

**Ysgol Maes Hyfryd
Flintshire
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASC)
Sensory Regulation**



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This document is a policy statement for Sensory Regulation for pupils with ASC at Ysgol Maes Hyfryd. It identifies our aims, objectives and strategies used.

1. CONTEXT

A growing number of pupils at Ysgol Maes Hyfryd have a statement of need that defines them as having Autistic spectrum condition or associated difficulties that benefit from a specific ASC structure. The primary characteristics of which are as follows; difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication, social understanding and social behaviour, and thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought) according to the situation and sensory perception and responses. Pupils with an ASC commonly experience unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli. Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a change in the child's needs over the years of his/her development and the difficulties vary.

Sensory profiles are drawn up for all ASC pupils using a sensory assessment these are monitored and reviewed annually, or earlier as required.

This policy document sets out the school's aims, principles and strategies for the Sensory education of pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder at Ysgol Maes Hyfryd.

2. INTRODUCTION

Learning how each autistic person's senses function is one crucial key to understanding that person. (O'Neill)

Lots of people on the autism spectrum report differences in the way their senses work. It is important to recognize this; as it influences actions, responses and behaviour. In order to ensure that all pupils are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to pupils throughout our school the additional difficulties characteristic of pupils on the autistic spectrum are taken into account in all aspects of their school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives.

3. APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS

To meet the needs of all pupils across the spectrum the teaching philosophy at Maes Hyfryd is to use an eclectic mix of established and researched approaches and interventions; drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use. Interventions and approaches include;

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) Various communication approaches (See ASC communication policy)
Therapies e.g.: Lego Therapy
Sensory Circuits
Venturing into Play
Time to talk / social speaking
SCERTS

4. SENSORY SYSTEMS

There are seven sensory systems in the human body. Each system is a complex interaction of perception and experience that can be dysfunctional in some cases of autism. Specific behaviours can help us identify which system is lacking or over stimulated. The five senses are taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell. The sixth sensory system is the vestibular system, and the seventh is the proprioceptive system. The vestibular system involves how our bodies process movement. Sight is closely tied to this system. The proprioceptive system involves the body's natural way of adjusting to its environment. This system involves fine motor activities like buttoning a shirt and coordinated activities like walking down steps.

We also have senses related to pain, temperature and time. People on the autism spectrum might also experience these differently. Many people with autism are also hypersensitive or under-sensitive to light, noise, and touch. They may be unable to stand the sound of a dishwasher, or, on the other extreme, need to flap and even injure themselves to be fully aware of their bodies. Staff at Maes Hyfryd recognise that it is difficult to work out exactly what pupils sensory issues are, because each person will experience things differently and respond in different ways. Everyone's tolerance levels are affected by their wellbeing, so when we are tired, ill, run down, worried or stressed we might not be as tolerant of sensory stimuli as when we are feeling good. However this is always taken into consideration and acted upon during the day and evaluated.

Classes have undertaken sensory audits and identified the pupils' who require sensory profiles. These are in place to support their sensory needs

5. SENSORY ISSUES

Everyone has some sensory issues. Some people dislike a certain fabric or the well-known sound of fingernails running down a chalkboard. People with autism have sensitive sensory systems in many cases. No two individuals are exactly alike. Some individuals with autism may love the feeling of water while others can't stand to even listen to the sound of water filtering into a bathtub. The sensory issues pose a challenge for everyday activities like personal care and meal time. Many people with autism have sensory issues that make some food textures intolerable. As a result of this our pupils have a wide choice of meals prepared for them and individual diets catered for, lessons on food tasting are also delivered to try and encourage a wider acceptance of foods.

6. ENVIRONMENT

Many pupils with an autistic spectrum condition have sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of sound, sense, touch, sight and smell. This means our pupils may become unable to focus upon teaching activities and are distracted by noise and visual or other stimuli. This is addressed in the way lessons are delivered to maximize their ability to learn and reduce the impact of behaviour when sensory input causes extreme discomfort or pain. Our pupils also have difficulties with flexibility and require clear visual support to understand routines and expectations. Therefore we try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by the following:

- Providing an environment which is calm, distraction free and has a low level of visual and auditory stimulus.
- Providing pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structure.
- Providing pupils with a withdrawal chill-out area (safespace) when their levels of anxiety become raised.

7. SENSORY ISSUES IN THE PUBLIC SETTING

The community setting offers many opportunities for learning, but it is also a potential bomb of sensory overload for our pupils. At Maes Hyfryd we recognize that understanding these challenges can help deal with negative behaviors that may occur.

Most people can block out the ambient noise, smells, and visual stimuli. However for someone with sensory issues, this is a serious challenge, sorting through a plethora of voices and beeps and rattles. Also bombarded with images, products, unfamiliar faces, and bright lighting. The brain of a person with autism is not wired to determine which sensory stimuli should be ignored. Waiting in line may also be a painful experience, because it seems to serve no purpose. At Maes Hyfryd we ensure that as much as possible the pupil knows what to expect and what is expected of them.

We recognise that to exclude a pupil with autism from entering a public setting is denying an opportunity to interact with the community. However, taking steps prior can ensure smooth sailing. This is addressed using various means techniques e.g.: write a social story tailor made to the situation; provide a step-by-step list of what the outing will entail and where relevant behavior expectations for the person. In addition, alerting the individual of potential sensory issues in advance can help eliminate the fear of the unknown and put them more at ease. Where useful staff will bring objects, such as fidget toys and distractions to occupy their interest while on an errand, in addition to providing a controlled sensory input. If noise is a major issue, ear plugs or headphones with music may be used.

8. SENSORY INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES

Sensory integration activities are a very useful motivational tool used at Maes Hyfryd. They encourage communication and they help the individual calm and organize behavior. Sensory integration activities are also used to increase attention and time on task. Choosing which activities to implement depends on the specific needs of the individual, identified through their individual sensory assessments.

Often the needs are identified through self stimulatory behaviours that are exhibited. Rocking is a common stereotyped repetitive movement that serves to address visual and vestibular sensory systems. This behaviour is often replaced with activities like swinging on a swing or alternating sit-ups with a partner while holding hands. Tactile sensory integration activities include tickles, materials and sensory bins. Sensory bins are containers filled with beans, pasta, smooth stones or anything that has an interesting and textures. The auditory system is addressed as the individual moves his hands through the bin making interesting sounds. Deep pressure is a valuable approach to dealing with common proprioceptive needs. Deep pressure involves burrowing into pillows or hugging a large stuffed animal. These activities are helpful in calming behaviour in many cases.

9. LIGHT AND DARK ROOMS

The light and dark rooms consists of carpeting and soft floor cushioning and some specialist equipment, e.g. colour wheel projector, music, a mirror ball, optic fibre spray, bubble tube and tactile objects. Selected sensory stimulation or relaxation can be facilitated by correct use of the specialist equipment. The light and sound room supports interaction, discovery and communication. Enabling faster learning and development through increased awareness of the surroundings. This room encourages stimulation of all the senses - sight, sound, touch and smell.

Aim

To provide an environment which is non-threatening and relaxing where pupils and staff are able to develop a therapeutic relationship which will positively impact on mood and behaviour

Objectives

To provide an environment which gently stimulates or relaxes the sensory modalities through correct use of the equipment.

To create a secure environment where pupils may explore and relax.

To promote a therapeutic relationship by sharing experiences through sensory stimulation rather than focusing on verbal communication skills.

The light room aims to meet a wide range of needs; from encouraging positive actions for those with sensory impairment to promoting rest and relaxation for the agitated or stressed at Maes Hyfryd, we identify the learning styles of the pupils and the senses to be targeted and then adapt our approaches to meet the pupils' needs.

Use of light and dark room

All light and sound sessions are teaching and learning sessions and need to be planned for with clear aims and objectives.

The individual pupil's use of sensory equipment and resources are monitored and progress reported upon.

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

The room must be left ready for the next group to access it.

No pupil is allowed to access the room without direct adult supervision

10. SENSORY PLAY / THERAPIES

Sensory circuits are physical activities that help to alert, organise and then relax the senses of the pupils so that they are ready to take part in group activities and class work.

The circuit is an active, physical and fun activity that pupils enjoy. The Sensory Circuit provides a sequence of activities done repeatedly to provide the child with the right type of sensory input in order to calm and organise them for the day ahead ready for learning to occur.

“Well planned play gives children opportunities to be actively involved in learning and to investigate and discover for themselves” *S. Richards Assembly Educational Advisor 2003*

11. EQUALITY

In all areas of learning staff aim to promote equal opportunities in accordance with Maes Hyfryd Equality Policy. This recognises that each pupil should have access to the curriculum regardless of gender, sexuality, race, ethnic background, cultural heritage, social circumstance, disability or learning difficulty. Ysgol Maes Hyfryd will not unlawfully discriminate on grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or on the grounds of Welsh language.

All pupils, their parents and guardians, volunteers, staff and school governors are valued and will be treated with dignity and respect. We will not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

We will work across our school community to ensure our commitment to equality and fairness is shared and take steps to ensure that our school is accessible, welcoming and inclusive.

12. WELSH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Wherever possible, use the Welsh language as a natural part of all aspects discussed in this policy document

This policy must be read in conjunction with the individual ASC policies and Maes Hyfryd ASC Policy

