



## **Sensory and Regulation Breaks for Pupils with Care Needs Policy**

### **Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School:**

Leixlip ETNS is an Educate Together primary school. Educate Together schools are committed to the values laid down in the Educate Together Charter. Our school is learner-centred, equality-based, co-educational and democratically-run. This means that all members of the school community, whatever their social, cultural or belief background, work together in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. Our equality-based principle informs all policies and practices in the daily life of the school. In exercising this policy-making and decision-making responsibilities, the school's Board of Management upholds the ethos of the school.

### **Rationale**

#### **Inclusive Education**

Leixlip Educate Together National School promotes a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive for all pupils. Our pupils learn in an inclusive environment which recognises diversity, valuing each pupil as an individual. We understand that all children learn better if their learning environment can be adapted to meet their needs, abilities and interests. The school recognises that any pupil may benefit from accessing the sensory space and/or regulation breaks, particularly at times of anxiety, stress, however this policy aims to set out the procedures and guidelines in relation to our pupils that have Care Plans in place.

#### **Pupils with Additional Needs**

The EPSEN Act 2004 provides for the provision of education plans for pupils with additional educational needs, [Special Educational Needs (SEN)]. Under the Act, children with additional educational needs will be educated "in an inclusive environment with children who do not have SEN", unless this should be inconsistent either with the best interest of the child, or with the effective provision for the other children. Leixlip ETNS promotes a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive for all pupils. We recognise that pupils with additional or differing needs "are particularly at risk in the area of wellbeing" (NCSE, 2014), and that pupils learn more effectively and have better academic outcomes if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel acknowledged and supported in their schools.

"Children who have difficulty processing sensory information effectively often have trouble completing school and home based tasks requiring them to sit still, attend to instruction, be able to engage socially with peers, and play/work cooperatively with others." (Brunkner et al. 2018). At Leixlip ETNS, we recognise that difficulties interpreting sensory information can have an impact on how our pupils feel, how they think and how they behave or respond.

The school and the classroom can be filled with lots of sensory information which some of our pupils may find overwhelming. Incorporating classroom wide regulation breaks and providing opportunities for regulation throughout the school day can support pupils' wellbeing and sensory needs. By modifying the environment to

support our pupils' sensory needs and by providing regulation breaks and creating sensory spaces we can enable our pupils to engage and access the school curriculum.

## **Regulation breaks and Sensory Spaces**

In order to support our pupils' needs, we have created sensory outdoor and indoor spaces, which aim to provide pupils with the individualised sensory input they need to self-regulate, so they can be better prepared for learning and interacting with their peers in the classroom. Our sensory spaces aim to provide the opportunity to address the care needs of our pupils with a Care Plan, particularly in relation to the pupils' primary senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch, vestibular and proprioceptive. They aim to promote a positive school culture and climate in supporting our pupils' health and wellbeing. Our sensory areas may also occasionally benefit other pupils, as determined by the classteacher, however this policy relates only to those pupils with a Support Plan in place. It is hoped that our sensory areas can provide a safe environment where the pupil can be supported to calm and regulate, therefore optimising learning and participation in the school environment. While we are currently in temporary accommodation with limited space, we aim to make our sensory spaces flexible, changeable and adaptable in order to meet the differing needs of our pupils.

Parents/guardians must give their consent to their child having scheduled use of the sensory spaces and regulation breaks.

## **Benefits of Sensory Spaces**

There are many benefits to creating a sensory space(s)

- Sensory Spaces can reduce sensory overload for pupils who may find the school day overwhelming and enable them to achieve a calmer state for learning.
- Sensory Spaces can also provide increased sensory input for pupils who require more stimulation to enable them to regulate their sensory and emotional needs (Middletown, 2021).
- Sensory spaces can incorporate mindfulness activities to support interceptive awareness to facilitate self-regulation and support social and emotional learning (Lynch, et al., 2020).
- Sensory spaces can promote self-care, self-nurturance, empowerment, skill development, resilience & recovery (Champagne, 2006).

## **Guidelines for regulation breaks and using the sensory space**

Prior to using sensory spaces and/or regulation breaks, teachers should consider strategies that can support pupils in the classroom or broader school environment, and that may benefit all pupils. These could include activities involving proprioceptive, vestibular, tactile and calming activities. The NCSE (2021) recommends that 'movement' breaks can support pupils and can be provided as regularly as every two hours. Teachers may also include opportunities for self-regulation in the classroom including breathing activities, mindfulness and short regulation breaks.

The Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) will maintain a list of resources available for use in the Sensory Spaces and class teachers and Additional Needs Assistants should compile a list of resources that would be beneficial to individual pupils.

The Special Education Needs Coordinator will provide information on strategies that may be used in the Sensory Spaces or during regulation breaks outside of the classroom.

In addition, the following guidelines are recommended by the NCSE (2021) and will be followed by teachers at Leixlip ETNS: [see also, Appendix 2, Key Considerations for How and When to Use A Sensory Space]

**Before the Sensory Spaces the following are key:**

- Teachers, with the assistance of an Additional Needs Assistant (where practicable) should observe the pupil and their levels of alertness throughout the school day. Teachers should try to schedule in whole class or group movement activities frequently throughout the day to support all pupils' regulation. Teachers should observe if there is a pattern to the time(s) of the day when pupils get overwhelmed or need a break and should try to schedule in visits to sensory spaces at times when pupils need more sensory input.
- The classroom teacher, in consultation with the Special Education Teacher (SET) or SENCO should schedule a pupil's use of the sensory spaces and/or regulation breaks, and this target should be included in the pupil's Student Support Plan (SSP) which is prepared in collaboration with parents/guardians. Collaboration with school and family systems aims to promote predictability across environments. The SSP, which will include the planned use of regulation breaks and the sensory spaces will be agreed with and signed by parents/guardians. Parents will also be asked to sign a consent form in relation to their child having scheduled access to sensory spaces and regulation breaks.
- It is recognised that there may be occasions, outside of the scheduled times, when use of the sensory spaces will support a pupil in terms of self-regulation. The pupils' Behaviour Support Plan (where relevant) and their SSP should outline the circumstances where this may occur.
- Sensory spaces and regulation breaks should not be used, unless their use is included in the pupil's SSP.
- When writing a pupil's SSP in collaboration with parents/guardians, the class teacher and SET should ensure the planned use of the sensory spaces is as proactive as possible by incorporating sensory escape/space time into the pupil's daily routine. The sensory spaces should be used with pupils at regular scheduled times of the day to support and maximise their participation in school based activities (Maciever et al, 2019). This will also help to support pupil's self-regulation skills.
- Sensory activities should only be carried out with the consent of the pupil (see Appendix x), otherwise they could result in a negative or traumatic experience for a pupil. The spaces should always be supportive in meeting the pupil's needs.
- Sensory Spaces should not be used as a reward or for managing behaviour.
- It is important to ensure consistent access to regulation breaks and sensory spaces by incorporating sensory escape/space time into their daily schedules and routines.
- It is important that the teacher/ANA is calm and regulated to provide co-regulation, self-regulation and emotional wellbeing to the pupil when using the sensory spaces.

**Factors to Consider Before Using a Sensory Space and/or Regulation Breaks**

- Pupil voice – all pupils are unique and have individual interests and needs. Therefore, the individual pupil's needs will be considered prior to and during the sensory activity, in terms of what they seek in the sensory spaces - what are their interests, their favourite colour/toy etc?
- What is the desired outcome for the pupil? Is it to give them an escape from the busy sensory filled classroom or a sensory break?
- Would the pupil benefit from a calming or alerting activity?
- What equipment or resources will be used to meet the pupil's needs? Does the pupil need an individualised set of items? Can resources from home be used?
- What supports for transitioning will the pupil need? E.g. visual schedule, first, then visual, time timers.
- Which staff are involved and what is each of their roles and responsibilities - Class teacher, Special

### **While Using the Sensory Spaces and/or Regulation Breaks**

- The pupil will be guided towards either calming or alerting activities, depending on what they need. If the pupil needs alerting activities, these should be followed by some calming activities afterwards before they return to class, so they are ready to focus and concentrate. - The NCSE provide a range of print and video resources (see appendix 2)
- The Additional Needs Assistant or SET should observe the student's responses to all activities completed in the sensory spaces. Notice if they find the activity calming, organising or alerting. Their body language and facial expression should be observed during the activity, this should be noted in their 'Sensory Activity Record'.
- If a pupil is using a sensory integration programme such as 'Zones of Regulation' (Kuypers, 2011), this can also be used in the sensory spaces as it provides the pupil and staff with strategies and a shared language to learn self-regulation skills.
- Adult Supervision-The pupils should be supervised at all times when using the sensory spaces. Research has identified that the most important piece of kit in a sensory room is always the person facilitating the session (Grace 2020, Ashdown 2013). This is essential to remember when using the sensory spaces. The adult is essential in providing co-regulation, self-regulation and emotional wellbeing to the pupil when using the sensory spaces.
- Transitions: A visual schedule, timer or object of reference can be used to prepare the student for transitioning in and out of the sensory space.

### **After Using the Sensory Spaces and/or Regulation Breaks**

- Pupils should be observed after using the sensory space and/or regulation breaks and their disposition should be recorded - are they calm, organised and relaxed? [ANA/SET/Supervising Teacher]
- Observe and record whether the desired outcome of the sensory space and/or regulation breaks achieved [Class Teacher]?
- Observe whether the pupil is able to concentrate and attend when they transition back to the classroom? [Class Teacher]
- Observe and record how the pupil feels following the sensory activity and when they return to the classroom. [Class Teacher/ANA].
- Where appropriate, use the Zones of Regulation concepts and language to support student self-reflection and learning [Class Teacher/SET/ ANA].

#### **The policy was formulated:**

To ensure that regulation breaks and sensory spaces are planned for and are implemented with regard to the individual needs of a pupil and in order to ensure the most inclusive learning experience and the best learning outcome for that pupil.

To provide staff and parents/guardians with clear guidelines and expectations with regard to the use of regulation breaks and sensory spaces within the school.

To ensure best practice and continuity in how we work in Leixlip ETNS

#### **Aims**

To provide a framework for the use of regulation breaks and sensory spaces in the school

To ensure compliance with relevant legislation (Epsen Act 2004)

To ensure compliance with NCSE guidelines and best practice

To enhance the education, wellbeing and self esteem of all pupils with additional educational needs

To provide optimum learning experiences for all children  
To clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to regulation breaks and sensory spaces  
To ensure accountability and effective record keeping.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Board of Management**

The Board has responsibility to:

Oversee the implementation of the school policy on sensory space and/or regulation breaks  
Ensure that adequate accommodation and resources are provided for pupils' sensory needs (in line with Department of Education funding).  
Provide a secure facility for the storage of records in relation to pupils utilising sensory space and/or regulation breaks  
Provide opportunities for ongoing support for professional development in relation to regulation breaks and sensory activities.

### **The Principal**

The Principal has responsibility for:

Ensuring that teachers and ANA are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to sensory space and/or regulation breaks  
Deploying ANAs to provide support in looking after the primary care needs of pupils with the greatest needs  
Promoting in-service training. The Board of Management may fund or part fund this professional development.

### **The Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

The SENCO has responsibility for:

Assuming responsibility for overseeing Student Support Files in consultation with all relevant parties including the parents/guardians, SNA, class teacher and principal.  
Co-ordinating the schedules for the use of sensory space and/or regulation breaks in consultation with class teachers and additional needs assistants.  
Monitoring the supervision of pupils by ANAs while away from the classroom on regulation breaks and while using the sensory spaces.  
The procurement of appropriate resources for the sensory spaces, within the budget as agreed with the Board of Management and maintaining a list of resources.  
Ensuring that parents have given permission for their child to access sensory space and/or regulation breaks

### **Class Teachers**

Class Teachers have responsibility for:

Planning for differentiated activities that will support all pupils within the classroom.  
Plan for regulation breaks throughout the day that will benefit all pupils in their class.  
Every pupil in their class and for ensuring, in collaboration with the SET, that their pupils are supervised when taking regulation breaks outside of the classroom and while using the sensory space and/or regulation breaks.  
Observing pupils, and identifying how and when they would benefit from additional regulation and sensory breaks.  
Overseeing and signing off on individual pupil records in relation to the use of regulation and/or sensory breaks outside of the classroom.  
Ensure ANA support is available for those who need it in a class situation and when and if withdrawal intervention should be used.  
Collaborating with the SET with regard to Student Support Files

### **Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs)**

Additional Needs Assistants are an integral part of the school team and carry out duties of a non teaching nature supporting the primary care needs of pupils with additional educational needs. In regards to sensory space and/or regulation breaks:

The ANA works under the direction of the class teacher, SENCO/SET or Principal

The class teacher plans for in-class regulation and sensory breaks and the ANA assists pupils to access the regulation breaks in accordance with their SSF.

The class teacher and SET plan for sensory activities outside of the classroom and the ANA provides support in assisting the pupil to access the sensory activities.

The ANA may help to provide co-regulation, self-regulation and emotional wellbeing to the pupil when taking external regulation breaks or accessing sensory space and/or regulation breaks in line with our One-to-One Teaching Policy and our Supervision Policy. This takes place under the supervision of the class teacher or the SET.

The ANA assists the class teacher in observing the pupil as outlined above and in keeping records of the pupil's sensory activities outside of the classroom.

The ANA maintains daily observation notes in the form of ABC (antecedent, behaviour, consequence), and these should cross-reference non-scheduled regulation breaks

### **Parents/Guardians**

Parents/guardians have responsibility for

Collaborating with the Special Education Teacher and class teacher in the formulation of the Student Support File

Ensuring that the school is provided with copies of all relevant assessment reports

Regular communication with the class teacher and SET with regards to their child's individual needs

Taking a partnership approach with the school in regards to their child's education and educational needs.

Fostering positive attitudes about school and learning in the child

Creating a home environment where learning can thrive

Participation in relevant programmes based on the needs of the child, e.g. shared reading

Developing the child's social, emotional and environmental learning

Fostering an environment where difference and inclusion is celebrated

Consenting to their child using accessing sensory space and/or regulation breaks

### **Success Criteria**

This policy aims to put in place a framework to enable the school to provide a learner-centred approach to the use of sensory space and/or regulation breaks within the school and to establish a culture where sensory spaces and sensory strategies are used throughout the school day. It aims to set out guidelines for teachers and school staff to holistically support pupils by collaboratively creating and using sensory activities and spaces.

We will know that the policy is achieving its aims when observations and records show that the use of sensory spaces and/or regulation breaks have reached the desired outcome - that after accessing sensory spaces and/or regulation breaks, the pupil:

Is more calm, organised and relaxed and better able to concentrate and attend when they transition back to the classroom

Shows a better ability to self-regulate

Shows an improvement in emotional well-being.

### **Review and Ratification**

This plan was formally ratified by the Board of management on 2nd February 2023

The plan will be implemented by the teachers and ANAs and supported by the Board of Management from. It will be reviewed every 2 years.

Signed: Catherine Hare Chairperson, Board of Management Date: 2nd February 2023

Signed: Mary McDaniel Principal

Date: 2nd February 2023

## Appendix 2

(from NCSE, Sensory Spaces in School, 2021)

# Key Considerations for How and When to Use a Sensory Space

### Plan and Prepare

Plan your sensory space time.

Prepare the student before transitioning.

Use timers and visual schedules.

### Supervision

Supervision of an adult is always required in a sensory space and when using equipment.

### Use

Use the room at a predictable time which is scheduled into the student's day.

Do not use the space as a reward or for managing behaviour.

### Student Voice

Give students choice in the sensory space.

Never force a sensory activity.

### Equipment

Plan what equipment should be turned on before a student enters the space. Change lighting or add music depending on the students' needs.

Not everything should be on at once (lights, projectors, music).

### Safety

Schools should ensure every adult facilitating the sensory room has the appropriate information and training, if required to use the equipment safely.



## APPENDIX 3

### Links and Resources

<https://ncse.ie/movement-breaks-in-post-primary-classroom>

### Additional Notes

Can we put in a line about permission slips and maybe the line below 'under no circumstances should students be left alone..'

#### **Access**

Permission slips must be completed by parent / guardian if they wish for their child to have access to the room.

Identified students should have sensory time built into their individual timetable. These are subject to change.

No more than 2 students should access the sensory room at any time.

Under no circumstances should students be left alone in the sensory room at any time.

A monitoring system will be in place to ensure that the sensory room is not abused or over used.

Also, would the line about leaving the door open/ajar when working 1-1 with a pupil might be useful?

**Child Protection:**

Where staff are working 1:1 with students, they should not be lying alongside students and the door of the room will be left ajar.

Parents will have access to the sensory room policy and will give written consent to their child's supervised access of the sensory room.

This policy works in conjunction with:

- Health & Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy



## Permission Slip

### Access to Regulation Breaks and Sensory Space


Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

I give my child permission to access regulation breaks and the school sensory space under the supervision of a member of the school staff. I have read the Sensory Space Policy and am aware that where staff are working 1:1 with pupils, the door to the sensory space will be left ajar.

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

#### Child Permission

Please draw a happy face  if you are happy to go on regulation breaks and attend the Sensory Space.

Could we also use a 'smiley face' / traffic light 'consent' visual at the sensory space or could some pupils be too emotionally overwhelmed to give consent?