



Physical Development and Occupational Therapy in the Small Specialist Classes at Acre Hall

At Acre Hall, we need to support the development of physical skills for our children, many of whom have low muscle tone, hypermobility, poor co-ordination or sensory needs.

Over the years, school staff have received reports and implemented advice from Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists working with our children. We have learned to deliver many outcomes through our daily teaching and learning. There is also an extensive online resource for school professionals to access regarding the assessment and development of motor and sensory skills.

All the children in the SSCs have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and many of them contain recommendations relating to Physical and Sensory development skills. Whilst the Physical and Occupational

Therapy team and EHCP can advise upon the skills and outcomes that have been identified for the children, they do not prescribe how a school will deliver these, because all schools are different.

The information below gives some **brief** examples of how we include Physical and Sensory development skills in the curriculum at Acre Hall. These are by no means the only things we do. Many of our classroom resources, activities and creative curriculum spaces are used daily to aid physical development.

Fine motor skills development

Children are engaged in many activities that help them to develop, finger, wrist and arm strength alongside co-ordination, precision and control. Here are just a few ways we might do this in a normal week-

Theraputty, piano fingers (children pretend to play to music), dough and rolling/cutting tools, dough disco (squeezing and squashing to music), jigsaws, threading, peg boards, fishing games, tweezers, scrunching tin foil, fiddle toys, snipping and cutting with scissors, tearing thick paper, scooping and grabbing counters and bricks, placing objects precisely (eg matching button game), tracing over lines, dot to dots, drawing, handwriting practise, colouring, painting, printing, finger painting, using paint or crayons on sandpaper, writing in sand/shaving foam/mud/cornflower mix, playing with toys that need two hands e.g. stickle bricks, Velcro, Duplo blocks, using construction equipment that needs strength to click together or pull apart, practising buttons on clothing.

Sometimes children may need specific resources to help in this area eg tripod pencils, pencil grips, squeeze scissors, sloping boards or a seat wedge (to ensure correct posture and balance).

Gross motor skills development

Children are engaged in many activities that help them to develop balance, control of the body, limb co-ordination, eye hand coordination, stamina and muscle strength.

Warm up with Count to 100 song with gross motor actions every morning

Dance sessions copying movements from screen

5 minutes breaks (jumping jacks, jogging on the spot and marching)

Chalking and painting outside (large movements)

Pulling/pushing resistance activities with equipment

Using big toys that require two hands e.g. balls, balloons, big teddy bears, using both hands during action songs e.g. head shoulders knees and toes

Yoga 2 x 10 minutes sessions each week

Outdoor play- scooters, bikes, stilts, aiming games, climbing and balancing equipment

Bat and ball skills including aiming, throwing, catching, rolling, bouncing, bowling, striking

Running, chasing and dodging games

Some of the recommended exercises can be taught in our P.E lessons (twice a week) or in whole class warm up sessions.

Sensory needs

Your child may have a detailed Occupational Therapy assessment for their sensory needs. Many of the exercise and recommendations can be carried out at home, but we will also support your child in school by following advice within the report where we can.

Below is a brief summary of activities we can offer at school to support sensory needs. Many of these suggestions have been provided by the Occupational Therapy service over the years and benefit all the children in our classes.

Proprioception

This is the sense that allows information to be sent to the brain from the joints and muscles about the position and movements of the body. Proprioceptive activities can have a calming effect on children who have difficulty

processing sensory information and they can also have a regulating effect on mood and attention levels.

Hold edges of chair, pull up through arms, push down with bottom and push down with feet.

Hold insides of knees, push knees together whilst trying to pull them apart with hands.

Push palms together with elbows out to the sides.

Cushion squash

Ripping up cardboard to go in the recycling bin.

Squeezing a stress ball.

Wall push

'Heavy work' activities like carrying a toy box, bucket of sand etc

Swimming (KS2)

Therapeutic putty exercises

Cooking activities such as stirring a thick cake mix or kneading dough for bread.

Auditory

Some children are sensitive to noises and can find it difficult to be in noisy, busy environments. They can also find it difficult to filter out unnecessary auditory information so may miss instructions if there is a lot of background noise.

Sing or chant requests to catch attention.

Vary the volume and rhythm of instructions given.

Make sure we have visual attention before giving instructions.

Ask a child to repeat instructions back to check they have heard especially if there has been background noise.

Give instructions in small steps rather than all in one go.

Use ear defenders in noisy environments.

Give extra time to allow for processing auditory information

Reduce background noise as much as possible e.g. close windows/door.

When possible, warn about upcoming sounds that will be loud and/or unusual and encourage child to leave the room or put on ear

defenders or headphones.

Listening to music

A low distraction area within the classroom or in another room when focused work is required.

Movement

Some children unconsciously use movement to help to self-regulate.

Give regular opportunities to engage in movement activities throughout the day.

Do not expect a child to sit completely still.

Allow movement breaks with a purpose eg moving equipment to another place

Use a Move-n-sit cushion on a chair and the floor when sitting

Wake-up Shake-up type activities at the start of the day

Star jumps on the spot

Cycling and scooting

Use of fidget toys throughout the day to aid concentration.

Oral Proprioceptive

Children seek information (feedback) from oral stimulation or use it to sooth anxiety.

Use of 'chewellery' throughout the day.

Eating chewy foods, e.g. liquorice, raisins, dried fruit, fruit roll-ups etc.

Eating crunchy foods, e.g. raw carrots

Sucking through a thin straw or sucking thick liquid through a normal sized straw, e.g. yogurt, smoothie, thick milkshake.

Play games that involve blowing, e.g. blowing a pompom across the table with a straw, blowing a paper windmill or blow football.

Play games that involve sucking, e.g. moving liquid from one container to another using a straw, sucking through a straw to move pompoms or other suitable lightweight objects one at a time from one container to another.

Whistles, party blowers, musical instruments that require breath control

Blow through a straw to create mountain of bubbles.

Touch

Some children have a hypersensitivity to touch.

Make sure there is space between children when at a desk or lining up so that there is no accidental touching

Use firm touch when touching. Do not use light touch. Avoid touching from behind without warning.

Squashing a stress ball or using a fidget toy

Provide a texture box full of a variety of different textured objects for exploring during free time, e.g. velvet, spiky ball, furry soft toys, silk scarf, rubbery textures etc.

Tactile activities, e.g. exploring textures such as shaving foam, corn flour mixed with a little water, or play dough/modelling clay activities, craft and gluing activities

Play with vibrating toys.

Sensory Overload & Regulation

Sensory systems are not always regulated so children find it difficult to be calm and maintain an optimum level of alertness. Children can be on 'high alert' which contributes to or causes his anxiety.

Proprioceptive and movement activities (see above) are calming and help with self-regulation

Chewing can help to calm, so access to 'chewellery' or crunchy foods is advised

A sensory survival box e.g. a stress ball, chewy, fidget toys, ear defenders,

A 'sensory retreat' at school to allow a child space to unwind after any overwhelming situations eg a space that is in the dark and filled with heavy blankets.

A quieter space to work in the classroom for when a child is feeling overwhelmed

Use slow, rhythmic, repetitive activities to calm

Clear routines and use visual schedules to track of the day. Make the environment as predictable as possible.

Prepare children in advance for any changes and introduce those changes slowly if possible.

Incorporate movement/heavy work breaks during the day.

Encourage proprioceptive exercises and deep breathing when a change in routine is anticipated.

We hope this has given you a better understanding of what Physical and Sensory support looks like at Acre Hall. School staff are happy to help with resources and ideas for you to implement at home, or to discuss ideas from the report that medical professionals have provided for your child.