

Sensory Integration Policy - Gosberton House School and Outreach Service

The majority of pupils at GHS operate within the Autistic Spectrum - they may experience life in different ways to their peers. The sensory integration diet / environment / activities available at GHS provide core strategies to assist the pupils in overcoming / reducing the difficulties they have with communication, social interaction and demonstrating flexibility of thought and action .

Within Gosberton House School and the Outreach Service ,we are committed to assisting children to achieve their 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 - it has grown out of our belief that the physical and emotional well being of our pupils is the foundation for their ability to make sense of the cognitive demands of the educational curriculum.

What is Sensory Integration?

Sensory Integration is the ability to process, interpret and use appropriately, information received through the senses - tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, vestibular and proprioception. Processing is via the central nervous system and organised by the brain.

Sensory integration - a balanced nervous system - develops through the normal childhood activities and experiences; it is the foundation for later more complex learning and behaviour.

For some children sensory integration development is atypical, these children may experience difficulties in learning, motor skills and behaviour. The child with an AS often experiences sensory information in a different way, this may cause them to be in a heightened 'fright / flight' mode for much of their day and this may be a barrier to learning.

Many pupils at GHS demonstrate either hyper - reactivity or hypo - reactivity. Their responses to sensory input may be inconsistent and show variations on a daily basis. Some of the children appear unresponsive to sensory input because their nervous system has gone into 'shutdown ' mode to protect them from sensory stimulation - as they are actually highly responsive to sensory stimulation and will react in a 'hyper' way that they cannot regulate except by 'shutting down'.

Examples of Hyper -reactivity seen at GHS

- Distress with certain sounds - eg: can tolerate loud music but not coughing by another person
- Sensitivity to light - eg: child wants to sit in a darkened part of the classroom and complains that the light hurts his eyes.
- Discomfort with certain textures - eg: can't stand labels, woolly clothing is scratchy
- Aversion to certain smells and tastes - eg: notices perfumes, dislikes eating spicy foods prefers bland foods
- Irrational fear of heights and movement - eg: can't go on fairground rides, spin in the PE spinners
- Frequent startle reactions - eg: planes overhead, a child crying

Examples of Hypo - reactivity seen at GHS

- Disregard of sudden or loud sounds - eg: some children do not react to the playground whistle signals
- Unaware of painful bumps, bruises, cuts etc - eg: child who doesn't mention that they have cut themselves, falls over and shows no reaction
- Absence of startle reaction - eg: 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 - eg: 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 ie: have to be told to remove / replace clothing according to whether it is hot / cold.
- Lack of dizziness with excessive spinning - eg: the children who can have multiple turns on the waltzer at the fairground, crave being spun around
- Delayed responses - eg: the need to give some children even longer to process information / verbal questioning than we normally allow

GHS provides a multi-sensory learning environment in which staff assist and enable pupils to enjoy learning, through providing experiences that contribute to the development of sensory integration. (during their school day and beyond, in both inside and outside space.)

Action

Sensory Circuits

Sensory Circuits take place in the hall, each morning between 8.45 and 9.30am. They are organised and led by an experienced TA who has received specific training in Sensory Integration work.

The sensory circuit has 3 areas - alerting, organising and calming - through following a programme of physical exercises children are helped to refine and focus their concentration in readiness for the day's learning.

All children are offered sensory circuits - there are very few children who do not attend circuits on a regular basis. The decision as to whether a child should attend circuits is based on their perceived need to work on the vestibular and proprioceptive senses - motor planning and gross motor skills, improvements in co-ordination and organisation.

(please refer to Sensory circuit documentation - appendix)

(staff from other schools/services are welcome to observe/participate)

Activate

All classes participate in Activate sessions; these take place at registration time morning and afternoon. Activate is a fun and enjoyable music and exercise programme to develop co-ordination devised by Val Sabin. There are controlled breathing and calming exercises alongside the energetic movements.

There are manuals for Foundation Stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 - class staff are able to choose an appropriate level of exercises for their group within these stages. Some classes are able to access activate through the interactive whiteboard.

(please see manuals in PE cupboard - consultation with PE co-ordinator to identify level)

PE

GHS is an Active quality mark school and a member of the Spalding Sports Partnership - there is a very strong ethos of participation in all physical activities during lessons and playtimes. GHS believes that exercise and sporting activities promote emotional wellbeing as well as physical health.

(please see PE policy)

Playtime / lunchtime activities

GHS 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 - the climbing frame, trampoline, bike riding and scooters, trim trail, bats and balls.

Diet / food

GHS 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 - a programme of desensitisation as required.

All children have the opportunity to cook each week and take great pride in their work - staff are experts at promoting healthy choices and creating independent cooks.

GHS is moving into the Enhancement phase of the National Healthy School programme and diet issues are a key part of our targets.

Classroom strategies to promote sensory integration:

GHS operates within the SPELL philosophy to create a framework for teaching and learning (recognised through NAS accreditation)

Environment : the low arousal and calm, ordered classroom environment assists pupils in maintaining a calm, organised frame of mind. The use of visual supports reduce the anxiety felt by many pupils who may be overwhelmed by noise and chatter (auditory sensitivities) and ear defenders are available for those pupils who require them. The consistent application of classroom routines helps pupils to organise themselves - many of them have poor motor planning - so that in time they are able to sort out their belongings for themselves.

Communication: communication underpins all social interactions and comprehension is vital for cognitive learning. At GHS specific speech & language programmes are carried out but communication targets are also integrated into the fabric of classroom activity (please see communication policy)

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 eg writing, scissor work, handling tools. 'Good sitting' is promoted at all times - chair square to table when working or turn to teacher to give attention, sitting with bottom to back of chair no perching on the edge. There are sensory cushions available for those children who have great difficulty sitting still to work - consult SLT / OT before using . Where children's legs don't touch the floor we try to have a small stool under their feet to give the stability.

Fine motor: difficulties with handwriting, cutting and handling tools may be due to tactile difficulties or lack of awareness regarding use of pressure. All classrooms have a variety of handwriting pens, children in class 2+ use pens for literacy work and writing as they give a better response to even weak pressure and often act as a motivator. There are handwriting / mark making and scissor skill programmes for use in class to teach the skills but the emphasis is also on transferring skills into general use eg children produce beautiful writing in a handwriting session but can't produce writing of the same standard in other lessons.

(ideas for activities can be taken from 1st Move A gross and fine motor skills resource for teachers: Lincolnshire CC and Lincolnshire NHS)

Visual : the classroom environment is low arousal, calm colours, tidy surfaces and minimalist -individual lessons where the children are focused and engaged are full of real life experiences and objects that make use of all the senses. There is a consistent application of CIP (Communication in Print) and PECs (picture exchange communication system) to aid learning, provide instructions / labels and support behaviour. Spoken language is reduced and verbal prompting used - the ASD children respond to visual support more readily than lots of spoken language, especially when they are anxious or stressed. (please see communication policy)

There are resources to support pupils who may find it helpful to use coloured overlays when reading.

Beery VMI - The Beery -Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration:

This is an assessment tool agreed between the consultant Occupational Therapist and GHS. All staff have received training in interpreting the data and there is a handbook of activities to use in the classroom to support the pupils. Pupils in FYC and Key stage 1 will be assessed - as the

children move into middle and upper school it is expected that only a few children may need to work on these activities and receive further assessment.

Resistance exercises in classroom: hand exercises to promote strength are practised before writing / literacy lessons. A few children will include resistance work in their individual programmes eg Rainbow room rolling and squashing after playtime.

A variety of weighted resources are available to use with children eg 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 - it is frequently commented on by visitors. 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 eg returning to class after play and sometimes as background when pupils are working quietly and independently.

Dark Den: there is a dark den available for pupils to access as a means of relaxation and calming. A box of light /sensory toys is provided, tactile cushions and music.

Emotional Literacy

'Magic Star' sessions for small groups or individuals are available, where pupils are able to explore their feelings and social interactions. This support has led to improvements in behaviour issues at GHS, and aims to move towards an increasingly proactive policy in supporting children towards self-management of their emotions.

Home/school links are well established and staff are able to offer support to families concerning emotional / behavioural issues that are impacting on home life.

Staff undergo a rolling programme of training in Emotional Literacy and family/carers are offered training/support sessions as part of our Wednesday afternoon Family and Friends meetings.

(please see Emotional Literacy policy)

Multi-agency support:

Speech and Language Therapist

A speech and language therapist with specific expertise in working with autistic spectrum disorder is based at GHS for 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ days a week.

Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapy support is available from both private and NHS services.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapy support is available - the emphasis is often on the practical exercises but this impacts on the sensory integration work as physical improvements are made.

Outreach links

Gosberton House School provides an outreach service to support pupils and staff in mainstream schools, as part of the support a box of sensory resources is provided and training can be given on the sensory issues that pupils on the Autistic Spectrum may experience.

Definitions of the Sensory systems:

please see booklet 'the sensory world of the autistic spectrum: a greater understanding' - copies in each classroom (available for schools receiving outreach support).

Sensory Profiles

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

The profile has been developed by staff and an independent occupational therapist, to identify sensory integration dysfunction - 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.

Completed Parent sensory profile - to be kept in Yellow file.

Typed single profile sheet per child - this is the summary sheet with 'frequent' issues noted.

Some children need a class / school profile completed because reading the parent profile there are aspects where school is likely to have different views.

How to prioritise targets re. the Sensory Profile:

1st Priority for change - actions that cause child to be in danger / vulnerable / child harms others eg leaping out / off, self-harming, hurting others

They are likely to have major sensory modulation problems - behaviour can change instantly (all going well then suddenly terrible outburst); child is explosive / unpredictable; they are 'all or nothing' children.

Relatively few children at GHS fall into this category - often because of the steps taken to provide a predictable environment, clear communication systems, consistent routines.

These children have IBPs and require considerable support via Emotional Literacy (Magic Stars) - above and beyond the physical activities - please see IBPs on staff notice board

2nd 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.

Some of these children are sensory defensive - in order to avoid the sensory sensations that they find difficult, the child remains 'passive' or they may appear to be coping until their behaviour is carefully analysed Eg a child gives no problem in the classroom but he avoids situations that he finds difficult - refuses to go out on trips, eat certain foods, perform movements.

Eg a child was so overwhelmed by the demands made on her at school that she didn't move

Eg notice that some children become more alert when given time for more physical activities

Sensory integration issues will be incorporated into the 'Learning styles' information at the start of each child's Individual Education Plan.

There will be a sensory target for many children - incorporated into their IEP targets or added as a separate target.

The emotional / behaviour issues are often addressed through IBP or magic star work.

Sensory integration issues will be discussed as part of GHS regular meetings between family and staff, there will also be at least one general meeting during the year as part of in-reach or family and friends' meetings.

(please see family profile and single profile sheet)

Policy reviewed January 2013 to be reviewed biannually

