West Sussex
Autism and Social Communication Advisory Team
(ASCT)

Sensory Environment Audit:

A Tool to Assess the
Sensory Impact of the Classroom Environment
for Autistic Pupils

Introduction.

Sensory differences are recognised as an integral part of autism and are now included in the DSM-5, diagnostic criteria. This tool has been developed for use alongside the Autism and Social Communication Advisory Team's Individual Sensory Profile.

This checklist was developed as part of the author's assignment for "autism in practice" as part of their studies. The tool is evidence-based and rooted in best practice. Various research studies and papers, audit tools, blogs from autistic individuals, information on appropriate autistic environments and pupil voice were used to develop this tool. The audit tool provides a list of "gold standard" statements (which is by no way meant to be exhaustive) in relation to the sensory environment which should be considered to support the autistic pupil (or those who may have sensory differences). This should then positively influence engagement, learning, self-regulation and ultimately the Child or Young Person's (CYP) education.

We have 8 different sensory systems; we all experience differences in our sensory processing and integration which effects our sensory preferences. The autistic CYP is likely to experience significant sensory integration difficulties in one or more systems:

Tactile (touch)
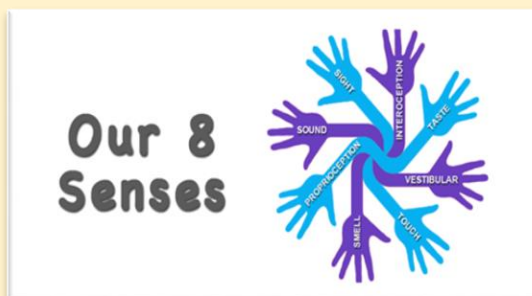
Gustatory (taste)

Olfactory (smell)

Visual (sight)

Auditory (hearing)

Proprioceptive (body awareness)

Vestibular (movement/balance)

Interoceptive (Awareness of internal state e.g. hunger, temperature, …)

The classroom audit tool uses the 8 senses to reflect upon the environment.

Section	Examples of theoretical good practice	Yes	No	Some	Comments and Next Steps.
1	**Visual**				
1.1	There are spaces that are free from clutter and some clear wall space free from stimulation.				
1.2	Resources are accessible and there are clear labels and visual timetables.				
1.3	Displays have a neutral background.				
1.4	If the environment is changed, CYP are given prior notice.				
1.5	Educators are aware of how natural light enters the room, the direction of travel and any shiny objects.				
1.6	No fluorescent lights are used. (If they are used, consider how the affects may				

	be mitigated and updated in the future)				
1.7	Colours are neutral and calming, the walls are free from patterns and surfaces are plain. It is recognised that colour can contribute to mood.				
1.8	If an interactive whiteboard is used, it is free from distraction around the periphery.				
2	**Auditory**				
2.1	Sounds that may cause pupils difficulty are considered - consider music lessons, assembly, lunchtime noises nearby and do other sounds or echoes travel into the class.				

2.2	There is access to ear defenders/headphones or a quiet/calm space.				
2.3	There are resources that allow the CYP extra input for their auditory sense.				
2.4	Staff employ techniques to monitor and support all CYP with noise levels.				
2.5	There are different spaces that CYP can choose to work in.				
2.6	CYP are given prior warning regarding fire alarms. If appropriate an alternative exit route is used.				
3	**Touch**				
3.1	There are opportunities for CYP to engage in sensory play e.g. sand, water, oats, gloop.				

	Fiddle toys are available if this supports their sensory profile.				
3.2	Floor surfaces are considered for example carpets may be itchy, colours may illicit a response, patterns may be distracting or uncomfortable.				
3.3	Patterns, colours, textures, layering of clothing are all considered as these may be distracting or uncomfortable.				
3.4	Proximity of others is considered.				
4	**Olfactory**				
4.1	Smells are contained, limited travel around the building.				
4.2	Pupils can eat in a separate space if required.				
4.3	Smells in the environment are limited. Staff consider their deodorants, perfumes and any other scents that				

	they wear. Smells of cleaning products are considered.				
4.4	There is an awareness of outside environmental smells, these are mitigated where possible.				
5	**Taste**				
5.1	CYP have control about what, when and where they eat.				
6	**Proprioception Vestibular and Interoceptive**				
6.1	There are options for the CYP to gain additional input for their body e.g. they can use move 'n' sit cushions, they can lean against objects, they are allowed to rock on their chair / use the legs for feedback, there are stretchy bands available and alternative sensations are catered for.				

	They can choose to work lying down or standing up.				
6.2	Stimming is understood by all adults working with the CYP.				
6.3	The CYP can negotiate space: there are clear pathways and different levels prompted by visuals.				
6.4	There are opportunities for additional input for the vestibular sense. E.g. climbing frames, roundabouts, trim-trails, dizzy whizzy.				
6.5	There are prompts for the interoceptive sense - adults talk about internal feelings both physical and emotional.				
7	**Additional Prompts**				
7.1	Staff have access to sensory training, that includes how the environment impacts on				

	the autistic CYP's sensory processing. Additionally, staff recognise when CYP may need some time out/low arousal space				
7.2	There are calm/quiet (safe) spaces.				
8	**Schools Accessibility Plan**				
8.1	The school has an accessibility plan which details the differences that autistic individuals may experience with sensory integration and how this may impact on the physical environment.				
9	**Equality Act**				
9.1	The Equality Act principles are embedded in practice within school, particularly in relation to reasonable adjustments.				

	Reasonable adjustments are made.				
10	**The Social Model**				
10.1	The social model principles are embedded in practice within the school. There is evidence that the environment is adapted to suit the autistic CYP's needs.				
11	**Sensory Theory**				
11.1	Sensory Theory principles are embedded in practice within the school. There is evidence that the environment is adapted to suit the autistic CYP's needs. Staff are trained in sensory integration difficulties.				