

Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms

Devised by Ian Atfield, Amy Fowler and Val Jones

This sensory audit is to help staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with autism. It does not cover all aspects, but gives ideas on the ways in which a setting might be altered if pupils experience sensory processing difficulties and find it hard or very anxiety-provoking to tolerate certain sensations or situations.

Visual

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Classroom illumination is suitable for pupils with autism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.) • The effects of light coming into the room through blinds and creating distracting patterns are minimised • Light reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the classroom is minimised. 		
<p>The classroom is orderly and not cluttered so that pupils can make sense of the environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of wall displays 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 		

Noise and sounds

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Sounds from classroom equipment are kept to a minimum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Televisions, videos, audio systems, lights and computers are switched off when not in use to avoid a mains hum. 		
<p>There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classrooms are carpeted to lessen noise created by the movement of people, chairs and desks. • The acoustics of the gym, dining hall and hall are checked and modified to lessen echo • Hallways are carpeted to lessen the noise created by movement through the corridors. 		
<p>Sounds from outside the classroom do not cause problems within classrooms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows are suitably soundproofed so that the noise of passing traffic is not a nuisance 		
<p>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 relax.</p>		

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Pupils are warned if a loud noise or bell is going to sound.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies are put in place to support pupils who find loud noises or fire bells very difficult to tolerate. 		

Smell

Pointer	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Smells within the classroom are kept to a minimum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The smell of paints, glue, clay and cleaning fluids is minimal. Staff are aware that the smell of perfumes and deodorants may be distressing. Staff are aware that pupils may react to the smell of others. 		
<p>Smells from outside the classroom are monitored and reduced, where possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative toileting arrangements are allowed (e.g. possible use of staff or disabled toilets). The smell of cooking from the cafeteria or food technology rooms is reduced. 		

Touch and feel

Pointer	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Uncomfortable clothing (seams, inflexible or itchy fabrics) is avoided, where possible, unless there are safety issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variations of the school uniform offer enough flexibility to enable pupils to be able to wear clothing they find comfortable. Willingness of the school to adapt the school uniform (e.g. wear a sweatshirt, a necktie loosely or one that pins on). 		
<p>Alternative arrangements are made for pupils who find writing to be physically painful or difficult.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness of the school to allow some work or homework to be typed. Possible use of an 'Alpha Smart', iPad or laptop for written work 		
<p>Seating is comfortable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Padding is used to make hard chairs more comfortable. Pupils are allowed to sit on carpet squares if the floor is not carpeted. 		

General sensory issues

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Pupils are encouraged to let others know if they are finding a sensory aspect of the environment distressing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils know that they can speak to someone about concerns. • Pupils have a designated person or mentor to talk to. 		
<p>Pupils are relaxed when moving through corridors. (Pupils can become anxious in busy corridors due to noise, dislike of crowds and worry about being touched).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are allowed to leave the classroom slightly earlier or later than peers to avoid noisy corridors/ crowds. 		
<p>Classroom organisation takes into account the individual needs of pupils.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 		

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
<p>Dinner halls and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are allowed to enter the dinner hall before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds. • An adult or buddy may escort a pupil to and within the dinner hall 		
<p>A system of support is available for pupils experiencing sensory overload.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning breaks are allowed when necessary • There is a designated place and a clear system/routine for pupils to follow if they feel they need to withdraw due to sensory overload to 'chill out.' 		