Sensory Learning
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What does a “sensory” curriculum look like, and who is it for?

This information booklet has been written for educators who are supporting students with significant special needs. A pupil working at this developmental level can be any chronological age, but their skills are at a much lower level. These children are working within the “pre-key-stage-standards” which means that their learning is between a typical nursery to year 2 level (PKSS 1-6).

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-key-stage-1-standards
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-key-stage-2-standards

Learning for these children must take into consideration their interests, their concentration length and involve their senses. As they experience activities they will learn skills, and they will not be at a stage where recording through extended written work is meaningful or useful. Their progress is measured in small incremental steps of personal achievement.

Involving their senses (seeing / listening / tasting / touching / smelling) and holding their interest through kinaesthetic tasks will prove highly successful with a pupil who may experience difficulties with independence, struggle to complete age appropriate tasks and retain information. The booklet has been broken down into 8 sections:

1. Communication
2. Reading
3. Writing
4. Maths
5. The world around us
6. Music and the arts
7. Independence
8. Topic based learning

It is by no means exhaustive, and it should be used as suggestions and areas to explore further in your own setting. A resource pack accompanies this booklet with downloadable resources that can be accessed through the SENDAT Outreach website at: https://sendat.academy/outreach/
Section 1
Communication
Communication for PKSS students

Students working within the PKSS may use a number of ways to communicate.

- Speaking
- Signing
- PECS
- Symbols
- Gesture and vocalisation
- Idiosyncratic or personal communication
- A variety of above

Counting to three in BSL
Speaking and listening and communicating

There are many different ways of producing signs and symbols. Here are some websites that support the use of signs and symbols most commonly used at home and in school.

Widgit symbols

https://www.widgit.com/products/widgit-online/index.htm

Widgit Online, Create, print, share and translate symbol materials online

Communicate In Print

Short video explaining the use of symbols https://communicate-in-print.software.informer.com

Desktop publishing program for creating symbol-supported resources for printing

SymbolStix

https://www.cricksoft.com/us/symbol-sets/symbolstix

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TVz0FodmeQ 3 minute video explaining use of SymbolStix

SymbolStix depicts activities and people as lively, vibrant stick figures, drawn with a distinctive flair to create “stick figures with an attitude”.
01 Communication - ideas

Speaking and listening and communicating

Sym Writer

https://www.widgit.com/products/symwriter/index.htm

Writers of any ability can use Sim Writer 2, a symbol word processor to see the meaning of words as they type or input content.

Sign Language

Sign language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression and body language. Sign language is used mainly by people who are Deaf or have hearing impairments. The two most common are BSL and Makaton. Makaton is designed to help hearing people with learning or communication difficulties. It uses signs and symbols, with speech, in spoken word order. BSL is the language of the deaf community in the UK. It is a naturally evolving language, with its own grammar, word order and has regional variations.

https://www.british-sign.co.uk/ offer resources and online courses which you can sign up for a minimum contribution of £10 if you are a key worker during the Coronavirus crisis

There are lots of youtube clips to help you learn basic BSL signs

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyicdRI3ULg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMNHvXSW4iE

https://www.youtube.com/user/SingingHandsUK Some lovely signed stories and songs to use at home and in the classroom
If you have a pupil who struggles with communication, you can make a referral to the SALT team. They can then advise you on steps to support, Language Link resources and they may accept the pupil onto their case load.

https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/service.page?id=XC-HslMxH_s


Children's Speech and Language Therapy is a core service provided by Integrated Community Paediatric Services (part of Suffolk Community Healthcare). The service sees children with a range of speech, language and communication needs (including eating/drinking difficulties). The service provides an assessment and intervention service for children with identified needs.
Interest in stories, role play and sharing books for PKSS students

Students working within the PKSS will be working at the very first stages of “reading”

• Sharing fiction stories
• Finding out about areas of interest through non-fiction
• Browsing the library or book boxes
• Re-creating stories through role play
• Re-telling stories using small world toys
• Listening and watching stories online
• Matching labels, familiar logos and signs to the world around them.
02 Literacy and early reading - ideas

Sharing stories and interest in letters and sounds

Sensory stories are simple narratives with items that can be held to support the pupil interacting with the plot and characters. For example, The Very Hungry Caterpillar would have a “story bag” containing a small caterpillar, items of food, a butterfly, a plastic leaf, a bag of dried leaves, and a small ping pong ball to represent the egg. You can make these from resources in your school or purchase story bags from sites such as:
https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/literacy/story-resources/story-sack-resource-packs

Role play and sharing an interest in the narrative of a story encourages the pupil to recollect and retell aspects of the story that interested them. This allows you to identify what they know and helps you to support the facts they did not remember. Free role play in a setting allows the pupil to use their creativity in familiar environment, and can springboard into story telling.
https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/20-best-role-play-ideas-for-kids/
This link shows ideas and suggestions for role play in KS1.

Twinkl has some great packs to print and put up to create role play for KS2 students, such as the cinema and science lab.
Sharing stories and interest in letters and sounds

Phonics vs flashcards

Many students working within the PKSS experience difficulties in learning and retaining reading skills. A combination of offering interest in text (such as role play and story sacks) as well as offering reading in a familiar context will make huge difference to the pupil’s interest and therefore their ability to focus and retain reading skills. SENDAT Outreach has put together an English booklet to support small steps progress in English skills which includes reading. Research suggests that some children who struggle to learn to read using a phonics based approach are more successful when offered a “see and say” approach. The Down’s syndrome community have developed a reading scheme based on this principle and information about it ca be found here:


This scheme can be very successful with students with learning needs as well as those with DS.

My “I can read” dictionary

Starting with words that the students sees and recognises as concrete objects can also help emergent readers. Post it notes on doors, tables, bed, chair etc. Clear and regular repetition of the word in context to the object and then a collection of the pupil's personal dictionary of words they can read will build their confidence and show them that words have meaning.

Specific sections of familiar reading schemes focus on reading difficulties, such as Oxford reading (KS1) tree and Rapid readers (KS2) focus on offering words at a low reading level fut subjects that fit the age equivalent reader.

There are lots of reading interventions available, and the SENDAT Outreach team have a resource that reviews and rates interventions schemes in terms of their impact.
Section 3

Literacy, early writing
Interest in making marks, fine motor skills, gross motor skills for PKSS students

Students working within the PKSS will be working at the very first stages of “writing”

- Exploring tools that make marks
- Fine motor skill activities that “warm up” the hand; pinching, gripping, sorting
- Practising hand - eye coordination
- Using “writing” within the context of play to give it meaning
- Writing for a variety of purposes
- Gross motor skill activities that develop body awareness and proprioceptive senses; jumping, catching, balancing
Suggestion and ideas


Instructions and suggestions on how to set up sensory activities involving letter recognition

https://www.learning4kids.net/2016/02/07/sight-word-play-dough/

Lots of ideas to use in the classroom but if you want to print off their activities you have to download from website


Lots of ideas for different sand play which helps fine motor control
Suggestion and ideas

https://theimaginationtree.com/40-fine-motor-skills-activities-for-kids/
A great free website for fine motor skills tasks for all ages. Always complete a FMS task before mark making or pencil control tasks.

Link to the download from South Warwickshire NHS OT team, detailing ways to support posture and Fine motor skills activities for MLD children.

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Ion-Teodorescu-Write-start-Handwriting/dp/B00NBDPUDU/ref=pd_lpo_14_img_1/257-0039849-3768766?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B00NBDPUDU&pd_rd_r=e3165562-5a22-4367-8c12-a61935a31a6f&pd_rd_w=P3O35&pd_rd_wg=W0niZ&pf_rd_p=7b8e3b03-1439-4489-abd4-4a138cf4ecaf&pf_rd_r=126S3YD0971738A2YK7K&psc=1&refRID=126S3YD0971738A2YK7K
A great resource based on the Teuoderescu writing scheme. This can be borrowed from the Outreach team to try before you buy.

https://www.theottoolbox.com/fine-motor-skills/
A great free website for fine motor skills tasks for all ages written by occupational therapists.

https://www.tts-group.co.uk/motor-skills-united-occupational-therapy-programme/1002394.html
A great book of lesson plans taking you through each sense and skills written by occupational therapists. This can be borrowed from the Outreach team to try before you buy.
Section 4

Maths
Early maths skills

Interest in counting, sorting, identifying, and matching for PKSS students

Students working within the PKSS will be working at the very first stages of “maths”

- Making sets
- Identifying numbers
- Recognising and repeating patterns
- Playing with shapes
- Sorting and classifying
- Explaining their choices
- Making tallies and representing the count
- Undertaking total
- One to one correspondence
Early maths skills and ideas

https://www.learning4kids.net/2016/05/02/printable-measuring-length-learning-centre-mats/

Good ideas to use with equipment already available. Some resources free, but if you want to print off their activities you have to buy downloads from website.

http://www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk/blog/2019/09/sensory-maths-activities-for-early-years/

Top 10 sensory maths activities for children in EYFS


A range of strategies rather than activities. Practical and useful ideas.

https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/series/numicon/?region=uk

Based on a **concrete-pictorial-abstract approach**, **Numicon** encourages children to explore maths using structured imagery and apparatus in order to understand and explain mathematical concepts.
Early maths skills and ideas

SENDAT Outreach have created a maths planning and assessment booklet for number. It allows teachers to plan small steps curriculum for their PKSS pupils working standard 1-4. Please see the resource pack or the Outreach team to access the free booklet. It combines the work completed by Willow Dene school and matches the levels to the pre-key-stage-standards.

https://sendat.academy/outreach/useful-resources/

Further Willow Dene resources can be found on TES, but they are matched to the P scales. They are, however useful for ideas and suggestions for activities.

Section 5

The world around us

- Science
- Geography
- History
- Outdoor Learning
Exploring the world around us

Interest in routines, outdoor play, the school grounds, the people around them

Students working within the PKSS will be interested in their immediate surroundings and will find less concrete subjects difficult to understand

• My classroom/my school
• Following routines and accepting Adult led tasks as well as personal interests
• Exploring the natural world outside
• Forest school/ play with a purpose
• Significant dates in the year that relate to them
• Practical tasks that explain processes they can interact with
Humanities and Science ideas

https://www.learning4kids.net/2015/02/24/five-senses-sense-smell-touch-activity/
Shows how to make smell swatches and touch boards. Children experiment with smell and touch to explore the world around them.

https://inclusiveteach.com/2019/05/13/the-a-z-of-sensory-learning-activities/
range of sensory activities that aim to maximise potential of simple ideas in the classroom setting

https://childhood101.com/sensory-play-ideas/ divided into activities for touch, sight, smell, sound, taste and often with a youtube clip to show you what to do
Humanities and Science ideas - 2

https://www.pinterest.co.uk/sarahaultseidel/sensory-boxes/ - ideas for sensory boxes

https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/kids-sensory-play-ideas/ - Simple science and STEM ideas for sensory play, 50 sensory play activities with hands on fun, exploring textures

https://www.thechaosandtheclutter.com/archives/huge-list-outdoor-sensory-fun - A variety of outdoor activities with clear instructions and pictures.

http://www.cherrygardenschool.co.uk/Community - Cherry garden school for students with SLD Has a great community page with lots of resources and suggestions.
Section 6

The Arts
Students working within the PKSS will usually be interested in the arts. There may be issues with sensory needs, over stimulation or an inability to manage loud noises.

- Open ended tasks with a few choices
- Moving to music and expressing physically the emotions/response they feel
- Large pieces of work that allow for bigger movements
- Stepping through a process, rather than offering a model.
- Limiting the choice of tool, but opening the interpretation.
06 | The arts and Music - ideas

**Touching and making / seeing and sound**

https://www.learning4kids.net/2016/03/13/creative-sand-art-activity/

Based around the story of The Magic Beach by Alison Lester. This activity looks at different landscapes and colours that make up these landscapes.

**https://kidssteamlab.com/sensory-art/**

Art activities related to the senses

**https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/bring-the-noise/SEND-music-sensory-activity/zdxtqp3**

Comes with video clips to support your sessions

**https://www.notimeforflashcards.com/2019/09/sensory-art-activities-for-preschool.html**

A selection of art activities that rely heavily on the 5 senses

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cih4U17ph8A**

15 quick and easy sensory crafts for kids
The arts and Music - ideas

Touching and making / seeing and sound

https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/bring-the-noise/eyfs-ks1-music-play-it-bring-the-noise/z4sq92p

Explore the different elements that make up a song, play or clap along with the music and make then listen back to your own version of songs

http://www.musicintheround.co.uk/user_content/files/resource_pack.pdf

This was a year's project and the pack provides a range of resources to develop skills and confidence in leading musical activity. This pack explores how music can support learning in each of the EYFS areas and includes specific activities designed to be incorporated into everyday practice.

https://www.literacyshed.com/the-music-shed.html

The videos aren't visually inspiring, instead they aim to draw inspiration from listening to the music and lyrics. These clips use music to inspire writing and literacy based activities. Suitable for pupils working at P5/P6

https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/bring-the-noise/SEND-telling-story-music/z7psyc/

SEND: Telling a story with music and sensory exploration


Looks at music apps suitable for pupils with SEND
Section 7

Independence
PKSS students often find independence in school difficult. The key is to design small steps of progress and break tasks and routines down into manageable steps.

Working towards independence may be a long journey, but the first steps are crucial in teaching them that they have control over their choices and can achieve small steps without support.

- Now and next boards
- Visual timetable
- Use of symbol prompts
- “chunking” instructions
- Use of speech button prompts
- Knowing the student so that you can offer rewards that are meaningful
- Reward quickly and often, to associate participation with result.
Repeating tasks and following routines to develop confidence in their own abilities

Students working at this level often find independence really tricky. Often the pupil can complete a task with an adult prompting, but when they are left to continue, they stop, or lose their focus.

• One way to develop independence is to repeat tasks that the pupil has completed earlier in the day. This is not to be confused with a task they have started but not finished. Independence can be encouraged by repeating exactly the same task, but in a different place or with different people. Students working at this level do not always generalise their skills, so repeating the exact same task in a different place or with different people allows them to experience success, and reaffirm the gained skill.

• Repetition of the schedule also builds resilience and independence, so if the pupil knows that the task they are completing with an adult will be completed again later, it gives the pupil more incentive to participate and master the skill while they have support.

• Use of a now and next board or a simple visual timetable will prompt the student to follow their activity from beginning to end as they will have reward to gain once the task is completed. It is essential, however, to ensure that the reward is something they genuinely want to do! Offering “time in the book corner” or an extension task will not necessarily give the student the draw they need to persevere with a task independently.

• Chunking the task so that the pupil does not feel overwhelmed by the entirety of the activity will help the pupil to see an end point and experience success as they move through a stepped task.

• Ensuring that the pupil is given a task that they can actually complete by themselves is clearly an essential aspect to developing independence and careful though should be given to what or how you want the pupil to participate so that they can experience quick success. This builds a feeling of “I can” and encourages the pupil to continue with the next step.

• Spend time as a staff observing the pupil to identify the length of time they can really concentrate for. If the pupil focusses really well for 5 minutes, then ensure that the independence task can be completed in 5 minutes. Build in a “brain break” to allow the pupil to “re-set” and then focus for a further 5 minutes for the next chunk of the activity. https://www.teachstarter.com/gb/blog/26-brain-break-ideas-classroom-gb/ link to explain brain breaks. Also see Twinkl. Examples are in the OUTREACH SENDAT resource pack and online at SENDAT Outreach.
Section 8
Planning across the curriculum
PKSS students often find topic based work more engaging. Subjects are themed to match the topic, chosen to appeal to the pupil’s interests.

https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/sites/pathstoliteracy.perkinsdev1.org/files/MSI_curriculum_v2.pdf  A curriculum for multi sensory impaired children - recommended for teachers setting up a curriculum for PLMD pupils P1-P8. Has 4 phases – phase 1 P1(i) - P2 (ii), phase 2 P2(i) – P3(ii), phase 3 P3(ii) – P6, phases 4 P5-P8


http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/curriculum_microsite/SEN_PMLD_thematic_units/index.asp  - Practical resources for teachers developing a sensory curriculum for PLMD pupils 3-19 years  - recommended to