when pupils experience sensory difficulties.

Visual		
Good practice and evidence to look for	**Current Situation**	**Action required**
Classroom illumination is suitable for pupils with sensory differences. • Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.) • LED lighting may produce less glare • The effects of light coming into the room through blinds (and creating distracting patterns) is minimised • Light reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the classroom is minimised. • Classroom lighting is flexible so can be dimmed, switched on /off in certain areas • Staff utilise flexible lighting to manage pupil's sensory needs		
The classroom is orderly and not cluttered so that pupils can make sense of the environment.		

* adapted from the Autism Education Trust national standards sensory audit for schools and classrooms devised by Ian Attfield , Amy Fowler and Val Jones and AET Teachers Tools No 44

Good practice and evidence to look for	Current Situation	Action required
- The impact of wall displays and visuals is considered. (Busy and cluttered wall displays can be distracting). - Designated areas for specific activities to give clarity to the classroom organisation. - Pupils have the opportunity to work at a workstation to focus their attention if necessary - Privacy boards can help minimise distractions in peripheral vision - Consider levels of brightness on the IWB. Some students may find white on black too much of a contrast. Is it possible to activate coloured filters?		

Auditory

Good practice and evidence to look for	Current Situation	Action required
Sounds from classroom equipment are kept to a minimum. - TV's, IWB's, projectors, audio systems, lights and PC's are switched off when not in use to avoid a mains hum.		
There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use. - Consideration is given to the noise created by the movement of people, chairs and desks and adjustments made (e.g. felt pads underneath chair legs) - The acoustics of the gym, dining hall and hall are checked and modified to lessen echo (e.g. sound absorbing foam panels, thick fabric wall hangings etc.)		

Good practice	Current Situation	Action required
Sounds from outside the classroom do not cause problems within classrooms. • Consideration is given to road noise, building noise, etc. • Soundproofing between classrooms. Placing furniture (e.g. storage shelves) between adjoining classrooms can help to muffle noise		
• Look for low noise options for all integral appliances (AC, extraction fans) • Consider use of earpieces for staff radios to minimise competing background noise		
There are agreed strategies in place when noise becomes too much for individual pupils. • There is a quiet room available which provides a calm place for pupils to decompress.		
Pupils are warned if a loud noise or alarm is going to sound. • Strategies are put in place to support pupils who find loud noises or fire alarms very difficult to tolerate.		
Smell		
Good practice	**Current Situation**	**Action required**
Smells within the classroom are kept to a minimum. • The smell of paints, glue, clay and cleaning fluids is minimal. • Air fresheners in toilets will be too strong for some students. Are there other ways of managing smell using more natural products? • Staff are aware that the smell of perfumes and deodorants may be distressing.		

Good practice	Current Situation	Action required
• Staff are aware that pupils may react to the smell of others.		
Smells from outside the classroom are monitored and reduced, where possible • Look for ways to give very sensitive students a sense of control over the toilet environment. This might be choosing which toilet they use. • The smell of cooking from the cafeteria or food technology rooms is reduced (use scented products as 'sensory blockers' to mask smell)		

Tactile

Good practice	Current Situation	Action required
Uncomfortable clothing (seams, inflexible or itchy fabrics) is avoided, where possible • Adapted school uniform and footwear choices		
Alternative arrangements are made for pupils who find writing to be physically painful or difficult. • Use a laptop or iPad • Or an alternative recording method for written work (e.g. take photos of work)		
Seating is comfortable. • Cushions may be used		

Proprioception

Good practice	Current Situation	Action required
Pupils with a high proprioceptive threshold will not feel 'grounded' if classroom tables and chairs are too large, and their feet are not fully supported.		

Good practice and evidence to look for	Current Situation	Action required
• See optimal sitting position below. • Switch out furniture between year groups if needed. 		
Ensure students who jump or climb to gain proprioceptive feedback have safe provision which they can access.		

Vestibular

• Consider dynamic seating (ball chair, office chair, 'Zuma' rocker chair) • Some students may work better with a standing desk or at a work bench		

General sensory issues

Good practice and evidence to look for	Current Situation	Action required
Staff are aware of pupils' sensory needs • Staff are familiar with an individual's sensory passport. • Staff monitor pupils who are unable to communicate or recognise their own sensory needs and take appropriate action.		

Dinner halls and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds). • Some pupils may need to enter the dinner hall before or after other peers to avoid queuing and crowds. • Students may need to eat in a separate area or in their classroom		
Classroom organisation takes into account the individual needs of pupils. • Classroom organisation and individual seating plan takes into consideration individual sensory concerns (e.g. A pupil with a fascination with light reflection does not sit by the window). • Pupils who become anxious by the close proximity of others are allowed ample space around their seat		
A system of support is available for pupils experiencing sensory overload. • Learning breaks are built into the daily routine • There is a designated low-stimulus place for pupils to withdraw to for sensory decompression or if experiencing sensory overload		

Classroom Checklist

General Classroom Appearance	
Are the furniture tops clear?	
Are cupboard doors closed?	
Are the blinds closed when the sun shines in?	
Are all cupboards and boxes labelled?	
Are all resources stored in cupboards or lidded boxes?	

Organisation of room	
Is there a clear area for group work?	
Is there a clear snack area (or a strategy which indicates change of use)?	
Are children's work areas clearly organised with resources clearly labelled so children can access the materials they need?	
Are materials/stationary in a good state of repair?	

Computer	
Are wires hidden?	
Are stop/closed signs in places for when the computer is not in use?	
Is the computer area clean and tidy?	

Sound	
Are windows closed if people are outside?	
Do chairs have stoppers / felt pads to minimise noise?	

Staff	
Do staff consider clothing choices (remembering bright and highly patterned clothing may not be conducive to learning)	
Are accessories kept to a minimum?	
Do staff avoid wearing strong perfume or hair products?	
Do staff support understanding using symbols?	
Do staff use minimal language where appropriate?	
Are staff conversations kept to essential information only in the presence of children?	