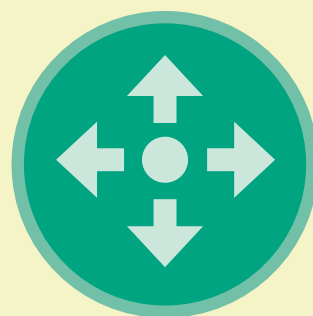
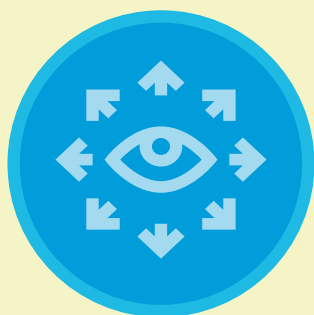




An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

Classroom Sensory Screening Tool





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This screening tool was developed by National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Occupational Therapists working in collaboration with NCSE Speech and Language Therapy and Advisor colleagues.

The content of this screening tool is based on research and practice based evidence from working in schools.

This tool can be used by any teacher working across primary, post primary and special school settings.

Classroom Sensory Screening Tool

The sensory qualities of our classrooms have a direct influence on student participation and learning. Learning spaces that have too much or too little sensory stimulation can serve as a barrier to student energy regulation, attention and readiness to engage in learning. Students have differences in how they process their sensory world and for many, the classroom can be a very busy and overwhelming place.

Conducting a sensory audit of your room can support you to think about your space from a sensory lens and identify:

- What elements of your classroom are working well.
- What practical steps you can take to help create a more sensory comfortable classroom for all students.

When Completing a Classroom Sensory Audit:

- Invite a colleague to support you in assessing the sensory qualities of your room.
- Consider how you will capture students' voice in relation to their experience of your classroom environment. See Page 6 of **The Physical Classroom Environment booklet** for ideas.
- Conduct a sensory audit of your space regularly. Spaces change and students' needs change.
- Please refer to the booklet **The Physical Classroom Environment** when conducting this audit for more information and ideas around creating sensory comfortable classrooms.



Good Practice Statements To Consider



Classroom Lighting

- Artificial light is used only where necessary.
- Fluorescent lights are checked and changed regularly (to avoid flickering).
- Flickering light coming in through blinds is minimised.
- Position reflective surfaces like whiteboards to minimise reflection/glare.
- Monitor position of sunlight shining in when sun is low.
- Avoid putting displays and posters on windows.

Wall Colours

Colours in the classroom can be over or under stimulating:

- Lots of bright colour on the walls, such as red or orange, may be over-stimulating.
- Plain white walls with little colour features may be under-stimulating.
- A calm backdrop with additional colour elements helps to create an optimal level of stimulation. Some examples of how to apply this include using colours on furniture, soft furnishings, wall displays and notice boards.
- Different wall colours can differentiate zones within the classroom. For example, a corner of the room painted pale blue stages the calm corner area.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Visual Organisation

- Visual displays are clear, organised and designated to bounded spaces in the room.
- Art and decorations are displayed in a designated space like on a bulletin board. These are updated regularly.
- Wall space is clear. Recommend a minimum 20-50% of wall space be kept clear (Barret et al., 2015).
- Key information is visible from all seating areas in the classroom. For example, class expectations and visual schedules.
- Whole class visual schedules are minimum A5 or A4 size for each subject.
- To reduce visual clutter, use closed storage for occasional materials and resources.
- The classroom is structured into designated zones for specific activities to give clarity to environmental organisation. Examples of zones include calm space, reading corner or floor work zone.
- The teachers' desk and area is kept organised and clear of clutter.
- If possible, student bags and coats are kept in a segregated area of the classroom to increase visual calm and organisation.

Seating Plan

- Involve students in the process of identifying a learning space or seating plan that works best for them.
- Provide a variety of workstations such as standing desks, group work desk or individual work desk.
- An individual work desk in a less stimulating area of the classroom may benefit some students to maintain attention and concentration at specific times. This could include having privacy boards or any other visual boundary.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Noise Inside the Classroom

- Sounds from classroom equipment (TV, audio systems, computers) are:
 - At an appropriate volume level.
 - Switched off when not in use.
- Adults are aware of their own voice volume and pitch.
- Make sounds predictable through the use of clear routines, schedules and social stories.
- A voice modulation chart can communicate clear expectations for noise levels in the classroom.
- An alternative quiet learning space is available in the classroom.
- Access to calming tools can support students to regulate and manage uncomfortable sensory experiences.
- Noise created from the movement of furniture and of people can be dampened by using carpet floor surfaces, protector pads on chair/table legs and encouraging students to lift their chairs.
- Classroom is fitted with soft furnishings to absorb sound vibrations. This may include acoustic panels, floor mats or felt notice boards.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Noise Outside the Classroom

- Consider the volume/pitch of the school bell/intercom. Invite students to comment on their sensory comfort with the volume.
- Windows are closed when necessary to avoid outside noise. For example, from lawn mowers or other students playing.
- The acoustics of the gym, canteen and corridors are checked and modified. Use of soft furnishings and installing acoustic panels absorb sound to control noise and can reduce echo.

Loud Noises

- Where possible, students are told in advance if a loud noise or alarm is going to sound.
- A quiet space is available for students who experience auditory sensory discomfort.

Music

- Using music in the classroom can create a regulated atmosphere.
- Music can be used at the beginning of class, during group work or transitioning between activities.
- For some students, music may be distracting or overwhelming. Determine when music may be helpful for all students by involving them in the decision making.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Within the Classroom

- Students who experience intense sensory responses to touch are provided with seating options away from high traffic areas to minimise the risk of other students bumping into them.
- Visuals are used to clarify boundaries for personal space where appropriate. For example, use carpet samples or cushions during floor time.
- There is a clear system for queuing and waiting. Some students may prefer to be at the front or the back of the line so they only have one person beside them.

Corridor Movements

- There are systems in place in corridors to reduce the risk of students bumping into each other. For example, one way system, walk on the left.

Fidget Items

- Fidget items are available to students who require input to attend and focus.
- An under the table policy for fidgets may support students who wish to access the fidgets whilst also minimising distractions for other students who choose not to access them.

Temperature

- A comfortable classroom temperature is maintained.
- It is recommended that the heating system should maintain a minimum temperature of 18 degrees°C in classrooms (where there is an average level of clothing and activity – www.into.ie).

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Smells Within the Classroom

- Odours from paints, glues and cleaning fluids are minimised.
- Student may experience intense sensory responses to everyday smells in the classroom. For instance perfumes or food. Ventilating the room by opening windows is advised.
- Calming or alerting scents that come from oils or essences should be researched and only introduced gradually, with feedback from students.

Smells Outside the Classroom

- The impact of odours from the canteen and practical rooms. For example, (home economics or woodwork room) is considered.
- The impact of odours from toilets/changing rooms is minimised.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Good Practice Statements To Consider



Regular Movement Opportunities Within the Classroom

- Academic infused movement is incorporated into the classroom where possible to support student regulation and engagement in learning. This involves adapting a learning activity so that it can be facilitated through movement. For example, a walking debate or sensory story.
- Students are facilitated to complete tasks in different positions. Examples include standing, kneeling or on their tummies on the floor instead of sitting on their chairs.
- Alternative seating options are available for students to choose.

What are we doing well?

What could we do to increase the sensory comfort?

Additional Information

References

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Notes

Notes

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