

The Sensory Audit Checklist for Teachers

Creating neurodivergent-friendly learning environments

Your classroom is a sensory wonderland - full of lights, sounds, textures, and smells that you might not even notice anymore. But for neurodivergent pupils, some of these everyday sensory experiences can feel like trying to concentrate during a fireworks display. This friendly audit helps you see your classroom through their eyes and spot the sensory surprises that might be making learning harder than it needs to be.

Take a wander around your classroom with fresh eyes. Try to experience it as your pupils do - get down to their eye level, listen like they listen, notice what they notice. Do this twice if you can: once when it's calm and quiet, and once during the buzz of a busy lesson.

Supporting Notes

When to Use This Audit:

- Beginning of term to establish baseline sensory environment
- When you notice increased restlessness or distraction in pupils
- Before making any major classroom reorganisation
- When integrating a new pupil with identified sensory needs

What to Do With Your Findings:

Start with the easiest changes first - often lighting and sound adjustments make the biggest difference. Don't try to eliminate every sensory input, but aim to make them predictable and manageable.

Remember: Not every sensory input will affect every pupil the same way. Some pupils seek sensory input while others avoid it. The goal is creating flexibility so all pupils can find ways to be comfortable and focused in your classroom.

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Visual Environment Audit

Lighting

- Fluorescent lights flicker or buzz
- Sunlight creates glare on whiteboards or screens
- Shadows fall across pupils' work areas
- Lighting levels vary dramatically across the room
- Emergency exit signs flash or are overly bright

Visual Clutter

- Wall displays overlap or compete for attention
- Bright colours dominate the space
- Moving decorations (mobiles, streamers) are visible from pupils' seats
- Reflective surfaces create visual distractions
- Digital displays show moving images or animations during lessons

Workspace Organisation

- Pupils can see into other classrooms through windows or doors
- Corridor activity is visible and distracting
- Storage areas appear chaotic or overstuffed
- Desks face multiple directions creating visual confusion
- Interactive displays remain on when not in use

What I Noticed:

Use this space to jot down your observations - what caught your attention? Which areas seemed most problematic?

Quick Wins I Can Try This Week:

Simple changes that won't cost anything but could make a real difference

- Turn off interactive displays when not actively teaching
- Reposition one pupil's seat away from main visual distractions
- Remove or relocate one overly bright or moving decoration
- Adjust blinds to reduce glare during specific times of day

Auditory Environment Audit

Background Noise

- Heating/cooling systems create constant hum
- Fluorescent lights buzz audibly
- Corridor noise filters through doors or walls
- Clock ticking is audible from pupils' seats
- Computer fans or projectors create background sound

Acoustic Properties

- Hard surfaces create echo or reverberation
- Sounds from adjacent classrooms are audible
- Footsteps on flooring create loud sounds
- Chair scraping on floor is frequent and jarring
- Door closures create sharp, loud sounds

Classroom Sound Management

- Multiple conversations happen simultaneously during group work
- Music or audio plays while pupils work independently
- Sound levels vary dramatically throughout lessons
- Sudden loud sounds (timers, bells) interrupt focus
- Electronic devices beep or chime unexpectedly

What I Noticed:

Use this space to jot down your observations - what caught your attention? Which areas seemed most problematic?

Quick Wins I Can Try This Week:

Simple changes that won't cost anything but could make a real difference

- Put tennis balls on chair legs to reduce scraping sounds
- Establish a "quiet signal" for group work transitions
- Turn off unnecessary electronic devices during focused work time
- Use visual timers instead of audible ones for some activities

Tactile and Physical Comfort Audit

Seating and Furniture

- Chairs have different heights or firmness levels
- Desk surfaces have varying textures
- Fabrics (cushions, carpet) have strong or unusual textures
- Pupils must share equipment with different tactile properties
- Temperature varies significantly across seating areas

Movement and Space

- Pupils must navigate through tight spaces between desks
- Flooring changes texture (carpet to hard surface)
- Pupils accidentally bump into each other during transitions
- Limited space for pupils who need to move or stretch
- Queue areas require close physical proximity to others

Materials and Resources

- Art materials have strong textures (finger paints, clay)
- PE equipment has varying surface textures
- Books and worksheets use different paper types
- Cleaning products leave residual scents on surfaces
- Hand sanitiser or soap has strong fragrances

What I Noticed:

Use this space to jot down your observations - what caught your attention? Which areas seemed most problematic?

Quick Wins I Can Try This Week:

Simple changes that won't cost anything but could make a real difference

- *Create wider pathways between desks for easier movement*
- *Offer alternative seating options (cushion, standing desk area)*
- *Provide tissue or wet wipes for pupils sensitive to art materials*
- *Designate specific personal workspace areas to reduce sharing*

Aromas and Air Quality Audit

Scents and Odours

- Cleaning products create strong chemical smells
- Air fresheners or diffusers add artificial fragrances
- Food smells from canteen or snack time linger
- Marker pens, glue, or craft supplies have strong odours
- Personal care products (perfume, deodorant) create competing scents

Air Quality

- Room feels stuffy or poorly ventilated
- Outdoor smells (traffic, construction, gardens) filter in
- Storage areas have musty or damp odours
- Pets or plants in classroom add organic smells
- Photocopier or printer creates chemical odours

What I Noticed:

Use this space to jot down your observations - what caught your attention? Which areas seemed most problematic?

Quick Wins I Can Try This Week:

Simple changes that won't cost anything but could make a real difference

- *Open windows for 10 minutes before pupils arrive to freshen air*
- *Store strong-smelling art supplies in sealed containers*
- *Remove or relocate artificial air fresheners*
- *Choose low-odour cleaning products when possible*

Time and Transition Audit

You might wonder why time appears in a sensory audit, but for many neurodivergent pupils, unpredictable schedules and sudden transitions can feel as overwhelming as a loud noise or bright light. When routines change without warning, it creates a kind of "sensory chaos" in their minds - they can't predict what's coming next, which makes it much harder to regulate all

Routine Predictability

- Daily schedule changes frequently without warning
- Transitions happen abruptly without preparation time
- Break times vary in length unpredictably
- Unexpected visitors interrupt established routines
- Fire drills or emergency procedures occur without advance notice

Time Management

- Lessons switch between activities rapidly
- Time warnings are inconsistent or absent
- Pupils must process multiple time-based instructions
- Deadlines are announced last-minute
- Visual time cues (clocks, timers) are absent or unclear

What I Noticed:

Use this space to jot down your observations - what caught your attention? Which areas seemed most problematic?

Quick Wins I Can Try This Week:

Simple changes that won't cost anything but could make a real difference

- Give consistent "2-minute warnings" before transitions
- Display daily schedule visually where all pupils can see it
- Use the same verbal cues for common transitions
- Allow extra processing time when giving multi-step instructions