Environmental Audit

This environmental audit is to help practitioners to assess and create an environment that enables the engagement of children and young people (CYP) with sensory processing needs. It is not intended to be a definitive guide and therefore does not cover every aspect. However, it does give ideas and suggestions on the ways in which the environment could be altered if CYP are experiencing anxieties, behaviours or sensory reactions which may be due to them finding it hard to tolerate certain sensations or situations.

	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
General Sensory Needs	**A system of support is available for CYP experiencing sensory overload.** • Learning or movement breaks are allowed when necessary • There is a clear system/routine for CYP to follow if they feel they need to withdraw due to sensory overload • There is a clearly designated place available for them to withdraw to		
	CYP are encouraged to let staff know if they are finding a sensory aspect of the environment distressing. • CYP know that they can speak to someone about their concerns • CYP have a designated person to talk to • CYP are provided with alternative communication tools if needed in order to communicate their sensory needs		
	Environmental organisation takes into account CYP's individual needs. • Environmental organisation and seating plans take into consideration individual sensory concerns (e.g. A CYP who is sensitive to light does not sit by a window) • CYP who are anxious because of other people being close to them are allowed extra personal space e.g. around their seat		

General Sensory Needs cont...	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
	CYP is calm and regulated when moving through communal areas such as corridors. (Some CYP with sensory processing needs can become anxious in busy corridors due to anxiety over being touched/in close proximity to others; sensitivity to loud noises; feeling confined within a limited space with lots of other people) • CYP is allowed to leave slightly earlier or later than peers to avoid noisy/busy times/spaces		
	Dinner halls and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds etc.) • CYP is allowed to enter the dining area before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds • An adult or buddy may escort CYP to and within the dining area		

	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Tactile	**Uncomfortable clothing is avoided, wherever possible unless there are safety issues.** (Some CYP with sensory processing needs are extremely sensitive to the feel of itchy or scratchy fabric; material which is stiff and inflexible and seams/labels within their clothes) • The uniform/dress code policy is flexible enough to allow for variations which help CYP to find appropriate alternative clothing options		
	Alternative arrangements are made for CYP who find writing to be uncomfortable, physically painful or difficult. • Policies are flexible in allowing CYP to use alternative forms of writing such as a laptop, iPad, Alpha Smart to produce written work		
	Seating is comfortable. • Allowance is made of the fact that some CYP will find sitting on hard chairs or the floor for long periods of time difficult • CYP are allowed movement breaks within the lessons/sessions/day to reduce seated time		

	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Hearing	There is a clear system/routine for CYP to follow if they feel that the level of noise becomes too much for them. • There is a quiet room/area available which provides a place for CYP to calm down and self-regulate • CYP has a system to alert staff that noise is getting too loud e.g. cue cards		
	Sounds from outside are kept to a minimum in order to avoid problems within.		
	There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use. Wherever possible: • Rooms and corridors are carpeted to lessen the amount of noise caused by the movement of people and furniture • The acoustics of larger areas such as the gym, dining hall and hall are checked and modified to lessen echo • CYP could wear ear defenders/headphones when moving around busy corridors		
	Sounds from equipment within the environment are, wherever possible, kept to a minimum. • All electrical equipment within the room is to be switched off when not in use • Any CYP sensitive to environmental noise to be positioned away from this equipment		
	CYP are warned in advance if a loud, sudden noise such as the fire alarm or transition bell is going to sound • Clear, well defined strategies are put in place to support CYP and help them to tolerate loud, sudden sounds		

	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Vision	The environment is structured and organised so as not to be cluttered to ensure that CYP can easily find the information needed without inducing anxiety. • The impact of wall displays is considered. (Busy and colourful wall displays can be appealing to some but can be visually distracting and a cause of anxiety for some CYP with sensory processing needs) • Environments to be organised so that specific activities have clearly designated areas in order to give clarity to CYP with sensory processing needs • If necessary, CYP have the opportunity to work at a workstation or at an area which is sectioned off in order to focus their attention		
	Environmental lighting is suitable for CYP with sensory processing needs. • Lights are turned off if they are not needed in order to reduce visual stress in CYP • Flickering lights are turned off and changed as soon as possible • Staff are aware of the effects of light coming into the room – for example: the reflection from metal or shiny objects, the sun shining on certain areas of the room, patterns created by light coming through blinds etc.		

	Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Smell	**Staff are aware of the effect smell may have on CYP with sensory processing needs** • Staff are aware of everyday smells such as cleaning materials, some ink in pens and highlighters, paint and glue • Staff are aware that the smell of some perfumes and deodorants may be upsetting or overwhelming to CYP • Staff are aware that CYP may react to the smell of other people, such as the smell of coffee on someone's breath		
	Smells from outside the room are monitored and reduced, where possible. • 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		