



## **SENSORY POLICY**

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**Reviewed at Governors' Student Development Committee –13/11/18**

***To be further amended prior to Board Meeting 6, 2019 (14 March), and approved at the meeting.***

This policy will be reviewed on a calendar three-yearly model:

**Next review date: Autumn, 2021**

## Introduction

Sensory processing is a person's ability to organise and process incoming sensory information from our senses. Sensory modulation is a person's ability to interpret sensory input and to respond appropriately.

At Riverside we appreciate the continuous need to interpret and respond to sensory experiences. The aim is to support students' sensory needs across the school day, in a variety of ways, to have a 'just right' challenge.

We are all familiar with the five basic sensory systems; sight, sound, taste, smell and touch (tactile). These basic senses or 'far senses' respond to external stimuli from the environment. However, less familiar sensory systems exist within our bodies called:

- Interoceptive: Sensory system of the internal organs (e.g. heart rate, hunger, digestion, state of arousal, mood, etc.,)
- Vestibular Sense: Processing information about movement, gravity and balance, primarily through the inner ear. It provides information about speed of our movements, maintains and regulates postural one, triggers balance reactions and gives us a postural core. It also helps us to maintain a table visual field and adequate spatial awareness.
- Proprioceptive Sense (body scheme): Processing information about body position received through the muscles, ligaments and joints. It allows us to control the speed and force of movement, efficient motor planning, allows us to use our bodies without having visual cues, and it is vital for fine motor dexterity.

The brain locates, sorts and orders sensations – somewhat like a traffic officer directs traffic. This is necessary if a person is to move and learn normally. The tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive processing is at the core of sensory systems, leading to the five basic sensory systems.

With some students, such as those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the processing of sensory experience may be disordered or delayed. The slightest change or difficulty with processing such information can influence how we manage daily living skills, academic progress and social interactions.

As each person will process and modulate sensory information differently, these experiences are unique to each individual. Something that may be comforting and pleasant for one person is uncomfortable and unpleasant to another; a hug, bright lighting or eating particular foods.

The school's occupational therapist provides sensory training for all school staff with recommendations for:

- Environmental adaptation and resources
- Universal and targeted sensory strategies provided by the class teams with guidance from the school occupational therapist.
- Specific individual sensory plans are developed and monitored by the occupational therapist and delivered by the class teams.

Universal strategies are embedded in the school curriculum to prepare and support students learning and development. For example, calming/alerting movements prepare, lighting adjusted between dim or bright and student positioning/location in the room to aid focus and maximise engagement.

#### Initial factors we consider

Lighting – natural and artificial

Sound

Furniture – size in relation to students

Temperature

Space and number of people

Décor – colour of wall paint and displays

Location of students and staff in the room

#### Strategies we may implement

Use of blinds to dim the natural light, gel covers on ceiling lights to defuse lighting

Use of music to calm and alert students as appropriate.

Use of soft furnishings defuse sound

Zoning of classrooms

Changing the size of the furniture to accommodate taller or smaller students

Managing the heat/cold from radiator or open windows and students' alertness

Use of physical boundaries or open space to enable students to feel secure

Limiting the displays according to students' stimulation needs.

Dial up and down displays as appropriate

Position identified students away from windows/opening doors to reduce distractions

According to Dr Winnie Dunn, a sensory expert, sensory processing is about everyone. However, some people experience greater difficulty with interpreting and responding appropriately. This can be seen in some of our students diagnosed with autism, developmental delay and PMLD.

### **Assessing and managing needs**

At Riverside we have a Multi-disciplinary approach to students with sensory processing difficulties. This team is made up of Occupational Therapy, Speech & Language Therapy, Physiotherapy, School Nurse and school staff.

The Occupational Therapy Service offers different tiers of intervention including whole school and class specific intervention/training.

All classes receive input from the OT through a referral process. Class teams and the OT work collaboratively to develop strategies to best meet students sensory needs.

These referrals are typically discussed via the bi-weekly MDT meeting. This ensures that basic sensory strategies have been tried and that other factors impacting on behaviour and learning have been addressed e.g. appropriate Behaviour Profiles in place and referral to CAMHS-LD considered.

In order to monitor and measure the impact of interventions we carry out a Learning Walk that focuses specifically on Environment and Sensory Processing. The Learning Walk is used to identify both what is working well and what areas need to be developed. This exercise gives a whole school view of how individual needs are met from a sensory perspective. To best cater for all of our learners sensory needs we strive to maximise our learning environments and ensure that they enhance functional use, offer that 'just right challenge', encourage independence and are flexible to be both stimulating and grounding.

The environments cover all areas of the school that the students engage with. The Environment Learning Walk is carried out by the OT, SLT as well as a colleague from the leadership team, a teacher and a teaching assistant. This is to represent the whole school community in order to gain a whole school perspective and to deepen the information gathered and shared. The information gathered from Environment Learning Walk then feeds into the Sensory Development Plan.

### **Development Plans**

At Riverside School we are committed to the continual improvement of our educational provision for students. This commitment extends to both curriculum development and teaching and learning methodologies to best meet the needs of our students. From September 2018 we structured our school into 4 teams to better meet the diverse needs of our students. This new structure has supported our push to improve our communication and sensory approaches for students.

We have scheduled a significant proportion of our staff training time allocation over the past two academic years to develop all staff capabilities in communication and sensory approaches in class practice.

Our '*Communication Development Plan 2016-2017*' provides an in depth and multi-faceted approach to staff development. Training was provided by NHS colleagues (SaLT), in school expertise, occasional external trainers and peer to peer training and support.

Our '*Sensory Development Plan 2017-2018*', again used a significant proportion of staff training time in this academic year. The approach is whole school training (provided by an OT that we have brought in house for this purpose), targeted class development (to generate case studies for peer to peer learning, SMSA (lunchtime assistants) training related to sensory requirements and needs for 'play'.

We have now developed our *Riverside School Processing Pathway*, which we began delivering in the academic year 2017-2018, with Helena D'Mello (OT) and key Riverside School staff - see *Appendix*.

### **Resources**

Shared working protocols lay out which resources the school and Whittington Health are responsible for providing. Resources can include:

- Large pieces of equipment, e.g. swing, bikes, sensory room equipment.
- Individual pieces of equipment, e.g. ear defenders, chewy tubes, move-n-sit cushions.
- Assistive devices e.g. pencil grips, adapted scissors, slanting boards.
- Changes to the environment, e.g. blinds, lighting, wall coverings, shelves, seating.

### **Training**

The Occupational Therapists and other members of the MDT can offer a range of informal training where necessary on a range of different subjects. School staff are informed regularly of more formalised training programmes e.g. Sensory Integration courses and attend at the discretion of the leadership team or as part of an identified need in their continuing professional development.

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**Helena D'Mello, Occupational Therapist**

**Kelly Whiting, Deputy Head**

*February, 2019*

## APPENDIX

### Sensory Processing Pathway

