
Advice Sheet 10

CHECKING THE PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Sometimes there may be aspects of the physical classroom environment that are potential triggers for inappropriate behaviour. As a first step in a preventative approach, it is important to examine the physical environment carefully and remove / change anything that we can remove / change if we think it may be impacting negatively on behaviour. The following are just some of the suggested areas to think about.

Use of space: Is there clearly defined storage space for materials, books etc.? Are there lockers / filing cabinets / locked presses? Is there enough room for books and materials? Is the room cluttered? Who is responsible for keeping room tidy? Can study areas and desks be kept free of distractions and clutter? Are there designated work areas and quiet areas? (perhaps a bean bag, tent, screen, or a zone / direction path marked with masking tape on the floor.)

Displays: Are there appropriate wall displays, photographs, visual stimuli, plants, nature table, pets' corner? How do pupils respond to these displays (individually and collectively)? What level of input do pupils have into these aspects of the classroom? Are there too many displays for some pupils who may be overly distracted?

Respect for property and personal space: Where do pupils keep their bags and lunchboxes, coats and shoes, PE gear and equipment? Do they have individual storage space? What are the rules about personal items such as mobile phones, walkmans, iPods, etc.? Have pupils been explicitly taught to respect each other's property and also how to give each other appropriate personal space?

Seating arrangements: How are seats arranged (in rows, in clusters, in U-shape, in small groups)? Is this the best arrangement? Who decides who sits where? If the teacher assigns seats to individual pupils, it's good practice to change the seating on a regular basis (e.g. every month / half-term).

Quiet area: Is it possible to build some opportunity for pre-planned acceptable movement in class by having an extra seat / desk somewhere which gives the pupil who needs to move around a lot somewhere 'legal' to go when they need to move around? This also allows you the option of moving someone to redirect them to their on-task work without making a big issue of it.

Noise: What is your own comfort level? Do you want silence when pupils are on-task or are you happy to allow them to consult and discuss using 'partner voices'? Does it depend on the subject / activity? Can background noise e.g. radio / CD on at a low level be a help for certain subjects? What's the comfort level of the pupil? Is any pupil easily upset by a lot of noise? Do you need to lower the speed, pitch or volume of your own voice? Have you considered using a 'Noise Meter'? (see Advice Sheet 27).

Light: You may not be able to control this but consider if the amount of sunlight is not enough or is too strong; Have you window blinds or frosted contact on windows? Is the electrical light strong enough? Does a flickering fluorescent light negatively affect some pupils (e.g. those with ADHD or those with photosensitive epilepsy)? Do certain pupils need to be in brighter or darker areas of the room? Is there a glare on the blackboard / whiteboard / computer monitor from certain places or at certain times?

Air / Heat: How is the classroom ventilated? Is the air / temperature regulated through different points in the room. How do you accommodate different needs / viewpoints? What can you do if the room is too hot / too cold / too stuffy?

Safety: Does the school have a health and safety policy? If so, am I aware of what it says? Are we complying with it in our classroom? Are there any potential dangers that need to be removed / repaired (faulty equipment / broken plugs or sockets / trailing wires / dripping tap / broken window etc.)?

*Note: **Signal Change!** If possible, prepare the class / pupil for change – if you are going to make changes to the physical environment or seating arrangements explain what will happen and why the change is happening.*

EXERCISE TO CHECK THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Objective: To identify any possible triggers that may lead to inappropriate behaviour from pupils as a result of any of these areas of your own classroom environment.

TOPIC	Are there any identifiable triggers?	If so, what can I do about it?
Use of space		
Displays		
Respect for property / personal space		
Seating arrangements		
Quiet area		
Noise		
Light		
Air / Heat		
Safety		
Other matters?		