Classroom Environment

## Areas to consider within a classroom:

**Physical setup** – furniture, equipment, resources, seating plans

**Overall atmosphere** – noise levels, lighting, smells

## Why is the classroom environment important?

The design of a classroom can impact students’ learning experience and ultimately their overall performance. Being able to adapt/create an environment around the needs of students can help reduce distraction, mitigate physical discomfort and promote better participation.

## Examples of ways to adapt the classroom environment:

* Promote students to sit with a comfortable and supported posture – feet on the floor, knees and hips positioned at 90-degree angles; elbows resting on the table at a 90-degree angle. If possible, seek different furniture/equipment for students who experience difficulty with sitting, which in effect impacts their learning/engagement.
* Students should be sat directly facing the teaching area where possible. For some students, you may want to consider seating them away from external distraction (windows/doors) and/or away from direct sunlight/bright areas of the room. Dimmable lightbulbs and/or blinds can be used to alter the lighting levels and glare from windows, to optimise the learning environment.
* Soft furnishings can improve the acoustics and decrease the echo and loudness of noise. Be aware of low-level background noises, like a ticking clock, fan or computer machines, and change/remove these where possible. Classical music, where appropriate, might soften the auditory environment.
* Decorate using a monochromatic colour scheme and allow for blank or neutral spaces. Blue, violet and green hues are typically calming whereas bright colours are generally alerting and should be used sparingly to draw attention to important details or areas of information.
* Avoid fluorescent bulbs if possible and limit visual distractions. Remove clutter (including information on ‘overkill’ bulletin boards), secure pictures/resources to walls so they don’t flutter, consider how the lightning may bounce off/reflect against different materials.
* Group work can be daunting and create a sensory overload environment. Be sensitive in how students are grouped to enable social interaction in a secure environment and where applicable, consider access to a low stimulation workspace where young people can go to complete work.
* Create distraction-free/quiet areas where students can go if necessary.

## Other strategies/things to consider:

* Chewing gum, sucking on a sports water-bottle, eating sour sweets and crunchy or chewy foods can help increase concentration for some people. Fidget toys and squeezable objects can also help people regulate themselves against external stimuli.
* Weighted items such as a “lap buddy” or beanbag provide deep pressure input that re-enforces body awareness and may have a calming effect.
* Regular movement breaks and allowing students to change positions when working can help their organisation and attention level. This could be incorporated with/followed by heavy work activity, such as handing out resources or moving chairs, to help students achieve a calm/alert state. Additionally, some students may benefit from sitting on a Movein’sit cushion due to the dynamic movement and feedback it offers.