



# **Classroom Sensory Environment Audit**

**A quick checklist for identifying barriers to learning**

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## **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

*This audit looks at the environment... not the student.  
It supports access, regulation, and learning readiness.*

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## How to use this audit

- Walk through the classroom during a typical lesson
- Tick what is **present**, not what is ideal
- Focus on **patterns**, not perfection
- Use results to make **small, low-effort changes first**

You do **not** need student disclosure for this to be useful.

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## 1. Sound (Auditory Load)

Check anything that applies:

- Constant background noise (corridors, traffic, HVAC)
- Sudden or unpredictable sounds
- Overlapping voices during instruction
- Chairs scraping / equipment noise
- Audio content without captions or volume control

### Safety signals present?

- Quiet seating options
- Clear turn-taking norms
- Permission to use ear defenders / headphones

Notes / quick adjustments:

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## 2. Light (Visual Comfort)

- Harsh overhead lighting
- Flickering or buzzing lights
- Glare from windows or whiteboards
- Bright screens used for long periods
- No option to dim or vary lighting

Safety signals present?

- Lamps / softer lighting options
- Blinds or curtains
- Seating away from direct glare

**Notes / quick adjustments:**

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### 3. Visual Load (Cognitive Demand on the Eyes)

- Walls crowded with posters or displays
- Too many instructions visible at once
- Moving visuals during explanation
- Multiple focal points competing for attention

**Safety signals present?**

- Clear visual hierarchy
- One main focus during teaching
- Calm or neutral areas

**Notes / quick adjustments:**

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### 4. Space & Movement

- Tight seating or limited personal space
- Frequent movement near desks
- Blocked pathways
- No option to stand, move, or shift position

**Safety signals present?**

- Clear walkways
- Choice of seating where possible
- Movement breaks built in

**Notes / quick adjustments:**

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### 5. Temperature & Air Quality

- Room often too hot or too cold
- Poor ventilation
- Strong smells (cleaning products, food, perfumes)

#### **Safety signals present?**

- Windows that open
- Layer-friendly dress expectations
- Scent-aware practices

#### **Notes / quick adjustments:**

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## **6. Instruction & Sensory Timing**

- Instructions given while students are still settling
- Multiple instructions delivered verbally only
- Rapid transitions without warning
- No pause between tasks

#### **Safety signals present?**

- Instructions repeated in writing
- Countdown warnings before transitions
- Brief pauses to settle before tasks

#### **Notes / quick adjustments:**

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## **7. Regulation & Break Signals**

- No clear way for students to take breaks
- Breaks framed as rewards or punishments
- Students must ask publicly to step out

#### **Safety signals present?**

- Quiet break spaces or options
- Non-verbal break signals
- Normalised movement or rest breaks

#### **Notes / quick adjustments:**

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## 8. Overall Safety Signals

Tick what students are likely to *feel* in this space:

- Predictability
- Permission to adjust
- Safety to opt out briefly
- Calm adult presence
- Clear expectations

If these signals are missing, students may mask or disengage.

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### Priority reflection (2 minutes)

Top 3 sensory barriers identified:

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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One low-effort change to trial this week:

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### Why this audit matters

Sensory strain often shows up as:

- inattention
- behaviour concerns
- emotional distress
- fatigue
- inconsistent performance

Reducing sensory load improves **learning access for everyone**, not just ND students.

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### Gentle reminders for educators

- Regulation comes before learning
  - Quiet changes have big impact
  - Students adapt silently until they can't
  - Environment shapes behaviour more than motivation
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## **Bottom line**

If the classroom is overwhelming, learning can't land.

This audit helps you ask:

*“What might be getting in the way... before we look at the student?”*

That shift changes outcomes.

