

Sensory Skills

Our senses play an essential role in our education and the way in which we grow and interpret the world. It is our main means of exploration and the foundation to our understanding. Many pupils with PMLDs and complex needs have significant sensory impairments which may make this exploration, understanding and processing more difficult. It is therefore important for the curriculum to establish clear key achievement indicators so as to help pupils make progress with sensory processing needs. It is also beneficial for a range of complementary approaches to be accessed through therapies and the broader curriculum; so the pupil can experience a holistic approach to the development of their senses.

As with most, if not all, curricular areas a multidisciplinary approach to sensory skills is taken. The team around the child include: parents, teachers, special support assistants, trained intervenors, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. It is the role of occupational therapist to assess sensory processing needs and to develop practical strategies and activity programmes to help manage sensory processing needs which impact on function. Furthermore the role includes overseeing and advising the educational provision implemented with the individual child. It is the responsibility of the teachers to ensure time for sensory exploration and development are built into sessions and to follow OT programmes and advice. It is the role of the special support assistant to follow plans and facilitate sensory exploration in correspondence with the class teacher. There are trained individuals who are qualified to work with multisensory impaired pupils (intervenors and teacher working towards/with the MSI MQ) and they have a close bond with pupils to ensure that their routines, communication and sensory development is personalised and appropriate.

The key achievement indicators of the sensory curriculum encourage sensory responsivity. At the early stages this involves discriminating between sensory stimulants. This then progresses to allow pupils to develop an interest and sense of wonder when interacting with stimuli. As the stages of the curriculum advance, this interest is honed to encourage pupils to intentionally seek out sensory experiences and develop understanding

The following is some examples of how we address and develop sensory processing needs across disciplines.

- Following visual programmes
- Following sensory passport advice and OT activity programmes
- OT drop ins
- Use of specialist equipment e.g. weighted blankets/vests, fidget toys.
- Use of dark rooms, sensory rooms and soft play areas.
- Use of magic carpet and plasma screen to develop visual skills.
- Rebound and hydrotherapy
- Music therapy
- Cause and effect activities

- Massage
- Outdoor learning/walks in the grounds

More specifically, the following lists some examples of how school sessions address and develop sensory processing needs:

- Sensory exploration built into most sessions, particularly group sessions in the afternoon.
- Morning/afternoon routines include smells, songs and visual cues.
- The use of objects of reference
- Tasting food and drinks often included in sessions. Tastes given by speech staff to those who are gastro-fed.
- Music is an integral part of sessions, cueing in times in routines and developing auditory awareness.
- Sensory stories and tacpac
- Tactile exploration
- Time in the soft play area.

We evidence progress in several ways including the use of an iPad progress tracking app, lesson evaluations and staff reports.