



HEDGEWOOD SCHOOL

# Sensory Policy

2021-2022

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## **SENSORY POLICY**

**This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies, including the following policies, documents and guidance: Whole School Curriculum Policy, Autism Policy, Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy, Behaviour, wellbeing and Safety Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.**

This policy document sets out the school's aims, principles and strategies to support the sensory needs of pupils with autistic spectrum condition at Hedgewood.

### **Intent**

The majority of pupils at Hedgewood have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition. Young people with autism commonly experience unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli. Many pupils also exhibit sensory seeking behaviours which require addressing. Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a change in the child's needs over the years of his/her development and the challenges for our pupils may vary.

We recognise that learning for our most complex pupils will not necessarily follow a traditional developmental pattern and for some of our children may be vastly different. In order to address this context of learning, Hedgewood recognises the need for a flexible approach that takes into account the individual sensory needs of all our young people.

Our sensory provision takes account of the learners' preferred learning channels, the way they communicate, their ability to anticipate and remember routines, and their ability to form attachments, relationships and interact socially.

Learning how each autistic person's senses function is one crucial key to understanding that person. Lots of people with autism spectrum condition experience differences in the way their senses work. It is important to recognise this as it influences actions, responses and behaviour. In order to ensure that all pupils are able to access the relevant curriculum pathway offered to students throughout our school, the additional challenging characteristics for our young people on the autistic spectrum are taken into account in all aspects of their school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives.

### **Sensory Systems**

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

The five well known senses are taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell. The sixth sensory system is the vestibular system, and the seventh is the proprioceptive system. The vestibular system involves how our bodies process movement. The visual system is closely tied to this system. The proprioceptive system involves understanding how the muscles and joints are moving through space. This system is important for fine motor activities like buttoning a shirt and coordinated activities like walking down steps.

We also have senses related to pain, temperature and time. This is called interoception system. People on the autism spectrum may also experience these differently. Many people with autism can be hypersensitive or under-sensitive to light, noise, and touch. They may be unable to tolerate 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 Hedgewood recognise that it is vital to work out exactly what pupil's sensory issues are, because each person will experience things differently and respond in different ways. Everyone's tolerance levels are affected by their wellbeing, so when we are tired, ill, run down, worried or stressed we might not be as tolerant of sensory stimuli as when we are feeling good. However this is always taken into consideration and acted upon during the day and evaluated.

**Hedgewood is committed to responding to our pupil's sensory difficulties and provide opportunities throughout the day for sensory experiences which aid young people's engagement and those which they enjoy and value.**

## **Implementation**

### **Approaches and Interventions**

The teaching philosophy at Hedgewood embodies the rationale of the SPELL framework developed by the NAS, this includes the provision of; Structure, Positive attitudes and expectations, Empathy, Low-arousal and Links between school, home and outside agencies.

In order to meet the needs of all students across the spectrum we use a mix of established and researched approaches and interventions; drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use. Interventions and approaches include TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children), EfL (Essential for Living protocols and approaches) and Low Arousal approach to behaviour management.

Sensory interventions are integrated into our universal provision through daily classroom support of sensory tools, sensory diets, sensory circuits and targets addressed through personal curriculum planning. Targeted and acute support is offered by our therapy team where need is identified.

Hedgewood utilises approaches to develop co-ordination and motor skills, using technology i.e. Nessy Fingers to support writing skills. We also use taught programmes including Zones of Regulation and The Alert Programme to develop pupil's ability to understand any sensory factors that may affect their feelings and use of successful strategies to aid each individual.

Communication of sensory needs is achieved through sensory passports and/or pupil profiles.

## **Environment**

Many pupils with an autistic spectrum condition have sensory difficulties which can result in being 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 even 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. This includes low arousal areas such as corridors, reception and areas of the playground.
- Developing staff understanding of their own impact on the environment i.e. noise levels, proximity to children, pauses and waiting time for pupils to process information.
- Adapted lighting across the school.
- Providing pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structure.
- Providing pupils with a withdrawal chill-out area (safespace/ blackout tents) when their levels of anxiety become raised.
- Ensuring individuals have personalised sensory support available to use independently throughout the day (e.g. chewy tubes, ear-defenders, tactile/fidget toys).

## **Sensory Issues in the community.**

The community setting offers many opportunities for learning, but it is also a potential cause of sensory overload for our pupils. At Hedgewood we recognise that understanding these challenges can help deal with negative behaviours that may occur.

Most people can block out ambient noise, smells, and visual stimuli. However, for someone with sensory issues, this is a serious challenge, sorting through a plethora of voices and beeps and rattles. We are also bombarded with images, products, unfamiliar faces, and bright lighting. People with autism are not wired to determine which sensory stimuli should be ignored. Waiting in line may also be a painful experience, because it seems to serve no purpose.

At Hedgewood we ensure that as much as possible the student knows what to expect and what is expected of them. We value all opportunities for our young people to interact with the

community. However, taking steps prior can ensure smooth sailing. This is addressed using various means e.g. write a social story tailor made to the situation; provide a step-by-step list of what the outing will entail and, where relevant, behaviour expectations for the person. In addition, alerting the individual of potential sensory issues in advance can help eliminate the fear of the unknown and put them more at ease. It is also useful to bring sensory support, such as fidget toys and distractions which are used to occupy an individual's interest while on an errand, in addition to providing a controlled sensory input. If noise is a major issue, ear defenders or headphones with music can be used.

## **Sensory based Activities**

Sensory-based activities are a very useful motivational tool used at Hedgewood. They encourage communication and they help the individual calm and organise behaviour. Sensory based 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 may be replaced with activities like swinging on a swing or alternating sit-ups with a partner while holding hands. Tactile sensory based activities include touch, materials and sensory trays. Sensory trays are containers filled with beans, pasta, smooth stones or anything that has an interesting texture. The auditory system can also be addressed as the individual moves his hands through the trays making interesting sounds, and also may enjoy the visual stimulus of material falling and passing through hands and containers.

Deep pressure is a valuable approach to dealing with common proprioceptive needs. Deep pressure may involve burrowing into pillows/ using weighted blankets or toys or hugging a large stuffed animal. Movement activities may also be used to address proprioceptive needs. These activities are helpful in calming behaviour in many cases.

## **Use of the Sensory room**

The pupil's use of sensory equipment and resources needs to be monitored and effectiveness and impact of use reported upon, particularly when using the swings and equipment in the sensory room. This equipment needs to be used in a prescribed way for some children in order to avoid sensory overload.

Use of the sensory room is part of teaching and learning and targeted support for vestibular and proprioceptive work is acutely monitored and impact safely assessed.

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure all equipment is safe for our students to use, it is the responsibility of the staff member in charge of the session to make sure all equipment is used appropriately and that no foreseeable harm comes to the user through misuse.

The room must be left ready for the next group to access it. No pupil is allowed to access the room without direct adult supervision by a member of staff who has been trained in the safe use of equipment for that child.

## **Training**

Regular whole staff training identifies how young people with autism are affected by their sensory experiences and the range of strategies that are available to give support. Bespoke training for individuals is given in response to pupil needs and support identified.

The therapy team conducts regular parent training workshops to include sleep difficulties, toileting issues, understanding sensory needs of your child as well as offering individual support to address any current challenges.

## **Impact.**

The positive impact of addressing sensory needs is enabling pupils at Hedgewood to improve sensory regulation to access learning, enable independence and self-regulation wherever possible, and use chosen sensory experiences for pleasure.

Development of toleration skills for everyday experiences that our young people find difficult ensure that they are as equipped as possible to enjoy and access a wide range of interests and opportunities.

The impact of interventions and approaches will be evaluated through universal targets set on Personal Curriculum Plans (PCP). Assessment of targets identified through curriculum pathways and next steps in developing emotional regulation, tolerance for necessary situations and activities (i.e. bathing/ doctors/waiting etc), will be reported in PCP reviews and through Annual Review of EHCP targets.