

Occupational Therapy

Sensory considerations in the school environment

Layout

A 'calm corner' is available - a small area of the classroom or pastoral room that the child can access when feeling overwhelmed. May include a beanbag/ cushions/ blanket, one or two favourite toys, lava lamp, fiddle toys/ stress ball, ear defenders, a dark tent
Mark this area with a visual boundary e.g. A soft play mat/ yoga mat, phone tiles or a ceiling canopy. A dark pop-up tent may limit social interactions
Areas for specific activities are demarcated to give clarity to the environmental organisation
The setting is orderly and not cluttered so children can make sense of the environment
Surfaces are kept as clear as possible

Vision

Encourage natural light during the day
Avoid positioning the child directly below a ceiling light if this is overwhelming
Consider installing a dimmer switch or adding diffused lighting (e.g. Lamps) for flexibility
Ensure there is a darker space available if needed for calming - inside or outside the room
Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed - flickering or hunting lights can be very distracting
Avoid slatted blinds, which can move around and cause light to 'dance' on surface is. Use curtains or roller blinds instead
Provide access to calming <i>slow moving</i> visuals like lava lamps, fish tanks, bubble tubes, light projectors or fibre optic lights
Avoid bright colours or busy patterns on walls, carpets or furnishings - aim for pale, neutral or pastel colours
Reduce reflective surfaces on walls/floors - Aim for a matte finish
Avoid child facing towards a visually cluttered area/busy wall. Avoid dangling ceiling displays. Child should face a blank/clear wall to reduce stimulation
At busy times, consider use of a peak cap/ hood/ sunglasses

Heating

Aim for consistent room temperature
For warm children who struggled to cool down, used cold drinks and no socks
Sit near a window for fresh air if needed

Smells

Keep smells to a minimum wherever possible. Avoid plug in air fresheners
Use unscented cleaning products. Keep windows open whilst cleaning
Consider the way any soft furnishings smell
Staff are aware that the smell of perfume's and deodorants may be distressing

If the child dislikes food smells, would they be happier eating in a quiet room away from the main hall?
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If the child is distressed by toileting smells, alternative arrangements are allowed [e.g. Possible use of disabled facilities]

Noise

Position the child away from irritating noises e.g. Ticking clocks, humming lights, squeaky furniture. Ideally, remove these altogether

Sounds from electrical equipment are kept to a minimum and are switched off when not in use to avoid harming
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use air plugs/ear loops/phones or put a hat when the area is very busy/noisy. Avoid using air defenders for long periods of time, as this will increase auditory sensitivity

the acoustics of used area are checked and modified to lessen echo. For example, avoid hard flooring or laminate and replace with carpets or vinyl where able. You saw furnishings and rugs(secured with non slip mat underneath)to reduce echoes.
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Avoid doors, cupboards or drawers banging by adding Velcro pads/soft close mechanisms/ door buffers

There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use

Windows are suitably soundproofed so that the noise of passing traffic is not a nuisance. Do not sit a noise sensitive or easily distracted child beside a window or door where there is a lot of noise going on outside
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The child is warned of a loud noise or bell is going to sound

Consider allowing the child to leave the settings slightly earlier or later than peers, if noisy crowds and corridors are distressing to them

Tactile

Uncomfortable clothing (seams, itchy fabrics) is avoided - unless there are safety issues

Variations of any uniform (if one) offer enough flexibility to enable children to be comfortable
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Padding is used to make hard chairs more comfortable
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If the carpet is scratchy to sit on, child to be afforded the opportunity to sit on something alternative of a consistent texture, e.g. Cushion, foam tiles, gym ball, classroom chair
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Furniture

Reduce trip hazards around the room; ensure a clear circulation space

For those who like squashing into a small space, have a bean bag in one corner
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For children who need to move to feel calm, sit on a gym ball or move 'n' sit cushion on the floor, or consider buying a chair which rocks slightly and gently
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Children have the opportunity to work at a low arousal area/table to focus their attention
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The height of tables and chairs is appropriate for children and corresponding seating is comfortable
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