

Integrated Therapeutic Curriculum
Deep Dive

Sensory and Physical

Intent

Our Sensory and Physical curriculum is fundamental in supporting pupils to develop the skills necessary for functional independence, participation in daily life, and emotional regulation. Many of our pupils experience differences in sensory processing, motor development, and occupational performance, which can significantly impact their ability to engage with learning, maintain relationships, and navigate daily tasks.

A sensory-informed approach is well evidenced as an effective means of supporting autistic pupils (RCOT, 2021). Research also indicates that activity-based, real-world interventions are essential for developing motor skills, self-care abilities, and emotional regulation (Laverdure and Beisbier, 2021). Given the high co-occurrence of sensory processing differences, motor coordination difficulties, and SEMH needs in our pupil population, we prioritise goal-based, practical, and meaningful interventions embedded into our daily curriculum.

Our Sensory and Physical curriculum is underpinned by:

- Neurodiversity-affirming occupational therapy principles, which focus on strengths-based, autonomy-driven support.
- The core principles of sensory integration theory, particularly modulation of sensory input to support engagement and participation.
- A trauma-informed approach, recognising that sensory processing and emotional regulation challenges are often linked to early experiences of adversity.
- A graduated model of support, ensuring that all pupils have access to universal strategies, group-based interventions, and individualised OT where needed.
- Core occupational therapy evidence-base and theory. For example, our integrated therapeutic curriculum is also informed by flexible programmes, such as Recovery and Discovery Through Activity (Parkinson, 2022).

Through this curriculum, we aim to support pupils to:

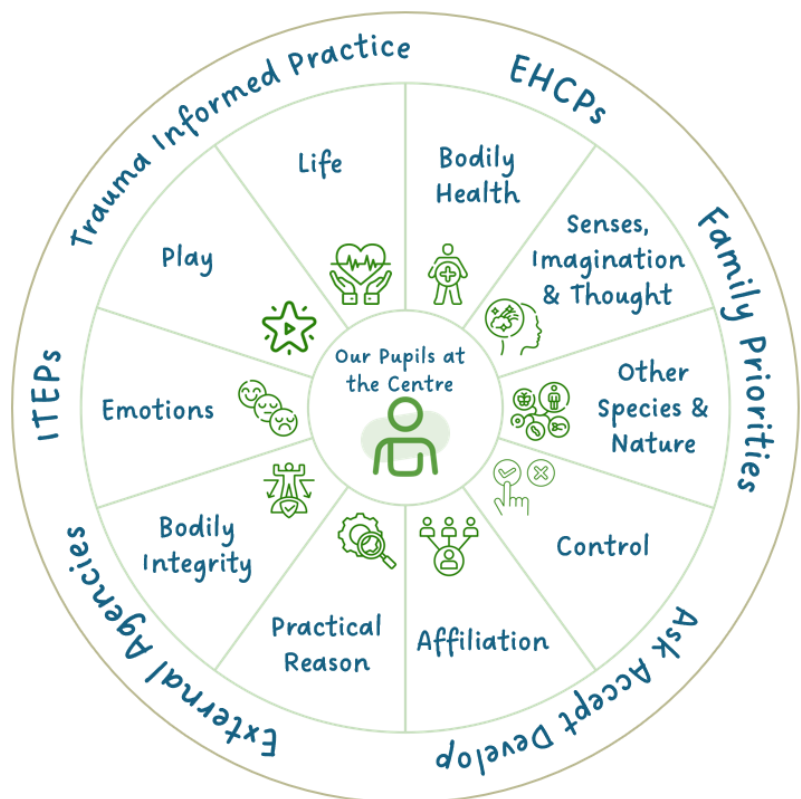
- Develop self-awareness around their sensory processing needs.
- Use sensory and motor-based strategies to regulate emotions and engage with learning.
- Build independence in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as dressing, toileting, and feeding.
- Develop functional motor skills to support play, learning, and life skills.
- Access adapted environments and tools that enable successful participation in school life.
- Develop movement skills and core physical abilities to support overall wellbeing and lifelong participation in physical activity.
- Access opportunities to explore occupational performance, participation and motivation through a range of meaningful activities related to leisure, play and learning.

Our Sensory and Physical curriculum most directly develops the capabilities of Bodily Health — supporting pupils to maintain and develop the physical functioning, sensory regulation, and bodily awareness needed for a healthy life — and Bodily Integrity — supporting pupils to have control over what happens to their bodies, to understand and assert their physical boundaries, and to access environments that do not cause them distress or harm.

The capability of Control is also central: the goal of sensory and motor development at MHS is not compliance with physical demands but the growth of pupils' own capacity to understand their bodies, regulate their responses, and act with increasing agency in the world.

Senses, Imagination and Thought is supported through the development of sensory processing and interoceptive awareness — supporting pupils to use their senses purposefully, to make sense of their physical experience, and to engage with the environment around them.

These capability domains are not developed in isolation from the rest of the curriculum. Sensory regulation is the precondition for learning in every other domain. Until a pupil can tolerate their sensory environment and achieve sufficient regulation, access to language, literacy, mathematics, and relationships is significantly constrained. The Sensory and Physical curriculum is therefore foundational to the whole school's curriculum intent.



Implementation

Our approach to supporting Sensory and Physical development consists of six key strands, each designed to target specific areas of need through evidence-based approaches and therapeutic intervention.

1. Sensory Processing and Self-Regulation

A sensory-informed approach is embedded into classroom practice, ensuring pupils are supported to understand and manage their sensory experiences.

Strategies include:

- Class-based sensory curriculum implementation, ensuring regulation strategies are part of daily routines.
- Access to sensory spaces within school grounds, including quiet zones, our purpose built soft-play room, sensory circuits, outdoor play equipment, and movement breaks.
- Consultation with our onsite occupational therapist to develop bespoke sensory support plans for individual pupils.
- Programs to support interoception and self-regulation, such as *The Interoception Curriculum (2019)* and *Zones of Regulation (2011)*.

We ensure that all sensory interventions are based on robust assessments, using frameworks such as *My Sensory World* to understand and support pupils' unique sensory needs.

2. Motor Skill Development and Physical Education

Motor skills are essential for engagement in schoolwork, play, and daily activities. We focus on:

- Class-based approaches to motor skill development, including embedded movement breaks and structured motor activities.
- Handwriting, fine motor, and gross motor intervention groups, either led by therapy assistants or delivered in class under OT guidance.
- Functional, goal-directed interventions to improve motor planning and coordination, such as *The Daily Mile* and *the NHS Fizzy Program*.
- In-depth motor skills assessments and bespoke programs for pupils needing additional support.

We recognise that motor skill development is most effective when integrated into real-life activities. Therefore, we embed practice and repetition into natural environments, such as playground activities, structured PE sessions, and outdoor learning.

3. Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Functional Independence

Building independence in self-care and daily routines is a key focus of our curriculum. We provide:

- Consultation on toileting, dressing, hygiene, and feeding, ensuring personalised support.
- Environmental modifications and specialist equipment to support self-care routines.
- Cognitive-based interventions to enhance problem-solving, executive function and praxis in daily tasks.
- Structured opportunities for pupils to practice independence, scaffolded to their developmental level.

By focusing on practical, life-relevant interventions, we enable pupils to develop the foundational skills needed for developing independence.

4. Life Skills and Transition to Adulthood

We ensure that pupils are well-prepared for future independence by embedding key life skills training into the curriculum. We evidence this through of MHS Community Passport. This includes:

- Instrumental ADLs, such as shopping, budgeting, planning, and travel training, dependent on developmental stage.
- Early, developmentally appropriate, opportunities for pupils to develop awareness of activities in the community and potential areas of interest for further education and training.
- Outdoor and physical education activities, promoting core motor skills, coordination, and resilience.

Evidence supports the effectiveness of group-based and peer-mediated interventions in developing life skills and promoting independence. Therefore, we use group models wherever appropriate to enhance learning through peer collaboration.

5. Trauma-Informed Occupational Therapy

We recognise that sensory processing and motor skill difficulties often co-occur with experiences of trauma. Our OT provision is trauma-sensitive, ensuring:

- A safe, structured approach to self-regulation through sensory and movement-based interventions.
- Collaboration with the multidisciplinary team to ensure holistic support.
- Caregiver involvement in intervention planning, particularly around intimate and personal care, ensuring strategies are generalised across settings.
- Opportunities for play, leisure, and social engagement, recognising their importance in recovery and wellbeing.

By ensuring occupational therapy is integrated into a trauma-informed framework, we maximise the emotional safety and engagement of our pupils.

6. Neurodiversity-Affirming Practice: Ask, Accept, Develop

Our Sensory and Physical curriculum is grounded in a neurodiversity-affirming approach, ensuring that pupils are supported in ways that align with their unique strengths, processing styles, and lived experiences. Rather than imposing compliance-based or deficit-focused interventions, we prioritise empowerment, autonomy, and meaningful participation.

We embed neurodiversity-affirming occupational therapy principles into practice by:

- Valuing and respecting each pupil's sensory and motor profile – We move beyond traditional models of 'normalisation' and instead support pupils to recognise, advocate for, and embrace their own sensory and motor needs.
- Using the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) framework (Kielhofner, 2002) to ensure our interventions are motivating, purposeful, and personally relevant. This supports engagement in activities that align with each pupil's intrinsic interests and values.
- Presuming competence and offering choice – Pupils are given autonomy over their sensory regulation strategies, movement-based activities, and adaptations to their physical environment.
- Rejecting deficit-based social skills training – We do not impose neurotypical social expectations, recognising that differences in social communication and motor planning are valid and do not need 'fixing'. Instead, we focus on self-advocacy, self-awareness, and practical life skills.
- Adopting a strength-based approach – All interventions are framed around capabilities rather than limitations, ensuring pupils develop self-confidence and a positive sense of identity.

By embedding neurodiversity-affirming principles, we ensure that pupils feel understood, empowered, and supported, enabling them to develop self-efficacy, independence, and a secure sense of self.

Impact

We measure the success of our Sensory and Physical curriculum through a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment methods, ensuring we track individual progress and whole-school effectiveness.

1. Assessment and Progress Monitoring

- Evidence for Learning – Pupils' progress against their EHCP Sensory and Physical outcomes is reviewed regularly through termly short term ITEP target reviews.
- Occupational Therapy Assessments, including:
 - *Goal Based Outcome (GBO)* – tracking achievement of personalised therapy goals.
 - *Child Occupational Self-Assessment (COSA)* – assessing pupils' perspectives on their functional abilities.
 - *Sensory Processing Measure (SPM-2)* – to evaluate sensory regulation progress.
 - *Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency, Second Edition (BOT-2)* – to evaluate motor performance.
 - *Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (BEERY VMI)* – to evaluate visual motor integration.
 - *The OFG Handwriting Checklist* – to evaluate handwriting competency and proficiency.
- Boxall Profile Assessments x3 yearly – supporting an understanding of emotional development and self-regulation.
- Use of Engagement Scales to review impact of provisions, such as Sensory Stories.

2. Pupil Outcomes and School Data

- Reduction in sensory-related distress and behaviour incidents, showing improved regulation.
- Increased engagement in learning, measured through classroom participation and therapy session observations.
- Improved fine and gross motor skills, evidenced through task completion and motor coordination assessments.
- Pupils accessing more independent participation in daily routines such as dressing, feeding, and hygiene.

3. Observations and Therapy Evaluations

- Therapist, teacher, and support staff observations of pupils using sensory strategies effectively.
- Tracking participation in sensory circuits, motor skill interventions, and life skills sessions.
- Use of structured reflection tools to evaluate the effectiveness of sensory-based and motor interventions over time.

4. Parent and Pupil Feedback

- Parent surveys and consultation meetings to assess generalisation of sensory strategies and independence at home.
- Pupil voice is captured via structured discussions and developmentally appropriate self-evaluations to ensure interventions are meaningful and accessible.

Through this structured approach, we ensure that our Sensory and Physical curriculum is effectively supporting our pupils' engagement, self-regulation, and independence, enabling them to access the broader curriculum and life beyond school.



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