

St. Andrew's School Inverurie



Sensory Policy

Supporting Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions

Date: April 2022 Updated: April 2023 Review Date: Jan 2026

Article 3 – Adults must do what is in my best interest



Article 12 – I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously



Article 23 – If I have a disability, I have the right to special care and education



Article 28 – I have a right to a good quality education. I should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level I can.



Introduction

This policy document sets out the school's aims, principles and strategies for addressing the sensory needs of all pupils, who exhibit sensory sensitivity.

Rationale

Our senses provide us with a means of interacting with and being part of society and enable us to understand and respond to the environment around us. Many individuals, particularly those on the autistic spectrum, have difficulties in integrating or making sense of sensory inputs which often manifests itself as withdrawal, distress or challenging behavior. Addressing sensory issues should result in increased engagement with the curriculum and therefore improved learning experiences, along with greater opportunities for engagement in both school and non-school activities. Sensory assessment can further personalise learning programmes, especially for those pupils with complex learning difficulties.

Addressing sensory need and accommodating sensory preferences is important for all our pupils with a sensory sensitivity. This policy will therefore apply to all those pupils within school ensuring that they gain their "right to an education that develops their personality, talents, abilities, and respect for human rights, their own and other cultures, and the environment" - *United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28 and 29.*

Aims

- To inform school staff, parents, carers and young people of the importance of sensory issues in the education, health and wellbeing of pupils.
- To put in place a means of recording, assessing, documenting, addressing and reviewing the sensory needs, responses and preferences of pupils.
- To provide an adapted environment and personalised teaching strategies that address the sensory needs and requirements of pupils, so resulting in improved learning experiences which positively impacts on health and wellbeing.

Equal Opportunities

Pupils will have their personal sensory issues, needs and preferences documented. Where sensory perception, needs and preferences impact on education, health and wellbeing, this policy and its associated procedures will be used to personalise and inform the teaching and learning.

The Sensory System

There are seven sensory systems in the human body. Each system is a complex interaction of perception and experience that can be dysfunctional in some cases of autism. Specific behaviors can help us identify which system is lacking or over stimulated.

The five senses are taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell. The sixth sensory system is the vestibular system (balance and spatial awareness). The vestibular system involves how our bodies process movement. Sight is closely tied to this system. The seventh is the proprioceptive system (self-movement and body position). The proprioceptive system involves the body's natural way of adjusting to its environment. This system involves fine motor activities like buttoning a shirt and coordinated activities like walking down steps.

We also have senses related to pain, temperature and time. People on the autism spectrum might also experience these differently.

Many people with autism are also hypersensitive or under-sensitive to light, noise, and touch. They may be unable to stand the sound of a dishwasher, or, on the other extreme, need to flap and even injure themselves to be fully aware of their bodies. Staff at St Andrew's School recognise that it is difficult to work out exactly what pupils' sensory issues are because each person will experience things differently and respond in different ways.

Sensory Issues

Everyone has some sensory issues. Some people dislike a certain fabric or the well-known sound of fingernails running down a chalkboard. People with autism have sensitive sensory systems in many cases. No two individuals are exactly alike. Some individuals with autism may love the feeling of water while others can't stand to even listen to the sound of water filtering into a bathtub. The sensory issues pose a challenge for everyday activities like personal care and meal time. Many people with autism have sensory issues that make some food textures intolerable. As a result of this lessons and other opportunities for food tasting are planned to try and encourage a wider acceptance of foods.

Environment

Many people with an autistic spectrum condition have sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of sound, sense, touch, sight and smell. This means our pupils may become unable to focus upon teaching activities and are distracted by noise and visual or other stimuli.

This is addressed in the way lessons are delivered to maximise their ability to learn and reduce the impact of behaviour when sensory input causes extreme discomfort or pain. Our pupils also have difficulties with flexibility and require clear visual support to understand routines and expectations. Therefore, we try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by the following:

- Providing an environment which is calm, distraction free and has a low level of visual and auditory stimulus.
- Providing students with a high degree of visual and physical structure.
- Providing students with a withdrawal chill-out area (safe space) when their levels of anxiety become raised.

Sensory Integration Activities

Sensory integration activities are a very useful motivational tool used at St Andrew's. They encourage communication and they help the individual calm and organise behavior. Sensory integration activities are also used to increase attention and time on task. Choosing which activities to implement depends on the specific needs of the individual, identified through their individual sensory assessments.

Often the needs are identified through self-stimulatory behaviours that are exhibited. Rocking is a common stereotyped repetitive movement that serves to address visual and vestibular sensory systems. This behaviour is often replaced with activities such as swinging on a swing. Tactile sensory integration activities include tickles, materials and walled sensory experience. A walled sensory experience is providing opportunity to touch and feel materials that have an interesting texture. The auditory system is addressed as the individual moves their hands over the wall making interesting sounds. Deep pressure is a valuable approach to dealing with common proprioceptive needs. Deep pressure involves burrowing into pillows or hugging a large stuffed animal. These activities are helpful in calming behaviour in many cases.

The Sensory Room

The Sensory rooms at St Andrew's School consist of many specialist sensory equipment, e.g. colour wheel projector, music, LED touch led bubble tube, mirrors, and sound effects board, and an immersive experience room. Selected sensory stimulation or relaxation can be facilitated by correct use of the specialist equipment. The Sensory room supports interaction, discovery and communication, enabling faster learning and development through increased awareness of the surroundings. This room encourages stimulation of all the senses - sight, sound, touch and smell.

Aim of the Sensory Room

To provide an environment this is non-threatening and relaxing, where pupils and staff are able to develop a therapeutic relationship which will positively impact on mood and behaviour

Objectives of The Sensory Room

- To provide an environment which gently stimulates or relaxes the sensory requirements through correct use of the equipment.
- To create a secure environment where pupils may explore and relax.
- To promote a therapeutic relationship by sharing experiences through sensory stimulation rather than focusing on verbal communication skills.

The Sensory room aims to meet a wide range of needs; from encouraging positive actions for those with sensory impairment to promoting rest and relaxation for the agitated or stressed.

Procedure for Sensory Profiling and Assessment

Where relevant, pupils will have a sensory profile drawn up through observation by class-based staff. The profile outlines observed reactions to the following inputs:

- Sound
- Vision
- Movement and body awareness
- Taste and food preferences
- Smell
- Touch – hands
- Touch – body

For example, staff will record if a pupil appears to react particularly positively, negatively or unusually to certain sounds. A pupil on the autistic spectrum may put their fingers in their ears and hum.

Pupils may contribute to their own sensory profiles. Pupils may be hypo or hyper-sensitive to stimuli and either response must be recorded.

The strategies may address specific issues that impact on learning and will include planned opportunities for addressing the issue with a view to reducing negative behavior.

Reporting

Sensory profiles and sensory strategies will be reviewed and discussed prior to a school Annual Review taking place.

Pupils with complex sensory profiles should be referred to Occupational Therapy.

Addressing Other Sensory Needs

There are a number of resources in school to help address sensory needs. These include:

- Ear defenders
- Chewy tubes
- Wedge Seats
- Bubble seats
- Weighted blankets
- Gym Balls
- Manual dexterity manipulation toys

Pupils sensory needs will change therefore resources that may work one day may not work the next.

Policy Review

This policy will be regularly reviewed by St Andrew's School Senior Leadership Team and updated annually.

Written: April 2022 Updated: April 2023 (added UNCRC Rights) Review date: Jan 2026