

## **MILLWOOD SCHOOL, BURY**

POLICY:                   Sensory Integration

DATE:                     January 2018

DATE ADOPTED BY GOVERNING BODY:

.....

### **Introduction**

All children at Millwood have special educational needs, many of the pupils are on the Autistic Spectrum– they may experience life in different ways to their peers. The sensory integration diet / environment / activities available at Millwood provide core strategies to assist the pupils in overcoming / reducing the difficulties they have with communication, social interaction and sensory processing.

Within Millwood, we are committed to assisting children to achieve their full potential – cognitively and emotionally – and supporting them through providing a multi-sensory environment in which their individual learning styles are paramount to our teaching. Promoting Sensory integration is a vital aspect of our work in helping our pupils to be ready to learn and stay on task more effectively.

### **What is sensory integration?**

Sensory Integration is the ability to process information received through the senses – tactile, auditory, visual, vestibular, proprioception, olfactory and gustatory. Processing is via the central nervous system and organised by the brain. Sensory integration – a balanced nervous system - develops through normal childhood activities and experiences; it is the foundation for more complex learning and behaviour.

For some children sensory processing development is atypical, these children may experience difficulties in learning, motor skills and behaviour. The child on the autistic spectrum often experiences sensory information in a different way and this may be a barrier to their learning.

Many pupils with sensory processing difficulties demonstrate either over responsive or under responsive behaviour, they may also show behaviour demonstrating that they are a sensory seeker. Their responses to sensory input may be inconsistent and show variations on a daily basis.

Examples of over responsive behaviour:

- Distress with certain sounds – e.g. can tolerate loud music but not coughing by another person.
- Sensitivity to light – e.g. child wants to sit in a darkened part of the classroom and complains that the light hurts his eyes.

- Discomfort with certain textures – e.g. can't stand labels, woolly clothing is scratchy.
- Aversion to certain smells and tastes – e.g. Notices perfumes, dislikes eating spicy foods prefers bland foods.
- Sensitivity to heights or fast movement – e.g. Can't go on fairground rides, spin in the PE spinners.

Examples of under responsive behaviour:

- Disregard of sudden or loud sounds – e.g. some children do not react to the playground whistle signals/ fire alarm.
- Unaware of painful bumps, bruises, cuts etc – e.g. child, who doesn't mention that they have cut themselves, falls over and shows no reaction.
- Absences of startle reaction – e.g. some children do not react to sudden loud sounds / movements and continue with their own agenda regardless.
- Lack of attention to environment, persons or things – e.g. the children that we regard as very 'passive', who show little awareness or interest in the rest of the group; children who show no regard for change in temperature i.e.: have to be told to remove / replace clothing according to whether it is hot / cold.
- Lacks of dizziness with excessive spinning – e.g. the children who can have multiple turns on the waltser at the fairground, crave being spun around.
- Delayed responses – e.g. The need to give some children even longer to process information / verbal questioning than we normally allow.

Examples of sensory seeking behaviour:

- Chewing clothing incessantly.
- Mouthing objects incessantly.
- Rocking in chair/ unable to sit still.
- Constantly fidgets.
- Running
- Spinning
- Crashing
- Bumping
- Constantly touching things/ people.
- Head banging.

## **Actions**

### **Rebound, sensory circuits**

Some children are offered the opportunity to take part in a small group circuit session first thing in the morning, this enables them to re-regulate after the bus journey and gets their bodies ready to sit and attend to lessons.

### Dance Massage-

Dance massage will be offered to children who the class teams feel don't respond to dance sessions. Dance massage combines the soothing sensory experience of massage with the rhythm and energy of music. It also follows 3 steps- alerting, organising and calming and aims to develop the proprioceptive system, (the sensory receptors located in the joints and muscles).

### PE-

There is a very strong ethos of participation in all physical activities during lessons and playtimes. Millwood believes that exercise and sporting activities promote emotional wellbeing as well as physical health.

(Please see PE policy).

### Playtime / lunchtime activities-

Millwood benefits from a stimulating and attractive outside environment– there are a variety of play areas to give our pupils choice and experiences that they can transfer into play out of school – either within the family or community areas. Much of the equipment promotes sensory integration, for example the climbing frame, bike riding and scooters, trail, wigwams.

### Diet / food-

Millwood provides hot school dinners in line with government guidance – the emphasis is on providing a sociable eating environment and supporting the children to make healthy choices. Many of the families report that their children eat a very limited range of foods, there are children who prefer soft foods / hard, dry foods, those who like to keep everything separated on the plate and those who happily mix strange combinations. Children are encouraged and challenged to taste different foods, given very small tastes and rewarded for their efforts. The aim is to create an environment where children can explore different foods without any pressure to eat. This hopefully, over time, can change the negative, emotional tagging that can happen so often in the brains of children with sensory processing difficulties relating to the gustatory sense. The room is not associated with food and none of the utensils used are associated with food for e.g. paintbrushes, glue spreaders are used instead of forks or spoons. Staff do not talk about food or eating whilst the lesson takes place. Any tasting, smelling, touching is quietly recorded by a member of staff and only verbally acknowledged if the child is looking for a reaction. In the theatre the projector is used to play music with a visual tie, the lights are kept low and the children are allowed to leave the table when they like, staff can try to entice children back but no demands should be put on the child. This is because in order to break the negative tagging the child has around food, it must become a calm, enjoyable experience to be around food. The children are exploring the smells, textures of food without fear and this is the first step. They must feel comfortable with this before they can be expected to taste without fear also. As the weeks progress hopefully some of the children will feel comfortable enough to participate in using ingredients to make something that they know is a food. If they have explored the food for long enough as an ingredient then it may not seem so scary when they see it as a food. This is

the next step in positive tagging and changing the way children feel about the foods they have deemed 'unsafe'

### Sensory Integration room-

The sensory integration room has a vestibulator swing frame with multiple swings for all abilities. Here the children can swing, to receive not only vestibular regulation but by using the different kinds of swings, children can build on their core strength. This can help with postural disorders as well as sensory modulation difficulties. The sensory room also has specialist equipment such as spinners, therabrushes, vibrating toys, balancing equipment, padded area for relaxation. The children who have been identified as needing to use the room have a 15 minute session where they follow a timeline of alerting, organising and calming using the necessary equipment.

### Rebound room.

Rebound is an exercise therapy which uses trampolines to provide opportunities for movement, therapeutic exercise and recreation for people across the whole spectrum of special needs. All children who use rebound have a fully trained member of staff with them at all times, a health questionnaire and an individual risk assessment is completed before use.

### Multi-sensory rooms

Millwood has state of the art light and dark rooms. These rooms have much to offer children with sensory processing difficulties. For children who are under responsive the rooms offer the chance to visually stimulate and arouse. For children who are over responsive, the rooms can offer the chance to focus on just one area of the room without distraction from the rest of it.

### Soft play rooms (pirate/jungle)

Millwood has two soft play rooms that offer the chance for children to climb, feel elevated, run. They are brightly coloured with lots of pictures on the walls for children who like visual stimulation and children can access them on a one to one basis so that their session and the room can be tailored to their needs, for example, no music, dimmed lighting.

## **Classroom strategies to promote sensory integration:**

**Environment:** Low arousal and calm, ordered classroom environment assists pupils in maintaining a calm, organised frame of mind. The use of visual supports reduces the anxiety felt by many pupils.

Some pupils may be overwhelmed by noise and chatter (auditory sensitivities) and ear defenders are available at difficult times for those pupils who require them.

**Posture:** stability on the chairs for working at the tables is crucial to assist the children in an awareness of body space and preparing them for using fine motor skills e.g. writing, scissor work, handling tools.

Children's sitting positions may not be typical or our idea of good sitting but it is crucial that children are working on the task on hand and not on their postural skills during these periods.

Children will work on their postural skills during Sensory integration sessions, working on their core stability.

There are a number of sensory cushions and weighted equipment available for those children who have great difficulty with proprioceptive regulation.

**Visual:** For children on the autistic spectrum who are over responsive, the classroom environment should be low arousal, calm colours, tidy surfaces and minimalist. Visual stimulation can offered between lessons or when appropriate to the child.

## **Under responsive**

There is consistent application PECS (picture exchange communication system) to aid learning, provide instructions / labels and support behaviour. Spoken language is reduced and verbal prompting used – the ASC children respond to visual support more readily than lots of spoken language, especially when they are anxious or stressed.

**Resistance exercises in classroom:** A few children will include resistance work in their individual programmes e.g. squashing after playtime. A variety of weighted resources are available to use with children e.g. vests, blankets, scarves, wrist bands, back packs. These may be used to help a child to calm, to focus on their work, or to realise where their body is located in space.

**Auditory / noise sensitivity:** A calm, quiet working atmosphere permeates the school day. Staff work very hard to minimise unnecessary noise. Ear defenders are available for children to make the choice to use them or staff will suggest a pupil may be more comfortable using them. Quiet music is played at transition times e.g. before lunch, at the end of the day.

## **Sensory Profiles**

Families or staff are invited to complete a sensory profile for their child and these are updated as necessary.

The profile has been developed by Winnie Dunn to identify sensory processing disorders – staff prioritise the behaviours that occur most frequently and look at ways to change them through general classroom activities and specific targets incorporated into IEPs and IBPs that will lead to improving sensory integration. Sometimes there will be a need for specialist input from an occupational therapist as written into the child's statement.

### **How to prioritise targets re. The Sensory Profile:**

1<sup>st</sup> Priority for change – actions that cause child to be in danger / vulnerable / child harms others e.g. leaping out / off, self-harming, hurting others. Sometimes with behaviours that can change instantly.

Quite a few children at Millwood fall into this category – even though steps are taken to provide a predictable environment, clear communication systems, and consistent routines. Sensory diets need to reflect IBP's and vice versa for these children.

2<sup>nd</sup> Priority for change – sensory behaviours that interfere with learning – the child may be so overcome by the sensations arising from auditory / visual / tactile / smell / taste that they are unable to learn to their full potential all the time.

### **Information for parents**

Sensory integration issues will be discussed as part of Millwood's regular meetings between family and staff, at annual reviews and parents evening.

Policy written November 2014 by Karen Hogg, Terri Wild and Katy Neild

Updated January 2018 – Karen Hogg