Primary School Field Guide

Enabling Environments

Dr Helga Abernethy OT, PhD; Sonia Swart OT

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Introduction

Purpose:

The purpose of the Primary School Field Guide is to provide teachers with:

- Strategies and ideas to support pupils to develop their ability to remain focused and regulated in the school environment.
- For teachers to make changes to the sensory environment in order to enhance the pupils' learning experience and support pupils' regulation.
- To enhance teachers' understanding of the impact of sensory stimuli in the school environment on pupils' ability to regulate and learn.

This Field Guide provides a brief overview of sensory processing differences that some pupils may experience, as well as regulation strategies that can be implemented based on the results of the Sensory Preferences Checklist completed by the teacher.

It is important to remember that each person is a unique individual with their own unique strengths and differences. For some, this means they may require additional health and care assessments conducted by a qualified professional in order to identify the most appropriate and more detailed support strategy.

How to use the Field Guide:

The teacher should complete the Sensory Preferences Checklist and Interpretation Sheet as instructed. The strategies in the Field Guide are linked to the possible answers teachers can provide in the checklist. Teachers can therefore look at a pupil's checklist and find strategies relating specifically to the highlighted areas. There are two ways of doing this:

- If the teacher highlighted many areas under one system, e.g. the visual system, the teacher can look at the strategies for the visual system in the Field Guide.
- If a teacher for example highlighted many areas under a specific section, e.g. sensitivity, then the teacher can look at the strategies under sensory sensitive in the Field Guide.

Teachers can read through the whole guide to familiarise themselves with it or they can use it as a quick reference guide and only look at the sections for strategies needed based on the information highlighted on the checklist and interpretation sheet.

Introduction

Overview:

Sensory processing is the ability to accurately process sensory information from our environment and our own bodies through the use of our sensory systems. The information we obtain is registered, regulated and results in an adapted response in order to meet the demands of the environment or the task[1].

For example, if a teacher calls a pupil's name, the pupil will hear it (register) and then think about what it means (regulate and integrate) in order to respond (adaption) appropriately with their words or actions.

However, when there are sensory processing difficulties, there may be a problem to register the information or to regulate the information and/or to respond appropriately to the incoming sensory input.

For example, if a teacher calls a pupil's name and the pupil does not respond immediately, this may be because the pupil did not hear the teacher calling which means they did not register the sound. It could be because the pupil could not regulate the incoming sensory input and heard the sound, but could not understand the meaning behind the sound (regulating). Or lastly it could mean that the pupil is struggling to form the correct response to the teacher with their words or actions (adaptive response).

Sensory processing impacts pupils', as well as teachers' responses and participation in daily activities, whether they are neuro-typical or neuro-diverse[2]. Everyone processes sensory information differently. Sensory processing difficulties are experienced when the way in which a person processes information and responds to it, prevents them from, or makes it hard for them to participate in daily activities, such as learning, socialising, etc.

Effective individualised strategies and adaptations to the environment can help a person process sensory information.

As sensory processing is clinical in nature, for the purpose of this Field Guide the term sensory processing difficulties will be used. The way in which these difficulties present are different and unique to the individual.

Introduction

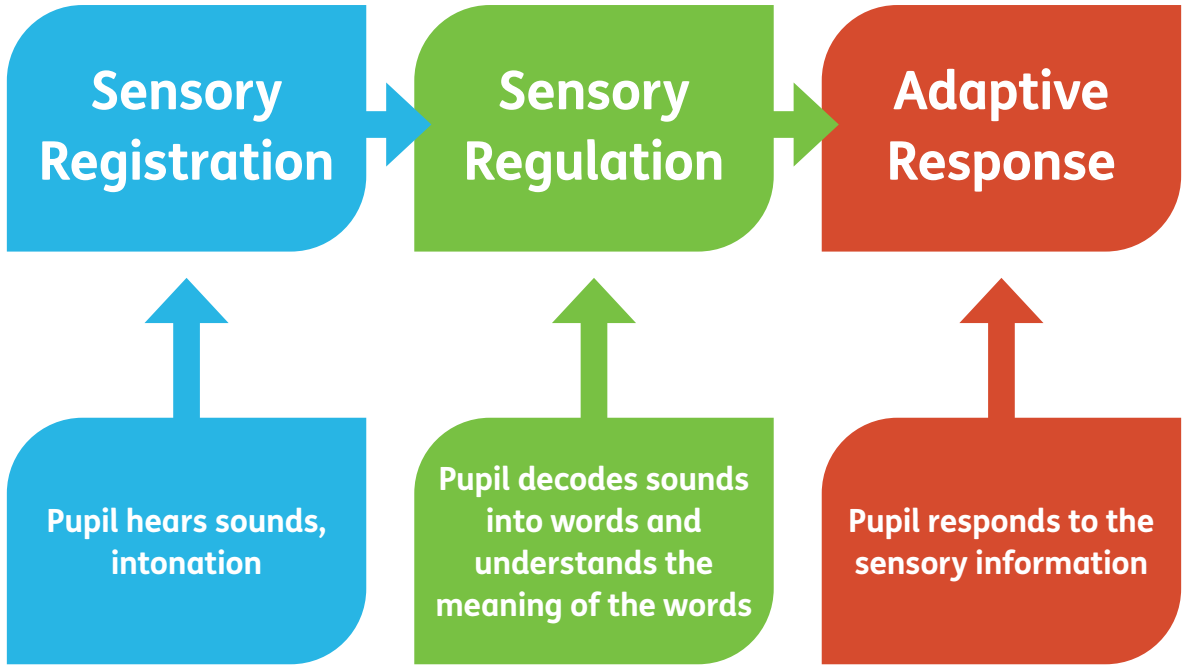

Diagram 1: Sensory Processing Process

Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fright Response:

Sensitivity in the sensory systems can result in a pupil experiencing the fight/flight reaction as their body immediately responds to the sensory stimuli that they are sensitive to as if they are in danger. For the purpose of this Field Guide, the word **'fight'** is used in relation to the fight/flight response.

When a pupil with sensory sensitivity becomes dysregulated, it takes them longer to return to their baseline of feeling calm compared to pupils who may not have sensory processing difficulties. Their bodies also do not get used to incoming sensory information the way other pupils' would.

For example, if a pupil sits in class and they can hear the sound of the nearby traffic they are unable to tune it out and their brain keeps telling them that it is information they have to respond too. This then distracts them from listening to what that teacher is saying and the pupil may appear to either be distracted and fidgety or as if they are day dreaming.

If a motorbike suddenly revs its engine as it races past, this pupil is likely to get a fright and they will feel more dysregulated than what they already are and will take a while to feel calmer.

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There can sometimes be a **clear trigger** for a pupil's behaviour but often there is not a clear trigger when a pupil becomes upset, as most of the time there is a build-up throughout the day (which might have already started at home and during their journey to school), and it might only take something small to happen that pushes the pupil into feeling upset and dysregulated.

The average school environment is filled with a large amount of sensory input, and this adds to a pupil becoming **dysregulated** as they are constantly exposed to many visual displays; pupils talking; noises inside and outside the classrooms; and pupils being near them, particularly during transitions, line-up before entering the school building and lunch times.

Pupils can respond to sensory stimuli with a **fight, flight, freeze or fright** response. In this Field Guide we linked these responses to the four areas that sensory processing difficulties can present as described in the Sensory Model by Winnie Dunn[3,4].

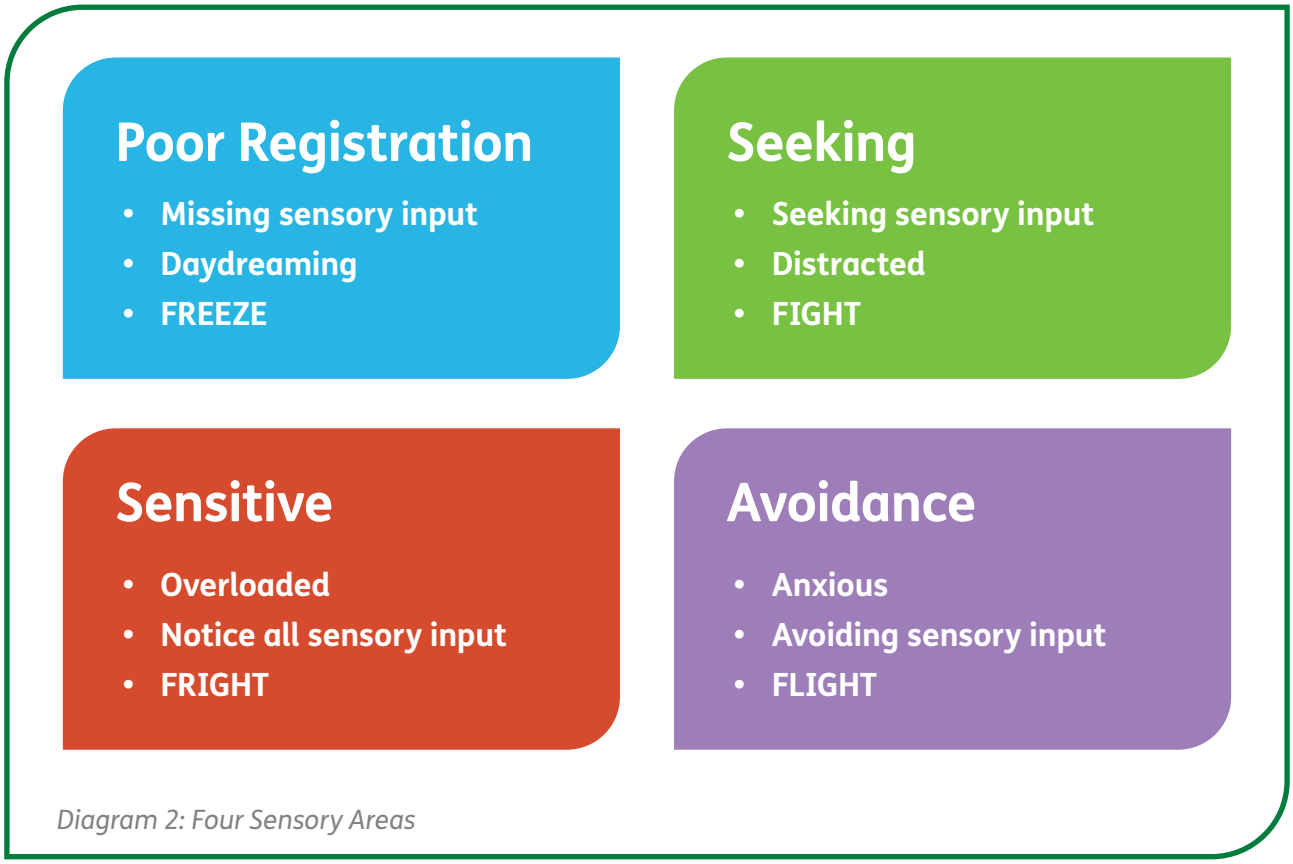

Diagram 2: Four Sensory Areas

Introduction

The ability of a person to register, regulate and integrate information is extraordinary. **Sensory information** from the body and from the environment is registered through the eight senses, **touch, movement, proprioception, vision, sound, taste, smell and interoception**, inside the body.

This information is processed by the brain and influences the autonomic nervous system (ANS), other sensory systems, the motor system and cognitive processing in various and profound ways. The brain is then able to recognise, analyse and categorise this information in order to formulate an **adaptive motor response**.

This results in something that we ourselves and/or other people can experience. For example we start to **think** about something and then we choose to go and do it and/or to go and say it. This means we are able to **connect and/or communicate** with something and/or someone.

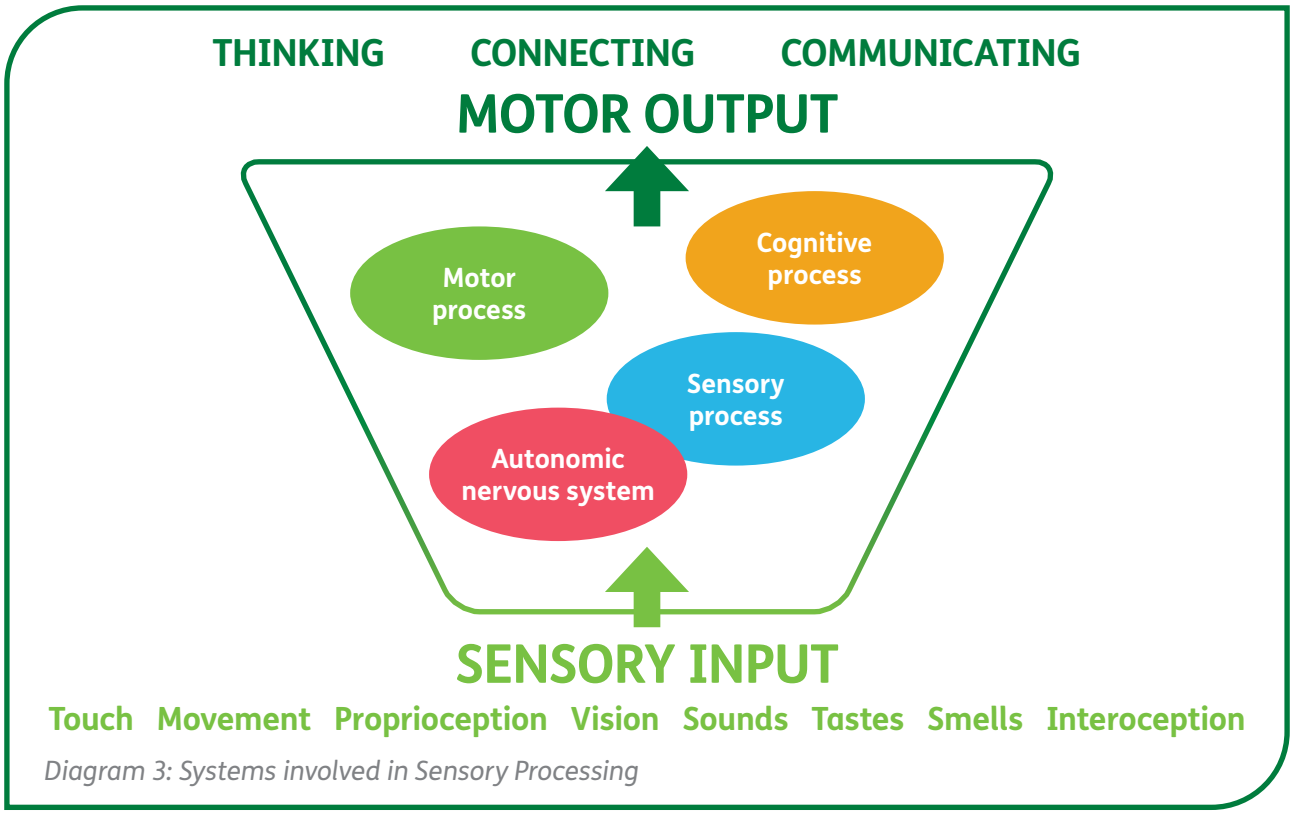

Diagram 3: Systems involved in Sensory Processing

These adaptive responses can also be used to identify **challenges in the processing of sensory information** and it can impact a pupil in various ways during the school day[5].

Introduction

It can influence a pupil's ability to **concentrate and pay attention** which in turn may impact their **ability to problem solve, plan and make decisions**. Pupils may also be easily **distracted** by incoming sensory information which influences their ability to tolerate input, e.g. being bothered by **noises** and/or by the **texture** of their **school uniform**.

Being intolerant to input often causes pupils to **fidget** and/or an inability to sit or stand still when the pupil is expected to. They might also appear not to **listen** and struggle to **follow instructions**. A pupil may also find it difficult to **endure** all of the input and the motor requirements of upright **sitting and standing postures** for the prolonged period of a school day, which may lead to a poor quality of motor output, e.g. struggling with **activities in PE**, especially activities requiring balance and coordination, **handwriting and other fine motor** tasks in the classroom.

A pupil might also find it difficult to **transition**, appear **clumsy**, seem to **tire** easily, find it difficult to **organise** themselves and find it difficult to **participate in group activities**.

Pupils may feel **overwhelmed** by all the **social-emotional demands** of coping with the academic work pace, **connecting with themselves and with peers** and being able to clearly **communicate** in different settings, such as in the classroom and during break times.

Especially in a Primary school setting pupils may not realise that they are becoming overwhelmed/dysregulated and may require help from staff to recognise that they are becoming dysregulated, to recognise the need to regulate and to use strategies/access sensory activities to help them regulate. The younger the pupils, the better are the chances of reducing sensory sensitivity. Recognition, appropriate input and adaptations where necessary can greatly impact a pupil's ability to learn, socialise and develop positive self-esteem[6]. Dysregulation may lead to the pupil responding with communicating behaviours such as **disruptive, withdrawal or avoidant behaviour** and a **disengagement from learning**.

Auditory system

"Sound waves in the air stimulate the auditory receptors in the inner ear to send impulses to the brain stem auditory centres. The most intricate and complicated part of the process is the refinement of certain sounds into meaningful syllables and words." [6]

The auditory system does not just help a person to **hear sounds** but also provides information about whether a sound **is important** and should be **attended** to (i.e. a fire alarm) or whether it can be **ignored** (i.e. the sound of a lawnmower outside). It provides information about **how far away** the sound is, **where it comes** from and whether it is a **new or familiar** sound.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Misses verbal instructions and seems unaware when being spoken to

- Using **visual schedules** to show the daily routine on the wall helps younger pupils to process what they are hearing in order to organise themselves during the day.
- Provide **step-by-step visual instructions** to tasks (pictures/written) for older pupils in order for them to refer back to the instructions.
- Check with the pupil during the lesson to see if they **understand** tasks.
- Help the pupil to **make a plan** to increase their understanding of instructions by asking people to talk slower, repeat instructions, take notes, etc.
- The use of a **sound-field amplification** (SFA) system by teachers can reduce auditory stress and improve listening.
- If a teacher has a **strong accent** they should be aware that some pupils might find it difficult to follow what they are saying and might therefore miss verbal instructions.
- Use the **pupil's name** when addressing them.

Sensitive (Fright)	Distracted by sounds in the environment and startles easily at unexpected/loud noises

- Using **specific sounds for specific tasks** may help younger pupils to feel safer in their class environment, e.g. tambourine for quieting down, soft bell for transitions, e.g. going out to play.
- Help the pupil to **make a plan** for when he/she gets distracted to find their place in the task they are busy with.
- **Visual (written/picture) instructions** help pupils to refocus.
- Have a clear **beginning and ending** to each piece of work.
- Be aware of and **limit noise** from outside and inside the classroom where possible.
- Identify if there are pupils in the class that speak loudly on a regular basis and whether this distract pupils who are sensitive to noise. If so, consider the **seating arrangements** of the pupils.

Auditory system

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Sensitive (Fright)	Distracted by sounds in the environment and startles easily at unexpected/loud noises

- Similarly identify if there are anything in the classrooms creating a noise, e.g. **sound of electronic equipment,** and ensure pupils bothered by this noise is seated further away from the source of the noise, if the noise cannot be eliminated.
- Consider the **impact of the increase in noise levels** during paired work and group discussions[7]. If needed, a pupil can be given a quick break from the noisy classroom environment.
- Pupils bothered by **unexpected noise** should be prepared for fire drills, whistles blown at the start of the school day, and during break and lunchtimes.

Seeking (Fight)	Makes own noise and talks self through tasks

- Pupils with auditory sensitivity often create their own noise to drown out/block out noise in their environment that bothers them. Identifying **when** the pupil makes their own noise can help to pinpoint whether a certain sound they hear in their classroom or a sound made by a specific person bothers them.
- Pupils often **talk themselves** through tasks to help them remain on track. Provide pupils who do this with visual instructions that they can tick or cross off, to help them remain on track.
- The pupil can also be **taught to verbalise** what they are doing quietly to themselves by miming the words to themselves instead of saying it out loud.
- Find out whether the pupil is **aware** that they are making noises. If they are, the teacher can ask if they have a reason for doing so and that might provide more information to guide the teacher on how to manage this. It might be that the pupil does not realise they make their own noise and that if they are subtly made aware of this they can try to do so less during times when this is distracting for other pupils.

Avoiding (Flight)	Bothered by the noise level in lunch hall, assemblies, playground and covers ears to certain sounds

- Let the pupil **sit near the back and/or side** of a row in case they have to leave the environment or arrange an alternative quieter area where they can have their lunch.
- Allow the use of **ear defenders/noise reducing ear plugs**.
- Allow the pupil not to attend **assemblies**.
- Help the pupil to identify an area on the **playground** that they feel is not too noisy for them, where they feel safe to play during play times.
- Help the pupil to **come up with strategies**, asking them what they think will help to make it sound better.
- Ensure the pupil has an **individualised plan** on how to manage when noise levels become too much for them.

Auditory system

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Auditory Processing

- Ensure that all the **doors** to the classroom do not make a noise upon opening and closing.
- Ensure all new chairs and tables have **rubbers stoppers** on the legs to reduce the noise levels when pupils move the chairs. Alternatively classrooms can be **carpeted** to reduce noise levels.
- Limit the noise created by **electronic or other equipment** in the classroom by ensuring equipment is in good working order. For example, humming lights, the sound of overhead projectors, air conditioning units, air purifiers, fans, etc. If the noise cannot be eliminated staff should be aware of the dysregulating impact on auditory sensitive pupils.
- Consider what adjustments can be made to **reduce acoustics**, e.g. acoustic panels, carpeting, soft furnishings, etc., particularly in areas such as the dining hall, the assembly hall and PE hall.
- Staff should also be aware of the **impact of noise from outside** the classroom, such as traffic from nearby roads, temporary road works, lawnmowers, sound from other classrooms, etc. Closing the classroom door and windows might help reduce the noise levels.
- Schools cannot easily change the problem of some **corridors/stairways being echoic**, however staff should be aware of the impact of this on pupils' levels of regulation and in some cases they might have to close their classroom doors to minimise this during lessons.
- **Crowded areas**, such as corridors and cloakrooms during transitions, and PE changing areas, contribute to **dysregulation due to the noise levels**. Staff might not be able to change this but should be aware of the impact on pupils' levels of regulation.
- Staff might feel that it is necessary at times to **raise their voice** at pupils but they should be aware that it can contribute to dysregulation for pupils who are sensitive to auditory input.
- If **hand dryers** are replaced they can be replaced with quieter hand dryers.
- Noise levels during **transitions** contribute to pupils becoming dysregulated. If a teacher notices that many pupils in the class are dysregulated and struggling to pay attention then it will be beneficial to spend the first five minutes of the lesson engaging in a calming activity.
- Pupils that find it difficult due to auditory sensitivity to **transition** with the rest of the school should be allowed to transition slightly earlier to assemblies, break times, lunchtime and home time if they would benefit from this.
- An **increase in awareness and the support** available for pupils who appear quiet and do not present with distressed behaviour, as they can easily be missed and not receive the support they require.
- Create quiet **Reading corners** in the classroom that can be used when the auditory input becomes too overwhelming. As this area will still be part of the classroom the pupil can have access to ear defenders or listen to music using headphones when sitting there.

Visual system

> **"Light stimulates the retina to send visual sensory input to the visual processing centres in the brainstem. These centres process the impulses and relate them to other types of sensory information, especially input from the muscles and joints and vestibular system."** [6]

The visual system does not just provide information about **what we see** but also the **detailed information about our environment** such as colours, brightness, patterns, shapes, depth and contrasts.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Misses written instructions/demonstrations and struggles to organise materials and equipment

- Use a window-guide or coloured overlays when **reading**.
- Make short age-appropriate **checklists** and ask the pupils to tick or cross out each step as they complete it.
- Break long tasks or assignments into **shorter tasks with deadlines** to help the pupil not feel overwhelmed and remain on track. Bear in mind that what the teacher views as a short task but be experienced as a long task by the pupil and therefore some tasks might have to be broken down into very small steps/tasks and presented bit-by-bit to the pupil. This will also give them a sense of accomplishment when they complete the shorter tasks and help to motivate them.
- Provide short, clear **instructions** for tasks.
- For older pupils underline, circle or highlight **key terms** on reading material.
- Follow a **predictable schedule** and inform the pupil what is expected for a task to help them organise themselves ahead of time.
- Teachers can get the whole class to practice **organising themselves** by asking them to get specific equipment and materials ready and show them how to organise it on their tables.
- Ensure that the **layout of the classroom** clearly indicates the function of the areas, e.g. reading corner, painting area, dress up or play area, etc., as this also helps the pupils to organise the equipment used in each area.
- Ensure **visual timetables** are clearly visible in all classrooms as this will remind older pupils what they are doing throughout the day and can help prompt their thoughts regarding materials needed for certain activities.
- Ensure **visual timetables** have clear pictures to outline the routine of the day for the younger pupils. Some pupils will benefit from regularly being reminded to look at the timetable.
- Ensure **storage boxes** are clearly marked with pictures and words to help pupils to keep the classroom as tidy as possible, and to help them learn to organise materials and equipment.

Visual system

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Sensitive (Fright)	Bothered by bright lights/lights in the classroom and bothered/distracted by movement in the classroom
• Identify if there are any areas in the classroom where there are **reflections of light** or movement/patterns of shadows. • Consider **seating arrangements** to place the pupil where there are the least distractions caused by light near their desk. • Minimise **overwhelming visual stimuli** such as bright light by using roller blinds, light covers for lights that are too bright. • If a pupil is bothered by too much **movement** around them position them near the front of the classroom to limit distraction. • Consider using a **privacy desk divider/panel** during tasks where the pupil has to concentrate on completing a specific piece of work.	
Seeking (Fight)	Watches people as they move around the classroom
• Consider **seating arrangements** to place the pupil where there are the least movements near their desk. • Do not place the pupil near **windows or doorways** to the corridor where they can be distracted by watching people outside the classroom.	
Avoiding (Flight)	Close eyes/blink/place hands over eyes to block out light and/or visual busyness
• Reduce the **visual displays** in the classrooms to reduce overall distractions. • Decrease **visual distractions** by considering where in the class the pupil is seated. • Use a window-guide or coloured overlays when **reading**. • Identify whether there are any **bright light or reflections** in the classroom that bothers the pupil. • Consider the impact of this during **play times and PE** where there are a lot of movement and often unexpected movements. For example the pupil might struggle during activities involving a ball being thrown or hit and adaptations might have to be made in relation to their participation in such activities.	

Things to Remember:

Many pupils with visual sensitivity do not only find eye contact uncomfortable but even painful.

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Visual Processing

- Ensure all the lights are in working order, that they have the same brightness and colour, and consider the different **types of lighting** used, e.g. fluorescents lights tend to be uncomfortable on the eyes.
- **Natural lighting** (Use of blinds, UV filters on windows, no skylights if there are a sufficient amount of windows otherwise it makes the room too hot).
- Be aware of and try to **eliminate patterns of shadows** and bright sunlight coming into the room as it can be visually distracting and overwhelming.
- **Mood/light filters** can be placed over fluorescent lights to block out the flickering of the lights which can contribute to visual stress and dysregulation[7] and underneath skylights if they let in too much sunlight.
- There are **large mats** with small pictures in a variety of colours often found in the classrooms of Reception and Year 1 pupils that is used during carpet time. It will **reduce visual busyness** if the mats had large dots in different colours rather than pictures in multiple colours.
- Some pupils become **visually overwhelmed** by too many **wall decorations/visual displays** in class and/or in the corridors. This will impact on their self-regulation and ability to concentrate in class as they might become distracted or seem not to pay attention as they might 'shut down'. Therefore limit the amount of wall decorations in corridors and classes to reduce visual distractions and create the impression of a larger space.
- Visual **displays** should ideally be limited to the display boards. If there are visual displays on the walls it should be minimal, preferably be on the side and/or back walls and be neatly organised.
- Visual **clutter** should be reduced in classrooms. For example, books, activities, stationary and other resources should be stored in containers or cupboards to particularly reduce distraction at the front of the classroom. Plain coloured material can also be used to cover some of the storage units to limit visual distraction.
- A **consistent colour scheme** throughout the school and classes using calming colours such as cream or pastel colours[8] including lilac, light blue, mint green, will contribute to a low arousal environment. Avoid bright colours, random colours, patterns or pictures. It is helpful for display boards to have **one colour background and another colour border that remains consistent** throughout the classroom or even throughout the school. Consistency in the colour and design of chairs and tables throughout the school is also recommended, as well as the colour of plastic storage drawers and containers often used in classrooms.

Visual system

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Visual Processing

- Mark **storage containers** clearly with pictures and words to help the pupils to keep the classrooms tidy.
- Clear **signage** across the school site is helpful for pupils struggling to organise.
- **School map** for new pupils that corresponds to the signage is helpful.
- Clearly **signposted areas** to help pupils to access equipment in classrooms, for example plastic storage drawers where their books are kept, etc.
- Ensure **lines painted on steps** are clear enough to indicate where the steps are.
- Many autistic people and people with visual sensitivity find it difficult to make **eye contact**. They find that they are able to pay attention better when they do not have to make eye contact. Staff should therefore not expect pupils to have to make eye contact in order to be paying attention as this can have the opposite effect.

Tactile system

"The skin has many different kinds of receptors for receiving sensations of touch, pressure, texture, heat or cold, pain and movement of the hairs of the skin. The tactile system is the largest sensory system and it plays a vital role in human behaviour, both physical and mental." [6]

The tactile system provides **information** about textures of everything around us, the **differences between textures** and whether it is wet or dry. It helps us to **plan** what to wear according to the temperature outside and inside a room. It helps us to **stop and change** when we feel pressure and/or pain.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Unaware of pain or temperature and don't notice when hands or face are dirty
• On a **hot day** the pupil might need reminding to take their jumper off as they will not think of doing so and this can impact their ability to concentrate. • Pupils may struggle to **'feel'** when they are hungry, thirsty, hot, cold and/or need to use the toilet, therefore they might need prompting. Help the pupil to learn to **identify the responses in their bodies** by helping them to listen to their body. A teacher can model/develop this process by saying for example, "I see your body looks uncomfortable, do you need to go to the bathroom?" or "It looks like you are feeling quite warm, would you like to take your jumper off?". • The pupil might have to be **made aware** if their hands are dirty. • Younger pupils can be **taught certain steps** to follow after they have been at the bathroom and/or after lunchtime, e.g. to look in the mirror and to check that their mouths/faces are clean and to wash their hands.	
Sensitive (Fright)	Bothered by certain textures of clothing/materials/ temperatures and dislikes getting hands dirty/messy play
• Tag-less clothes, seamless socks, and reasonable adjustments allowed to the **uniform**, e.g. clip on ties, wearing a T-shirt underneath the school shirt, variations or changes in the school uniform to be considered, coming to school in the PE kit on PE days, etc. • Providing **sensory boxes** in class with a variety of sensory fidget tools such as a stress ball to squeeze and other sensory fidget tools that can be used to promote calm. • **Providing opportunities to explore a variety of different textures** should be encouraged in order to assist with desensitisation and to develop tolerance of a texture, especially during art lessons and play time. The teacher may have to sit with younger pupils to support and encourage them to stay with a texture for a time and to not just move from texture to texture because of a fear of exploration.	

Tactile system

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Sensitive (Fright)	Bothered by certain textures of clothing/materials/ temperatures and dislikes getting hands dirty/messy play
• However if pupils find it very difficult and try to avoid touching certain **textures** during art and other messy play activities such as mud; or want to wear gloves or wash their hands often during a task, then this should be accommodated. Advice from a professional should be sought when the avoidance of touching certain textures is extreme and impacting the pupil's participation in learning.	
Seeking (Fight)	Touches people/objects/textures more than peers and fidgets with objects
• Allow the use of **sensory fidget tools** in the classroom and other areas in the school such as during assemblies, carpet time, etc. (See Appendix B for suggestions) • Allow pupils to **fidget with objects** in a manner that is **non-disruptive** to the pupils around them. • If a pupil bothers other pupils by touching them when standing in line or during carpet time/assemblies, they can be **positioned** at the front or the back of the line.	
Avoiding (Flight)	Dislikes and/or reacts emotionally or aggressively to unexpected touch and avoids/resists certain textures, materials, etc.
• **Inform** and prepare the pupil if they are going to be touched. • If possible **limit close seating** and **increase space** between pupils. • Consider that a pupil might become anxious during **transitions**, lunchtimes, assemblies, changing for PE, during PE and especially during times when colleting coats and book bags from crowded cloakrooms, when they are in close proximity to others. Reasonable adjustments should be made if needed for pupils struggling in the aforementioned environments. For example leaving early, arriving earlier, ensuring sufficient space, positioning the pupil's coat peg where it is easily accessible, allowing the pupil to change for PE slightly away from the other pupils or in a different area. • If the pupil becomes **dysregulated** due to being touched by other pupils wait until the pupil feels calmer and discuss the situation, help them to think about different solutions. • If a pupil shows an extreme dislike to certain **textures** they should not be forced to touch it as this can increase their levels of anxiety and contribute to them avoiding the textures or objects/activities involving those textures even more. • Advice can be sought on how to go about gradually increasing the pupil's **tolerance** to the textures that they find difficult to tolerate.	

Things to Remember:

Respect every pupil's response to sensory stimuli. A comfortable feeling for you may be an uncomfortable feeling for someone else.

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Tactile Processing

- Every person does not **regulate temperature** the same and it is therefore important for teachers to remember that some pupils might feel warmer or colder than others and this can impact their ability to pay attention.
- The **temperature** in some school buildings on warm days can contribute to pupils becoming dysregulated and struggling to focus in class as they might feel too hot.
- Some pupils might find it difficult to sit still during assemblies if they have to sit on a **cold hard floor** in the hall, resulting in them appearing fidgety.
- **Blinds** that have a solar reflective property will support the regulation of classroom temperatures.
- **Seasonal changes** can impact pupils in a variety of different ways and staff should be aware of this.
- **Crowded areas**, such as corridors and cloakrooms during transitions times, and PE changing areas, contribute to dysregulation due to pupils with **tactile sensitivity** finding it difficult to tolerate others being close to them and/or pushing against them. Staff might not be able to change this but should be aware of the impact on pupils' levels of regulation.
- Pupils that find it difficult due to tactile sensitivity to **transition** with the rest of the school should be allowed to transition to lessons and lunch a few minutes earlier or later if they feel they would benefit from this.
- Most schools allow **reasonable adjustments to the school uniform**. Although schools have policies with regards to school uniforms, schools also have a duty to make reasonable adjustments if a pupil's sensory processing difficulties make it difficult for them to be in a school environment and access learning. It will therefore be of great benefit to the pupils if there is a flexible approach with regards to the uniform policy in order for individual adaptations to be made to the school uniform for pupils who present with sensory processing difficulties, whether they are neuro-divergent or not.
- Think about **repeating the use of the same texture** in activities for specific pupils, particularly in Reception, for the whole week or a period of time, in order for the pupil to adapt to the texture and then change the texture for the next week, instead of having too many different textures at the same time, making it challenging to adapt to all the textures.

Movement system

"When the vestibular system works normally, the pull of gravity generates a constant sensory flow from early fetal life until death. The sensations from gravity flowing through our nervous system help to form a basic reference for all other sensory experiences. Every change in head position stimulates some of the vestibular receptors." [6]

The vestibular system is situated in the inner ear and provides information about our **balance, coordination of movements, head position,** maintaining a stable **visual field** and contributes to our sense of **body position in space**; where we are in **relation** to other objects and people, **bilateral coordination**, the **speed** at which we are moving, as well as **posture and muscle tone**.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Poor balance and requests help during balancing activities
• **Adapt activities** requiring balancing skills to accommodate pupils who has poor balance, without drawing attention to it. • Consider balancing tasks where **pupils have to work together**, as this will provide support to every pupil without drawing attention to individual pupils. These tasks can then be **graded** to make them more challenging, but still provide support. • **Support should be provided** if a pupil **requests help** during balancing activities. Attention should not be drawn to this and the pupil should not be made to feel that they are asking for help unnecessarily because they might struggle with an activity that the teacher perceive as easy. • If a teacher is **aware** that a pupil struggles during balancing activities, they could **offer support** if it looks like the pupil will benefit from it, as the pupil might not want to ask for help because they do not want to show that they are struggling in front of their peers. • **Grade activities** during PE in order to develop the pupils' balancing skills. • Consider **stable versus unstable surfaces** when pupils have to participate in PE.	
Sensitive (Fright)	Afraid to go on climbing equipment
• Consider the impact of this during playtimes and certain activities in PE and make **reasonable adjustments** for the pupil. For example they can help to organise the activity but does not have to participate if they are unable to participate, an activity can be adapted to enable the pupil to participate, the pupil can be supported to access the equipment if they feel able to try this, a Teaching Assistant could take the pupil to the equipment when it is quiet to see if the pupil can access it then and/or practice to access it, as it might be linked to the amount of pupils using the equipment rather than the skills needed to access the equipment.	

Movement system

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Seeking (Fight)	Struggles to keep still/moves/rocks body

- Allow the pupil to use **sensory fidget** tools in the classroom.
- Allow the pupil to do **chair push-ups/ wall push-ups**, etc. when needed.
- Allow **movement breaks**.
- Allow the pupil to **stand and work** at their desk.
- Provide a **disc-o-sit or Movin-Sit cushion** to trial.
- Provide a **foot fidget** or place an elastic exercise band around the front legs of the chair for the pupil to push and move their feet against it.
- Ensure the **tables and chairs are the correct heights**, and provide a footstool or change the size of the furniture if needed.

Avoiding (Flight)	Dislikes physical activities

- Try to identify the **reason for the avoidance** to participate, e.g. whether this is due to the pupil struggling with motor planning, the amount of pupils and/or movement around the pupil during physical activities, the noise levels, the amount of visual stimuli, the expectations from others if it involves teamwork, etc.
- **Encourage** the pupil to participate but do not force them.
- If they feel unable to participate **involve them in different ways**. For example helping the teacher to set up the activities, tidying up the activities, helping to organise the activities, etc.

Things to Remember:

The vestibular system does not only influence balance but also the eye, neck and body muscles. This means that if a pupil is not processing vestibular information appropriately it can impact their ability to follow writing on an interactive whiteboard and copy it in their books, they will have difficulty keeping their head up at their desk as well as consistently maintaining an upright sitting posture and they may tire quickly.[5]

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Vestibular (movement) Processing

- Plan the **layout of the classroom** in order to avoid trip hazards and provide space to transition easily between desks and chairs.
- Plan the **positioning** of storage units in order to create functional spaces, to create space that facilitates thinking and to enhance ease of movement around the classroom.
- Implementation of **movement breaks** and staff training to explain to staff the reasons behind movement breaks and how pupils benefit from them.
- Provide sufficient **space to transition** in corridors and on stairways.
- Pupils that find it difficult due to movement sensitivity to **transition** with the rest of the school should be allowed to transition to assemblies, the playground, the dining hall and home time a few minutes earlier or later, if this would be beneficial.

PROPRIOCEPTIVE SYSTEM

> **"Our body precept consists of "maps" of every part of our body, somewhat like a world atlas. As a child moves and does things, he stores countless bits of sensory information, just as a world explorer maps the land they discover. The more variations of movement this child performs, the more accurate his body "maps" will be. The brain can refer to its body precept to plan movements, in much the same way as we use maps to navigate a journey. The more accurate the "maps" the more able one is to "navigate" unfamiliar body movements."** [6]

The proprioceptive system is situated in the **muscles, tendons, ligaments and joint receptors**. It tells us where our body is in **relation to objects** in our environment and in relation to ourselves. It provides information about **the amount of force** we use when we pick up, hold, squeeze and throw objects.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Appears clumsy/trips over others/drops things; presses down too hard when writing and slouches/slumps in chair

- To reduce **trip hazards**, ensure there is sufficient **space** between tables in the classrooms.
- Ensure pupils' **book bags/coats** or small mats/rugs in the classroom are not in the way where they walk.
- Consider difficulty with the proprioceptive/motor system, such as challenges with feeling where you are in space, muscle endurance and control, judging and grading of force during **PE lessons**, as it might impact a pupil's confidence to participate in activities where there are a lot of people moving around and objects to navigate.
- Teach pupils about **boundaries** – people, objects and spaces all have boundaries and help them think about this in order to plan their movements cognitively.
- Professional advice can be sought if a pupil struggles with **handwriting** as there are many reasons why a pupil might be pressing down hard when writing.
- Trial the use of a **writing slope**.
- Different **pencil grips** can be trialled especially if the pupil holds the pencil with an awkward grasp.
- Trial a **Movin-Sit cushion** if a pupil slouches/slumps in their chair.
- Check that the table and chair **height** is suitable to the pupil's height.

Proprioceptive system

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Sensitive (Fright)	Tires easily, lacks endurance and holds pencil too tight/ too loose
• Be aware that this will impact **concentration and participation** in lessons. • Allow the use of **sensory fidget tools** to help the pupil feel more alert and to be able to concentrate. • Be aware that the pupil might struggle with activities that require **endurance** during PE, as well as endurance to sit at their table and to engage in activities requiring focus, such as writing. • Teach pupils about **rest and time management** in order to help them to monitor their physical exertion. • The opinion of a professional should be sought if a pupil's tightness when **holding a pencil** varies or is too loose or too tight and it impacts their writing.	
Seeking (Fight)	Likes chewing on objects and hugs people with more force than needed
• Allow older pupils to **chew gum** in class, if they are able to do so in a subtle manner. • Allow chewing on **chewable pencil toppers**, designed for this purpose. • Teach pupils to **ask before hugging** another person, to hug using only a small amount of force and to ask the person that they are hugging whether it is too tight.	
Avoiding (Flight)	Reluctant to or avoids to participate in team sports
• Try to **identify** why this is difficult for them. For example, is it too noisy or visually too busy, are they worried about letting their team down or being bullied or made fun off, do their struggle with motor planning, etc. • Be **encouraging** during PE lessons without drawing too much attention to the pupil. • If the pupil refuses to engage **ask them to help with setting up**, or organising the teams and the games, or helping to keep score, etc.	

Things to Remember:

A pupil with difficulties with form and space perception can see but they are unable to obtain "proper information" from what they see. For example, the pupil might see a chair but "bumps into it anyway".[5]

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Proprioceptive Processing

- **Furniture and equipment** in classrooms should be organised in a manner that allows sufficient space for pupils to get to their seats.
- Ensure **small mats/rugs** in reading corners are flat on the floor and do not scrunch up, move or have corners that fold over, as this can be a tripping hazard.
- Consideration to be given to **classroom seating plans** depending on the pupils' sensory processing preferences.
- If there are areas/routes that a pupil find particularly difficult to navigate then **alternative routes** should be considered, if possible. For example, if a pupil struggles to reach their coat peg when everyone else is trying to move to theirs, then allocate a peg to them that is at the side of this area and or let them access their coat peg before the rest of the class.
- Allow a pupil who struggles to **enter and leave school** at the same time as the rest of the school to **arrive and leave** a few minutes earlier or later, and if needed by a different, less busy route/entrance.
- Pupils that find it difficult, due to **proprioceptive difficulties to transition** with the rest of the school, should be allowed to **transition a few minutes earlier or later** if this would be beneficial.
- Difficulties with proprioception should be considered in relation to **safety** in lessons where equipment such as scissors is used as the pupil might struggle to judge where their hands and fingers are in relation to the equipment, as well as during playtime when pupils access climbing equipment.
- Proprioceptive difficulties will impact **participation in PE** and certain games during **play times**, as the pupil might throw or hit a ball too hard or too soft but will struggle to adjust to what is required by the activity.

Taste & smell systems

"The mouth contains many sensory receptors that help us to identify the texture, shape, temperature and taste of food and guide the process of eating, chewing and swallowing." [6]

The **taste system** provides information about **flavours, textures and temperature**. It also **discriminated** between sweet, salty, bitter and sour.

"Smell is unique in that it is processed directly through the limbic system without having to travel through the typical brain stem channels. Because of this, it is possible that smell may activate emotions directly and will influence how much we like or don't like what we encounter just by the way it smells." [6]

The **smell system** provides information about the **odours** around us. It is strongly linked to **emotions and memory** which means it can **trigger unexpected trauma reactions**.

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input	
Registration (Freeze)	Prefers to eat the same foods
• It is more important that a pupil **eats something to sustain them** through the school day, instead of becoming worried about them only eating the same foods. It is still helpful to see what the younger pupils are eating and to encourage them to try everything in their lunch box/school dinner. • If the school is providing food, such as fruit for morning snack, the pupil should still be able to **choose** whether they want to eat something or rather not. If a pupil does not want to eat what the school offers the parents can send in a morning snack. • Consider **talking more about food** and where it comes from in order to help pupils build their curiosity and repertoire of food choices.	
Sensitive (Fright)	Bothered by certain food textures and/or smells
• Be aware that this might impact a pupil's ability to **concentrate and participate**. • Be aware of the **impact of odours** in areas such as toilets, the dining hall, during lessons such as art, and the smell of cleaning products used around the school. • Pupils should be allowed to **leave the area** if an odour is too overwhelming for them. • **Alternative arrangements** should be made for pupils who cannot access the toilets due to smell sensitivity. • Some pupils might struggle to eat in the dining hall due to finding it difficult to tolerate seeing the textures of other pupils' foods and smelling other pupils' food. An **alternative space should** be provided where these pupils can enjoy their lunch.	

Taste & smell systems

Strategies to help Pupils in the Classroom with Sensory Input

Seeking (Fight)	Chews inedible objects

- If a pupil places an **inedible object** in their mouth, a member of staff should offer a more suitable object for them to chew on instead, such as a chewy.
- Allow pupils to use **chewable pencil toppers**, designed for this purpose.
- Allow **chewing gum** for older pupils if it helps them to be organised, calm and improve concentration. A teacher can determine whether this is a helpful strategy depending on whether the pupil uses it responsibly and it aids regulation.

Avoiding (Flight)	Avoids certain food textures and/or smells

- Be aware that this might impact a pupil's **ability to participate** in activities involving food, activities such as art, etc. and/or the areas in the school the pupil feels they are able to access.
- This might **impact** what food and the amount of food a pupil eats, depending on what is available if they have school lunches.

Consider Environmental Adaptations to improve Taste and Smell Processing

- Staff should be aware that pupils with **smell sensitivity** can find difficult to be in or near certain areas such as the dining hall or the toilets; and that the sensory stimuli they are exposed to can contribute to them becoming dysregulated or presenting with avoidance behaviour, as they might not want to attend certain activities or be near that area.
- Be aware of how **smell** can influence attention and help pupils who need time out from smells, for example when using paints or glue.
- Ensure there is sufficient **ventilation** in classrooms, corridors and toilets.
- Be aware that **cleaning products** used to clean the school equipment, floors, toilets, etc. can smell quite strongly to pupils who are sensitive to odours and can impact their concentration.

Poor registration

"Bystanders are very easy-going about their daily life routines. They will have a basic plan for meeting their life-management responsibilities, but will be loosely organised." [3]

When a pupil presents with poor registration it means that they **miss sensory input**, for example they might miss instructions on how to complete a task in class. This might happen because they take longer to process information, they are distracted by other incoming sensory stimuli such as a noise outside, the sound of an air humidifier in class, etc. or they need more intense input of the sensory information before they register the sensory stimuli and are able to respond. This might make them seem as if they are ignoring the teacher, **daydreaming or 'freezing'**.

Building understanding of how to help people who 'freeze' to improve their ability to learn and adapt in everyday life	
Auditory Misses verbal instructions and seems unaware when being spoken to	**Help them by creating:** • Clear boundaries, e.g. showing the beginning, middle and end of a task and/or being clear on timelines of projects. • Flexible parameters of how the work can be completed. • Visual schedules. • Visual reminders. • Time management plans for older pupils, e.g. setting alarms. • Repetition of instructions in different ways. For example explain the instruction using different words, presenting the instructions step-by-step in writing, or provide an example/ demonstration, etc. • Time to understand what they are learning. • A friendly environment by adjusting the tone, intonation and speed at which instructions are given. • Strategies for helping them become more organised.
Visual Misses visual instructions/ demonstrations and struggles to organise materials and equipment	
Tactile Unaware of pain or temperature and does not notice when hands/face are dirty	
Movement Poor balance and requests help during balancing activities	

Poor registration

Building understanding of how to help people who 'freeze' to improve their ability to learn and adapt in everyday life

Proprioception Appears clumsy/trips over others/drops things; presses down too hard when writing and slouches/slumps in chair	**Teach them to:** • Make a plan when they don't know what to do. • Work with time using a clock, watch or a timer. • Discriminate between similarities and differences to help them sort and organise things in the classroom. • Manage their time, once they understand time, and help them to see when they were successful so that they can implement it again. • Work in pairs. • Make plans that will help them to maintain their focus, e.g. use a step-by-step tick sheet to tick or cross off their work as they complete it. • Plan to work for set periods and to then take a break and/or shift their attention in order to stay productive. • Use a mirror to check that their face is clean and that they look tidy.
Taste/Smell Prefers to eat the same foods	

These pupils provide a calming influence on others.

Sensory sensitive

"Sensors are very picky, because their sensory needs are so precise. Even the best planned life management rituals will get changed or interrupted so Sensors can often become upset." [3]

When a pupil is sensitive to sensory information they **notice sensory input** much quicker than others, they can notice sensory input that others don't notice and they become overwhelmed very easily from too much sensory input. Due to the higher levels of anxiety and sensitivity to incoming sensory stimuli the pupil can easily have a 'fright' as they respond quicker and with a greater intensity to sensory input. However they can also present with the '**fright**' response if they interpret a particular sensory stimulus as a threat and as a result react automatically in a manner to **protect themselves**.

Building understanding of how to help people who are easily frightened/ anxious, to improve their ability to learn and adapt in everyday life	
Auditory Distracted by sounds in the environment and startles easily at unexpected/loud noises	**Help them by creating:** • A calm, structured, quiet setting to bring out optimal performance from the pupils. • An environment with minimal distractions as they are easily overwhelmed. • Clear spaces for specific tasks as this will help them to think faster and deeper. • Detailed and precise instructions. • A system where they are allowed to keep their own schedules or check materials or other details.
Visual Bothered by bright lights/lights in the classroom and bothered/ distracted by movement in classroom	
Tactile Bothered by certain textures of clothing/ materials/ temperatures and dislikes getting hands dirty/messy play	
Movement Afraid to go on climbing equipment	

Sensory sensitive

Building understanding of how to help people who are easily frightened/ anxious, to improve their ability to learn and adapt in everyday life	
Proprioception Tires easily, lacks endurance and holds pencil too tight/ too loose feel physically tired	**Teach them to:** • Find safe spaces in the classroom and/or school environment where they can have time-out and space to regulate. • Think about how they can create their own spaces that will help them to complete tasks. • Ask for help. • Use their own materials and supplies so that they can work at their own pace and can look after the materials. • Accept imperfections, that it is part of the creative process. • Accept changes and to be open to more options. • Understand and identify sensory aspects in their environment that bothers them and that they can make plans to cope with this. • Teach them to listen to their bodies' messages that help them to stop and slow down/pace themselves. • "Let go" – that every task does not have to be done with the same precision and focus.
Taste/Smell Bothered by certain food textures and/or smells	**These pupils are good at editing and/or finding mistakes.**

Sensory seeker

> **"Seekers want more sensory input and so their daily routines will be packed with sensation. They will find ways to make even repetitive activities different from day to day or weekly because the changes introduce new sensory experiences."** [3]

When a pupil takes longer to register sensory information and **misses information** it often impacts their behaviour in that they actively seek more input themselves. The pupil might look like they are distracted, fidgety and seeking more sensory input such as movement, touch, noise, etc. For example, a pupil will **keep disturbing another pupil** in order to try and determine what information they have missed during a task.

A pupil's sensation seeking behaviour is active behaviour in their attempt to '**fight**' in order to gain more sensory information. Unfortunately this behaviour can negatively impact the pupil and those around them, as it distracts the pupils around them and get themselves in trouble.

Building understanding of how to help people who tend to 'fight' when they are unsure to know how to learn and adapt in everyday life

Auditory Makes own noise, i.e. hums, sings and talks self through tasks	**Help them by creating:** • A creative space with a lot of potential to expand. • A safe environment for the expression of a lot of intonation and gestures. • Assignments with multiple steps at once. • Opportunities to generate new ideas and develop and implement the ideas. • Opportunities where they are involved with new development. **Teach them to:** • Sort things, as this helps them to understand similarities and differences, laying a foundation for organising. • Organise their space, e.g. with a colour coded system or another easy to use system. • De-clutter and/or tidy up their environment regularly, to avoid the build-up of chaos. • Respect the work schedule and to not disrupt it unnecessarily. • Plan their own routine or work schedule.
Visual Watches people as they move around the classroom	
Tactile Touches people/ objects/ textures more than peers and fidgets with objects	
Movement Struggles to keep still/ moves/ rocks body	
Proprioception Likes chewing on objects and hugs people with more force than needed	
Taste/Smell Chews inedible objects	**These pupils are spontaneous, creative, changeable and enjoy trouble shooting.**

Sensory avoiding

"Avoiders are very steadfast about their life-management strategies. They find strategies that minimise sensory input and use them in the exact same way every single day because to deviate is to introduce unknown sensory input." [3]

When a pupil is sensitive to sensory input one of the strategies they use to manage it is to **actively avoid** the activity/situation/environment that contributes to them experiencing the sensory input they are sensitive to. This can be problematic in a classroom situation as they are expected to attend and participate in all lessons in various different environments.

The pupil will present with the '**flight**' response as they are trying to avoid or get away from the situation/environment that is contributing to them becoming dysregulated and anxious. For example, a pupil will '**shut down**' **and stop listening** if a teacher's voice bothers them too much.

Building understanding of how to help people who tend to avoid or flee situations to learn and adapt in everyday life	
Auditory Bothered by the noise level in lunch hall, assemblies, playground and covers ears to certain sounds	**Help them by creating:** • Clear routines to help them know where they are in the process. • Clear schedules and plans of when work is due and how much time is available to complete tasks, for older pupils. • Short and clear instructions. • Alternative ways to communicating if they find face-to-face communication with staff and with other people too difficult, e.g. write, draw, gesture, sitting next to a member of staff facing the same way whilst talking or engaging in an activity/games. • Transparency by often doing things in the same way and order. • Responsibilities where there is order and routine; e.g. help set up the classroom for certain activities, or tidy up after certain activities.
Visual Close eyes/blink/ place hands over eyes to block out light and/or visual busyness	
Tactile Dislikes and/or reacts emotionally or aggressively to unexpected touch and avoids/resists certain textures, materials, etc.	

Sensory avoiding

Building understanding of how to help people who tend to avoid or flee situations to learn and adapt in everyday life

Movement Dislikes physical activities	**Teach them to:** • Work in pairs and teams as they want to work in isolation. • Communicate in different ways as this is very difficult for them. • Be spontaneous and impulsive at times, changing something that will not cause too much upset. • Intentionally plan time to connect with people, even if it is one person at a time. • Plan and use their time in a balanced manner and not focused on one thing all the time. • Practice to change their perspective by thinking what another person may be seeing or thinking, from that person's point of view.
Proprioception Reluctant to or avoids to participate in team sports	
Taste/Smell Avoids certain food textures and/or smells	**These pupils are good at following procedures and prefer structured tasks.**

Thinking skills

"Our perception of what is going on around us influences our thinking skills. When we think about perception we have to examine the gap between "what is" and what we know. Certain animals for example hear sounds and smell odours that are not apparent to humans.

There is much more going on in the world around us that we are able to experience with our limited senses and our idea of reality is in fact only a partial one. We attach meaning to our experiences by a process of selection, organisation and interpretation." [9]

There are differences in **how and what people perceive** and for pupils who experience difficulties with sensory processing these differences are more pronounced and occur more often.

Strategies to help pupils to develop THINKING skills

Prefers to do things in the same way

- **Build a story** in the classroom where every pupil has to add a line to the plot, even if the story does not make complete sense, to stimulate listening and thinking skills. This can be in writing or verbally for older pupils. Younger pupils will benefit from playing the "what happens next..." game when looking at a picture and trying to understand what is going on in the picture.
- Challenge the pupil to think of **different ways to do things**, i.e. a project, a different angle to solving a problem, etc.
- Provide **different options** to choose from when completing a project, allowing space for choice.

Finds it difficult to manage unexpected change/resists change to routine

- Practice **role play** situations for managing change.
- Create **subtle opportunities** throughout the week for the pupil to practice managing change in situations that will not cause distress.
- Use the **visual schedule and/or calendar** to prepare pupils for the program of the week and/or changes in the schedule. This will help them to clarify between expected and unexpected change, which provides opportunities to problem solve what to do when there are unexpected changes.

Thinking skills

Strategies to help pupils to develop THINKING skills

Prefers to be in control and know what to expect

- Practice in **pairs or small groups** to let other pupils be in control of a game/activity.
- Practice in **role play** how to manage when the pupil cannot be in control.
- Teach **calming strategies** the pupil can use when feeling out of control, such as breathing exercises, talking to an adult, etc.
- Use a **visual schedule** to help the pupil know what is happening throughout the day.
- Ensure classwork and homework have **clear steps** and instructions for the pupil to know what is expected from the work.

Finds it difficult to problem solve

- Teach the pupil that everything has three parts, **a before, a during and an after**. This will help them to start structuring their thoughts in order to start problem solving.
- Engage the pupil in **games and activities** that require problem solving.
- Use **role play scenarios or short stories** to help the pupil develop problem solving skills, particularly with regards to social situations.
- Help the pupil **identify strategies** they can use to help them problem solve.

Seems to have low self-esteem/lacks confidence

- Teach the pupil that **they are not alone**, or not the only one going through the situation, but that everybody goes through the same thing at some point in time. This helps the pupil to not feel isolated and continue to focus on themselves and their imperfections.
- Provide **encouragement and positive feedback**.
- Create a **safe environment** and opportunities for the pupil to participate in activities and/or be part of situations where they lack confidence, whilst setting it up to ensure success.

Appears nervous

- Teach the pupil that in the classroom they are accepted for **who they are**, not for what they do.
- Teach the pupil that they are **allowed to make mistakes** in the classroom as this helps them to learn.
- Try to **identify** the reasons that are causing the pupil to feel nervous.
- Teach the pupil **calming strategies** that they can use during times and situations where they feel nervous; as well as strategies they can use regularly throughout the day if they feel nervous in general.
- Ensure the pupil has **access** to calming sensory activities/tools, such as sensory fidget tools, the opportunity to leave the classroom if needed, etc.

Connecting skills

> **"For a relationship to exist, people must be aware of each other and take each other into account. At least one person must affect the other in some way and there are usually shared relational definitions built on the social form and expectations around the people. Relationships are a process that changes over time."** [9]

Many pupils with sensory processing difficulties will **struggle with connection to other people** as they find it difficult to connect with and know themselves.

Strategies to help pupils to develop CONNECTION skills

Finds it difficult to pay attention and to concentrate in class

- Use a **visual timetable** that is clearly visible and referred to throughout the day to create **consistency and predictability** within the daily routine.
- Help a pupil to concentrate by **limiting distractions and creating a safe space** for learning.
- Identify whether there are any **sensory distractions** in the classroom, such as too many visual displays, a particularly bothersome noise, a pupil that distracts them, the lighting in the classroom, etc.
- If any sensory distractions cannot be eliminated, try to adapt or look at the **seating arrangements** for the pupil in relation to the distracting sensory stimuli.
- Consider the **amount of information and clarity** of the information when delivered to the pupils. Is the pupil provided with a reasonable amount of instructions and information at any one time and is it delivered to them in a manner for them to be able to process it?

Finds it difficult to make eye contact and appears confused

- If pupils feel it will help them during social situations, they can practice **looking** above a person's head for it to appear like they are making eye contact and/or to practice to make sporadic eye contact and then look away and back again.
- Increase **knowledge** amongst teachers that many pupils concentrate and listen better when they are not making eye contact and that eye contact often increases anxiety.
- Try to identify what about the work or which part of a task is **confusing** for the pupil.
- Use **different ways and strategies**, e.g. visual pictures, to explain work/instructions to the pupil.

Connecting skills

Strategies to help pupils to develop CONNECTION skills

Gets frustrated easily and appears restless, asks to go to the toilet/to have a drink

- Try to **identify** why a pupil becomes frustrated in a certain situation or with a certain task. Help the pupil to make a plan when they become frustrated.
- Some pupils might benefit from **time away** from the classroom or task if they become frustrated in order to regulate.
- When a pupil often requests the toilet or a drink, try to identify whether it is an **emotional problem**, e.g. a pupil is anxious and therefore needs the toilet, a **physical problem**, e.g. whether they struggle to register when their bladder is empty and does not manage to empty it and therefore needs to go again, or a **concentration/ avoidance problem**, e.g. whether the pupil is trying to avoid specific tasks/activities in the classroom.

Feels anxious in new situations and easily overwhelmed

- Teach **deep breathing and relaxation** exercises.
- **Role-play** possible scenarios or new situations that make the pupil anxious and practice practical application and escape plans when confronted with these situations. Allow the pupil to observe rather than having to participate as it might make them more anxious.
- Develop **plans for interactions** between pupils and staff, especially when there are high anxiety levels present. For example, "When this happens..... then I can do this.....". Teach pupils to celebrate the uniqueness of other people instead of teasing and/or humiliating other people.

Misunderstands what people say and struggles to regulate emotions

- Provide **fun competitions or activities** to use and play with different words and look up the meaning of words in dictionaries and thesauruses to enhance the pupils' vocabulary in order to help them understand the meanings of words.
- Use approaches such as The **Zones of Regulation**[10] to help pupils identify and develop strategies to regulate their emotions.

Strategies to help pupils to develop CONNECTION skills

Dislikes social situations or gatherings

- Teach pupils **strategies** to use before, during and after engaging in social situations. For example, acknowledging that the situation might be difficult for them but knowing that they only have to tolerate it for a certain amount of time.
- Be aware that some pupils might need some time alone to recuperate from social gatherings. For example, **attending an assembly** can be so overwhelming that it can impact the pupil's ability to engage in the next few lessons after the assembly. Some pupils may be unable to attend large gatherings such as assemblies.
- Allow the pupil to **leave the situation** for a break or to arrange for them to only attend it for a set (and brief) period of time.
- Use **deep breathing and other relaxation techniques** throughout their engagement in the social situation.
- Allow them to use a **timer** in order for them to know they only need to tolerate the situation for a certain period of time. However be aware that even if the pupil manages to remain in the situation, it might still increase their levels of arousal and impact them after the event.

Communicating skills

"For the part of the brain that handles language and speech to function well, it is particularly important that it have good connections with the rest of an efficiently functioning brain, especially the sensory and motor sections. Good whole-brain processes enable the child to motor plan easily and efficiently.

Talking and in particular learning to talk, requires very complex motor planning. It requires the ability to initiate a motor act on one's own inner command. Then one must arrange the sequence of movements to make the sounds form a word. In one's brain one must decide which word follows which. Specific movements of the mouth tongue and lips are needed for good articulation." [6]

A pupil's ability to communicate is impacted by their **regulation**. For example, a pupil might have good communication skills but when their sensory systems feel overwhelmed, or they feel anxious due to any other reason, they will begin to feel dysregulated and their ability to communicate efficiently becomes compromised.

Strategies to help pupils develop COMMUNICATION skills

Struggles to start and maintain a conversation

- Practice **writing dialogues** and/or help pupils to read scripts with dialogues, for older pupils.
- Help pupils to think about the **five questions**: who?, what?, where?, when?, why? and how?; and to ask these questions to begin a conversation.
- Help pupils to try and find **one word** that they can ask about again if someone speaks.
- Use **role play** and/or playing with dolls/toys to practice starting and maintaining conversations.
- Talking about **stories** and what happened in the story helps pupils to **verbalise** something that they just heard and therefore not necessarily personal information.

Struggles to understand facial expressions and body language

- Teach pupils how to **identify emotions** and how to respond to the emotions in the classroom.
- Teach pupils to **ask questions**, e.g. "Am I understanding you correctly, is this what you mean?"
- Use a **variety of activities, games, pictures, role play**, etc. to help pupils learn to identify different facial expressions and body language.

Communicating skills

Strategies to help pupils develop COMMUNICATION skills

Prefers to play alone and struggles to follow a conversation

- Teach pupils that it is ok to want to spend time by themselves, but also highlight the importance of **social interaction** and help them identify and practice strategies to enable them to find it easier to engage in social situations. This should be done on a case-by-case basis as some pupils might find this too stressful increasing their anxiety.
- Try to **identify** why a pupil struggles to follow a conversation; for example is it due to slow processing, being distracted by sensory stimuli in the environment, etc.
- Once the reasons for finding it difficult to follow a conversation have been identified, think of **specific strategies** with the pupil that might help them.

Struggles to make and maintain friendships

- Use **books and stories** to teach children how to be a good friend to others. Then help them to practice learning these skills and encourage them when they managed to be a kind friend during playtime.
- There are many reasons why **making friends** can be hard. Try to **identify** whether this is due to a lack of confidence and/or low self-esteem. Does the pupil know how to interact socially and know what is expected; does the pupil struggle with communication; has the pupil had a previous negative experience; etc.
- **Problem solve situations and role play different scenarios** to help pupils practice to have meaningful relationships with their friends.

Avoids/resists handwriting tasks

- To start with consider using **different sensory textures** to practice writing in first, e.g. draw or write the numbers and/or letters in sand, flour, shaving cream and/or paint.
- Consider using **different sized crayons and pencils** and/or different pencil hardness, as these ranges from H to HB to B, and can make a difference in gliding across the paper.
- Consider using **writing slopes** and/or practice writing against the wall or on the whiteboard.
- Consider using **pencil grips** to stabilise the fingers and/or to help the fingers to plan where to hold the pencil when manipulating it.
- **Identify the reason** for the avoidance, e.g. is it due to **postural challenges**, e.g., low muscle tone, poor postural control and/or coordination challenges influencing stability and endurance. Or are there **perceptual challenges**, e.g. poor eye control and/or visual perceptual difficulties.
- Consider consulting a **professional** to identify the possible underlying reasons and to provide specific advice.

Strategies to help pupils develop COMMUNICATION skills

Interrupts and talks out of turn

- Teach pupils to **listen well**. For example take turns to listen and use strategies and games to practice this.
- Help pupils who struggle with **impulse control** in terms of wanting to shout out answers when they are not asked, to develop a strategy for them to be able to wait a while and not answer immediately, or other strategies such as writing down the answer in case they feel worried that they will forget it.

Interoception

The interoceptive system relates to **our ability to feel what is happening inside our body**. The receptors for this system are located in the organs, muscles and skin. It provides information about **internal regulation**, for example when we feel thirsty, hungry and full, regulating body temperature, heart and breathing rates, social touch, muscle tension, itchy, feeling nauseas and regulating sleep[11].

The body is programmed to remain in an optimal internal balanced position and this explains why the brain monitors the incoming interoceptive signals in order to adapt unconsciously and automatically to prepare the body for a fright, flight, freeze or fight response.

An example of this is the **urge to act in anticipation of nervousness**[12]. A person will **feel a sensation** of shaky muscles, a faster beating heart, upset stomach and a tight chest. The body will **understand this sensation** and interpret it as feeling nervous, even though the mind may or may not completely comprehend this. This will result in an **urge to act**.

This is where a person may be able to **think about their choice of words or actions** if there is enough time and/or if they had an opportunity to go through a similar experience and they were able to respond and learn from the event. Then an **action** will follow, either automatically where the body stretches and breathes deeper and/or thinking about how to make plans before acting.

The **outcome** will then be a change in a person's body, emotions, thoughts, actions and/or words as the brain learns from this experience. A person's ability to **evaluate and adapt and learn** from this experience will depend on their availability to think through what happened by themselves and/or with help from those around them.

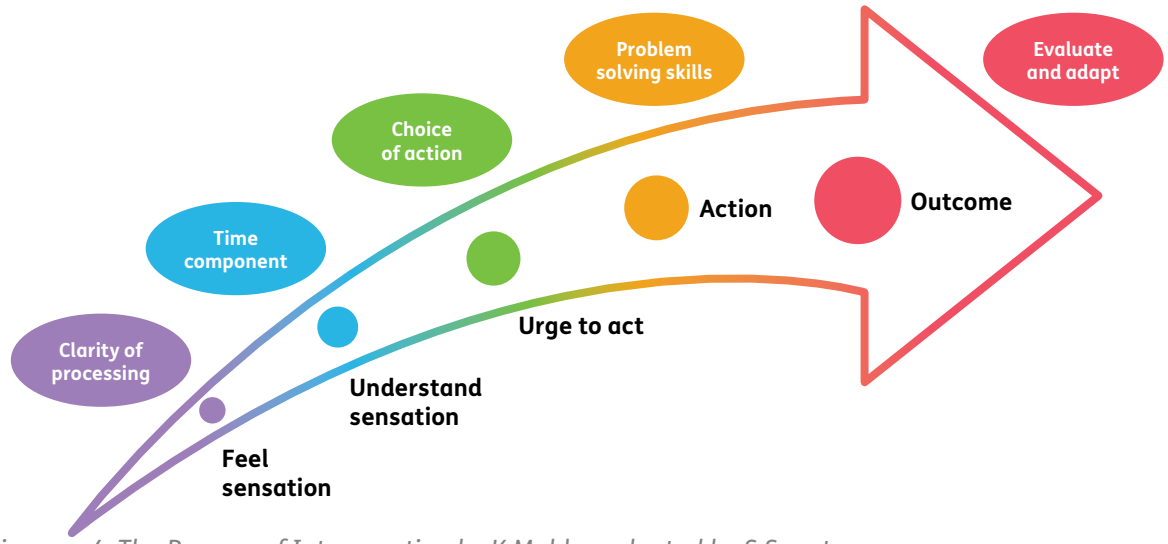

Diagram 4: The Process of Interoception by K Mahler, adapted by S Swart

Interoception

Interoception helps us to **learn about our emotions** through the physical sensations in our bodies. For example, feeling 'butterflies' in our tummy when we are nervous. This occurs due to the body noticing internals signals/sensations and connecting these sensations to emotions[11]. Interoception impacts our ability to **self-regulate**, which is our "...ability to identify and manage..." how we feel[11].

Sometimes the signals/sensations are too strong or there are too many, other times they are too weak or they are unclear regarding the origin or type of sensation. This can impact a pupil's ability to experience and express emotions and their ability to self-regulate, as they might not be receiving sufficient information or the correct information internally to help them identify their emotions. This then results in them being unable to manage and regulate their emotions. Inability to regulate or dysregulation is most often seen in the pupil's **behaviour**.

Appears confused:

Confusion is an inability to think or act clearly and with understanding. It may lead to a feeling of **disorientation, breathing** may be shortened and **heart rate** too fast/too slow, **muscles** may feel wiggly resulting in fidgeting of the **hands, fingers and feet**.

Strategies:

- Provide pupils with **subtle opportunities** to indicate if they do not understand concepts being explained in class or follow-up after lessons with pupils known to struggle, as many pupils do not feel able to ask for help in front of others.
- Try to get the pupil to **identify** what they feel they don't understand.
- Use **different perspectives** and strategies to explain concepts.
- Encourage the pupil to use **sensory strategies** to feel calmer and increase focus.

Interoception

Appears frustrated:

Feeling frustrated means that a pupil is **annoyed or less confident** in themselves or their abilities, because they were unable or unsuccessful at completing a task in the manner that they wanted to complete it. This may lead to a general feeling of **irritability or distraction**. The body may become **restless and start moving**, as the pupil does not know how to solve the problem and/or what to do next. This may lead to a withdrawal or a dysregulated **behavioural response**, depending on the nature of the pupil.

Strategies:

- Ensure the **expectations** of tasks are presented clearly.
- Ensure that the pupil understand they are **accepted**, whether they are successful at completing the task or not.
- Teach the pupil to **evaluate the completion of the task** objectively in order to learn from their mistakes and not to reduce their self-confidence.
- Help the pupil to **celebrate their successes** in such a way that they build self-confidence, but not become prideful.
- Teach pupils about **uniqueness**, that it is a gift.

Appears nervous:

Feeling nervous means that a pupil is anxious, worried or slightly frightened about something that they are going to do or experience. This may lead to a feeling of **distraction and tenseness**. The **ears** may be more sensitive, the **skin** may be clammy, **breathing** may be tight and the **heart rate** fast. The **stomach** may feel nauseous and the **muscles** tense and sore, resulting in clenched and fidgety **hands, fingers, feet and toes**.

Feeling stressed is when a pupil perceives that the demands of the task or situation exceed the personal and social resources the pupil is able to access. This may lead to a feeling of being **stuck**. The **ears** may appear 'shut-off'/not listening. The mouth may be dry, the **skin** dry/sweaty and the **breathing** short. The **heart** may be pounding and the **stomach** tight. The **muscles** may appear tight and tense, the **hands and fingers** fidgety; and the **feet and toes** tapping.

Strategies:

- Consider the **demands and expectations of tasks** and how this will impact the pupil's levels of anxiety.
- Consider allowing the pupil to sometimes **leave the classroom** to regulate their anxiety before trying to return to complete their work.
- **Sensory strategies** such as using sensory fidget tools in class and teaching the pupil breathing techniques could help them regulate their anxiety levels in the classroom in order to help them focus on the lesson and remain in class for longer.
- Use frameworks such as the **Zones of Regulation**[10] to help pupils identify their triggers and strategies to help them.

Interoception

Appears angry:

Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure towards some real or supposed grievance. It may cause a feeling of **light-headedness** and or **headaches**, increased **breathing** and **heart rate**, clammy and or flushed **skin**, tightness in the **stomach** and tension in the **muscles**, resulting in clenched **hands and fingers** and a tight **jaw**.

Strategies:

- Consider defusing the situation with a **movement break**. It is unproductive to confront/challenge the pupil whilst they are angry as they are unable to think and respond logically and a confrontational approach might enflame the situation.
- Consider giving the pupil **time out** by **leaving the classroom/environment** and/or sit in the Reading corner in order to calm down in a safe and private space.
- Once the pupil is calm, have a **discussion** with them to identify what in the situation and/or environment they think contributed to them becoming angry.
- Try to **identify strategies** with the pupil that they might find helpful in future situations. For example, requesting to leave the environment if they start to become upset to avoid it escalating, using sensory strategies to feel calmer, telling the teacher or a teaching assistant, etc.
- Use frameworks such as the **Zones of Regulation**[10] to help pupils identify their triggers and strategies to help them feel calmer.

Appears tired:

Feeling tired means a person is drained of strength and energy and may experience fatigue often to the point of exhaustion. This may lead to a feeling of **blankness**, the **ears** may feel shut-off, **breathing** may appear laboured, the **heart rate** fast and the **stomach** heavy or nauseous. The **muscles** may be sore, hot and burning and the **hands, fingers, feet and toes** sweating.

Strategies:

- The pupil might **need more breaks** compared to other pupils as their level of endurance is impacted by feelings of tiredness. This will impact their ability to concentrate in academic lessons and their level of endurance during lessons such as PE.
- The pupil might appear **fidgety** in their attempt to keep their mind focused and awake. They should therefore be allowed to use sensory fidget tools in the classroom to help them remain awake and focused.
- If a pupil appears tired frequently the teacher should check with the parents whether the pupil's **sleep is disrupted** or whether a co-occurring condition might be contributing to the tiredness.

Transitions

Moving from Primary school to Secondary school:

Transitioning is a challenging aspect of life for all people. Everybody faces many different transitions throughout their life. Transitioning is a process and if we understand this process it is easier to help pupils transition from Primary school to Secondary school.

Transition is a psychological three phase process that a person goes through as they internalise and/or come to terms with the details of their situation.[13]

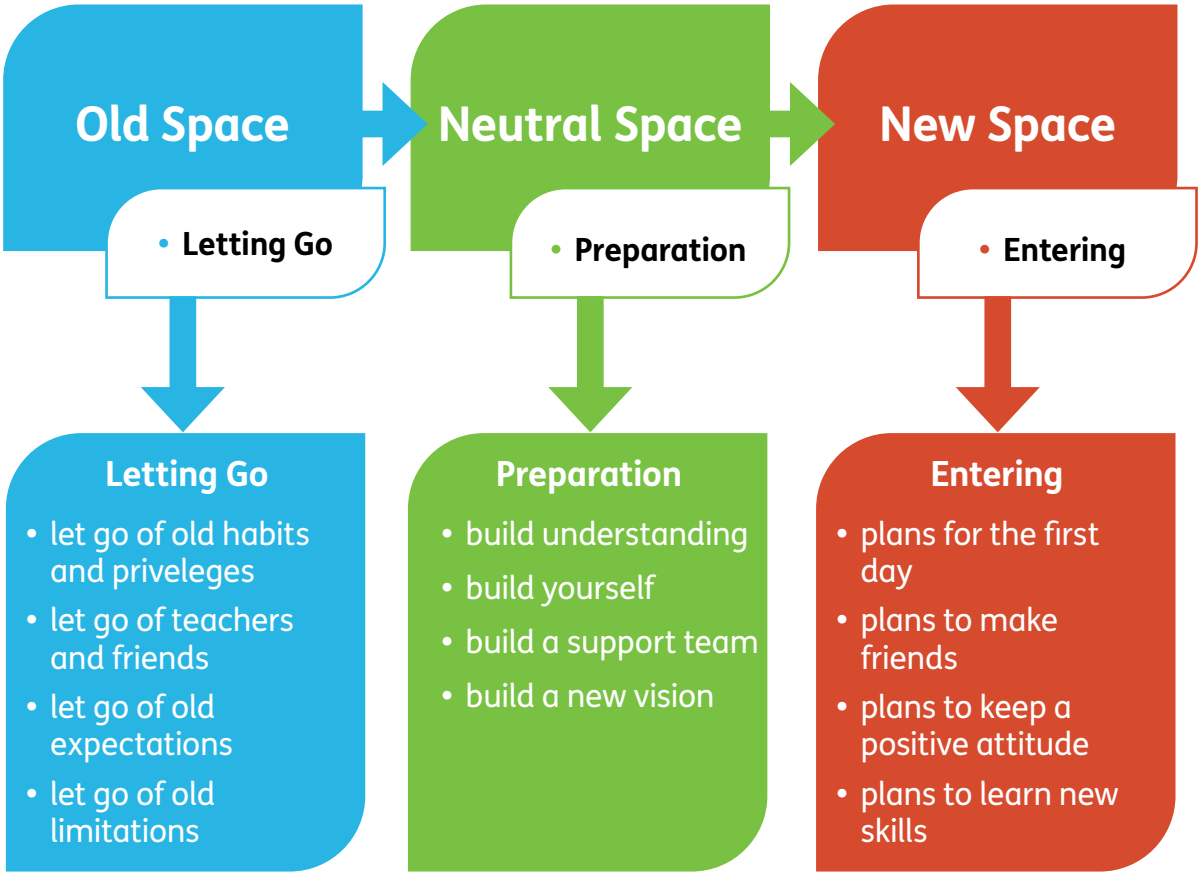

Diagram 5: Process of Transition, adapted by S Swart OT

Thinking about change and strategies to help a pupil through the process helps everyone to move forward.

Transitions

Pupils with and without sensory processing difficulties face **many challenges when transitioning** to the Secondary school environment. Some of these challenges are:

- Larger amount of pupils using the same spaces
- Larger school buildings and grounds
- More classrooms and teachers
- Getting lost when transitioning between classes
- Increased sensory stimuli, e.g. noises, sights, hustle and bustle of people and book bags, etc.
- Larger amount of work, in class and for homework, and expectations around this
- Learning to prioritise and plan assignments, homework and preparation for tests
- Socialising with pupils and learning the 'language' teenagers use

Pupils will usually attend a **transition day** where they spend the day at the Secondary school that they will be joining in Year 7. Many schools offer **extra transition times** for autistic pupils. The Primary schools prepare pupils for this transition; however the extent of the preparation might differ between schools. The next section provides a few **strategies** that Primary schools can use to help prepare all pupils but should be used to prepare pupils who struggle with sensory processing, anxiety, etc. with or without a diagnosis of autism, as some pupils might be undiagnosed or awaiting a diagnosis. There should be a balance between preparing pupils without increasing their anxiety. Some of the strategies will already be used by many schools but some might be a new idea that can be incorporated in existing strategies. School and parents should work together to provide consistent information and re-assurance. Many of the below recommendations can be compiled into a transition booklet that pupils complete over time and that can be shared with parents.

Transitioning Strategies: Letting Go

Letting go of old habits and privileges

- Help pupils to think about **current habits and privileges** that they will not have in Secondary school, in order for them to acknowledge that this will change.
- Help pupils to understand that there will be **changes** regarding timetables, subject choices and expectations.

Transitioning Strategies: Letting Go

Letting go of teachers and friends

- Help pupils to **say goodbye to teachers and friends** that are not moving to the same school. This can be done by writing cards and/or encouraging pupils to attend a celebration event.

Letting go of old expectations

- Help the pupils to think about what they have **expected** about Primary school and to evaluate whether their expectations were met or exceeded, and/or what they would have wanted to change if they could. Help them to think about what they are expecting of Secondary school.

Letting go of old limitations

- Help pupils to think about letting go of any **wrong choices they feel they made in the past and/or perceptions** about themselves. To know that they have an opportunity to start again with a clean slate.
- Help pupils to make a **list of questions and concerns** that they have for Secondary school. A worksheet can be used that contains common questions and worries for pupils to indicate any that apply to them. This makes it easier than to identify questions from scratch. However they can also add their own questions.

Transitioning Strategies: Preparation

Build understanding of the new environment

- Encourage the pupils to **attend transition days** and for the Primary school to ask for extra transition days if this will be beneficial.
- Help the pupil to **study a map** of the school and to familiarise themselves with all the different areas, so that they won't get lost.
- Identify the **safe places** as soon as possible, e.g. the SEN department, Library, or other quiet safe spaces.
- Identify where the **pastoral team and/or Support Staffs'** offices are.

Build understanding of yourself in the new environment

- Help the pupil to 'see' themselves in the new environment by using **social stories** regarding transition and the new school. It can contain photos of the school, 'safe' spaces the pupil can access, photos and names of key workers/support staff and staff that they will often see, a map of the school, timetable of the day, how to buy food at the canteen, where you can eat it, where you can go during break and lunchtimes, what clubs are available, photos of the uniform and PE kit, a list and photos of stationary equipment they will need, how the lockers work, etc.
- Help the pupil to think about how they want to **manage lunch times**, i.e. do they want to buy food or bring a packed lunch, and where could they sit and eat.
- Help the pupil to think about a plan regarding the **equipment** they may need, e.g. stationary, uniform and PE kit.
- Help the pupil to understand **uniform requirements** of Secondary school and explain that the school might be stricter regarding this, for example most Secondary schools require pupils to wear their blazers and ties all the time. Help the pupils to **practice how to knot a tie**, as this can often be quite stressful for some pupils.
- Pupils can **wear their new uniform at home** to help them practice getting used to the new textures if this is something that will help them. The parents can be advised to **wash the uniform a few times** in order for the material not to feel stiff and new.
- If pupils have sensory processing difficulties relating to **textures** of school uniform material or certain parts of the school uniform, for example wearing a tie, then the Senco could liaise closely with the Secondary school and ensure agreements are in place for reasonable adjustments regarding the specific pupil's uniform. The pupil could then also be re-assured ahead of time by the current Senco and the Secondary school, that the adjustments have been agreed on.

Transitions

Transitioning Strategies: Preparation

Build a support team

- Try to identify if there is a **friend** or other pupils that are going to the same Secondary school.
- Help the pupil to think about which **clubs** are available and what they would like to attend in order to make new friends and build skills.
- **Prepare pupils** that if someone is being mean to them that they should not respond and interact but rather walk away if possible, and depending on the situation it might have to be reported to a member of staff.
- Discuss a variety of **scenarios** that might occur in class and/or with friendships and how these can be managed.
- Pupils can engage in discussions about what constitutes a **good friend** and a **healthy friendship**.
- Discuss different styles of **assertiveness** and how to manage certain situations that will require assertiveness.
- Prepare pupils for the safe use of **social media**.

Build a new vision

- Help the pupil to think about the advantages and adventures of Secondary school. For example, talk about the **variety of subjects** on offer, doing real science experiments, etc.
- Talk about the big **variety of Clubs** that pupils can participate in.

Transitioning Strategies: Entering

Plans for the first day

- Practice how to **plan a school day** from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night. Use a checklist for pupils to tick or cross off whether they included all the necessary activities into their schedule.
- Explain to the pupils what the **rules and expectations** are at Secondary school, and explain why the rules exist so that is makes sense for the pupils. Also explain that some pupils will break the rules, as many autistic pupils find it difficult when they see others breaking rules. Also explain that sometimes teachers don't see the whole picture when they look at a situation and they might tell an innocent pupil off because they thought they saw something, which might not have been exactly what happened.
- The **Senco** will likely already **inform the Secondary school Senco** if a pupil has specific arrangements or passes that should be continued with at Secondary school. For example, a lunch pass to skip the queue and/or collecting their lunch earlier if it is a school lunch, access to a quiet space to eat their lunch, being allowed to transition to lessons slightly before the other pupils, to use the toilet during lesson times, changing elsewhere for PE if the changing rooms is a difficult environment to be in and being able to leave the classroom when feeling overwhelmed/dysregulated with or without conversing with the class teacher.

Plans to make new friends

- Practice what would be good **conversation starters**.
- **Discuss concerns**, try to offer re-assurances, prepare pupils that it usually takes a while to sort out friendship groups in Secondary school and that this is not unusual.
- Prepare pupils for **hearing different words** that teenagers use that will have different meanings but that they will soon understand this. Also prepare them that they will be hearing a lot of swear words and that this will not necessarily be directed at them personally but that many teenagers use swear words as usual words in their vocabulary.

Plans to keep a positive attitude

- Help the pupils to think about the attitude they have every day. Depending on the pupil it might be helpful to explain how **detention** works and that sometimes a whole class might get a detention due to the behaviour of a few pupils in the class, in order for the pupil to know that getting a detention will not necessarily be their fault and that these things sometimes happens. This might help some pupils but for others it will increase their levels of anxiety. It will be beneficial if the Secondary school can agree beforehand that specific pupils would not have to sit a class detention in these cases, as this could result in the pupil being more anxious to attend school and start to refuse attending.
- Explain the **rewards and consequences systems** in Secondary schools.

Transitioning Strategies: Entering

Plans to learn new skills

- Show pupils a Secondary **school timetable** applicable to the school they are going to, and explain what all the letters, numbers and abbreviations on it means. Talk about and practise how to use and follow a **timetable**.
- **Engaging in a range of activities**, which can include role play, practise sessions, etc., to help pupils prepare for a new school environment. For example, looking at what the similarities and differences are between Primary and Secondary school; once provided with information about the new Secondary school pupils can do quizzes about the Secondary school they are going to; looking at a timetable and packing a book bag for a particular day/write down what should be packed; look at a map of the school and answer questions about the school, where different areas are and how to get from one lesson to another lesson.

Appendix A: Sensory Preferences Checklist and Interpretation Sheet

Enabling Environments

Sensory Preferences Checklist and Interpretation

Please complete the Checklist by **highlighting** the areas in the **corresponding colour** that is applicable for the pupil. If it is not applicable don't highlight this area. Your answers will provide a summary of the pupil's main sensory preferences.	**Sometimes**	**50% of the time**	**Name:**
	Often	**75% of the time**	
	Always	**100% of the time**	**Date:**

System	Registration/ Freeze	Sensitive/ Fright	Seeking/ Flight	Avoiding/ Fight
Auditory	• Misses verbal instructions • Seems to be unaware when spoken to	• Distracted by sounds in the environment • Startles easily at unexpected/loud noises	• Makes own noise, i.e. hums, sings • Talks self through tasks	• Bothered by the noise level in lunch hall, assemblies, playground • Covers ears to certain sounds
Visual	• Misses written instructions/ demonstrations • Struggles to organise materials and equipment	• Bothered by bright lights/lights in the classroom • Bothered/ distracted by movement in classroom	• Watches people as they move around the classroom	• Close eyes/blink/ place hands over eyes to block out light and/or visual busyness
Tactile	• Unaware of pain or temperature • Does not notice when hands/face are dirty	• Bothered by certain textures of clothing/ materials/ temperatures • Dislikes getting hands dirty/messy play	• Touches people/ objects/ textures more than peers • Fidgets with objects	• Dislikes and/or reacts emotionally or aggressively to unexpected touch • Avoids/resists certain textures, materials, etc.
Movement	• Poor balance • Requests help during balancing activities	• Afraid to go on climbing equipment	• Struggles to keep still/ moves/rocks body	• Dislikes physical activities
Proprio	• Appears clumsy/trips over others/drops things • Presses down too hard when writing • Slouches/slumps in chair	• Tires easily, lacks endurance • Holds pencil too tight/ too loose	• Likes chewing on objects • Hugs people with more force than needed	• Reluctant to or avoids to participate in team sports
Taste/Smell	• Prefers to eat the same foods	• Bothered by certain food textures and/ or smells	• Chews inedible objects	• Avoids certain food textures and/ or smells

Thinking skills	Connecting skills	Communicating
• Prefers to do things in the same way	• Finds it difficult to pay attention and concentrate in class	• Struggles to start and maintain a conversation
• Finds it difficult to manage unexpected change/resists change to routine	• Finds it difficult to make eye contact • Appears confused	• Struggles to understand facial expressions and body language
• Prefers to be in control and know what to expect	• Gets frustrated easily • Appears restless, asks to go to the toilet/to have a drink	• Prefers to play alone • Struggles to follow a conversation
• Finds it difficult to problem solve	• Feels anxious in new situations • Easily overwhelmed	• Struggles to make and maintain friendships
• Seems to have low self-esteem/lacks confidence	• Misunderstands what people say • Struggles to regulate emotions	• Avoids/resists handwriting tasks
• Appears nervous	• Dislikes social situations or gatherings	• Interrupts and talks out of turn

Appendix B: Sensory Fidget tool Ideas

- Stress balls
- A chain of paper clips
- Mini erasers
- Soft kneaded erasers
- Blu Tack
- Pencil grips
- Chewable pencil topper
- Stretchy toys
- Bendable toys
- Tangles – can be paperclip chains
- Fidget cubes
- Spinning rings
- A few small Lego blocks
- Rubber bands wrapped around a pencil
- Doodling whilst listening in class
- Smooth stones/pebbles/marbles to manipulate
- Snapping/fidgeting with a rubber band on their wrist
- Twisting or playing with own hair
- Fidgeting with a pen or jewellery
- Rub gently on skin/clothes

(14) (15) (16) (17) (18)

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Autism Education Trust
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk

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