



Use of Sensory Tools

Adopted: November 2025

Review: July 2026

Policy intention

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidelines regarding the use of sensory resources and other auxiliary aids, such as, fidgets, chew tools, ear defenders, within New Milton Junior School. This policy aims to ensure that the use of such tools is beneficial for identified pupils in a classroom whilst maintaining a conducive learning environment for everyone.

These tools have become popular support aids for children with Autism Spectrum Condition, ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorder, anxiety, and other additional needs.

Although fidgets may appear fun and enjoyable, for many pupils with SEND they can serve a beneficial purpose in supporting pupils' regulation and attention by offering sensory stimulation, reducing stress, improving focus, and helping pupils to regulate during periods of high anxiety.

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must take reasonable steps to prevent disabled pupils from being placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to their peers. This can include providing auxiliary aids (e.g., fidget tools, chew tools, ear defenders) if these reduce barriers to learning. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) also states that reasonable adjustments should be anticipatory, systematic, and individualised.

A sensory regulation tool is likely to be a reasonable adjustment when:

- the pupil has a disability that substantially affects self-regulation, attention, sensory processing or anxiety;
- the tool clearly reduces distress or increases access to learning;
- the cost is low and the adjustment is practical;
- the tool doesn't create health or safety risks;
- staff can manage its use within routines.

Schools don't have to provide one if:

- the child is not disabled (under the Equality Act definition);
- the need is based on preference, not disadvantage;
- the item would pose a safety or hygiene issue;
- the tool worsens behaviour or distracts other pupils;
- a more suitable or safer alternative is available;
- it becomes high-cost or requires specialist staffing.

This policy applies to all pupils, staff, parents/carers, and visitors to New Milton Junior School.

- Sensory/fidget/chew tools are therapeutic aids and should always be seen as supports for learning – **not toys**;
- They will be authorised, by the SENDCo, to support regulation and learning when evidence shows an individual benefit;
- This policy applies to all pupils with sensory needs, attention differences, or additional SEND needs.

Authorisation

- Initial request can be made by a parent, the child's class teacher, or the pupil raises a need;
- Use of a sensory tool will only be approved by the SENDCo, in agreement with parents, after brief trial;
- The SENDCo will seek additional advice for individual pupils from external agency professionals, including: Occupational Therapists, Sensory Integration Practitioners, or Speech and Language Therapists, as required.
- If agreed, in discussion with SENDCo and classteacher, the child will read and sign a sensory tool 'contract' which will explain expectations of use;
- The school leadership team ratifies whole-school parameters.

Approved item criteria

- Quiet, small, discrete, non-toxic, no loose small parts, easy to clean.
- Chew tools must be made for oral use, food-safe silicone etc.

A good sensory tool should:

- Be quiet and safe;
- Be used without looking, so the child can still focus on the lesson;
- Stay out of other children's line of sight, avoiding distractions;
- Meet the child's individual sensory needs (some crave textures, others avoid them);
- Fit the child's physical abilities (if they can't manipulate it easily, it's not helpful);
- Be affordable and durable.

Permitted sensory tools:

- stress ball;
- silent putty / blu-tac;
- textured strip;
- chair resistance band;
- tangle / twisting blocks;
- small smooth pebble;
- chewable silicone necklaces or bracelets (certified food-safe);
- ear defenders;
- resistance band/theraband;
- wobble cushion.

Some sensory tools that are not tools for learning:

- Monkey Noodles – pose a risk of injury due to mis-use;
- Fidget Spinners – noisy, visually distracting, and susceptible for peer distraction;
- Poppits – great for a quiet sensory box, not for a classroom;
- Slime –poses a risk of damage to classroom equipment and clothing;
- Anything that clicks, spins noisily, bounces, or leaks goo – if it disrupts others, it's not a tool.

Some possible alternatives:

- Some children might need movement but find fidgets/chews too distracting.

Instead, consider:

- sitting on a wobble cushion;
- providing Theraband on chair legs for foot movement;

- offering movement breaks between tasks;
- sensory circuits BEFORE the learning demand.

Ear defenders support children with sensory processing differences, anxiety, autism, or auditory hypersensitivity from being put at a substantial disadvantage.

- they are low cost;
- they enable access in assemblies, dining rooms, PE halls;
- they reduce distress and prevent dysregulation;
- they have minimal impact on others.

Schools may decline if:

- the child is not disabled under the Equality Act;
- they compromise safeguarding (e.g., the child cannot hear instructions in high-risk situations, such as certain lessons, PE, transitions, walking near roads);
- they block essential learning input during teacher instruction;
- they are misused (e.g., during tests when they would give a significant advantage);
- they prevent inclusion if worn all day as a default.

In such cases, alternative quieter spaces or a sensory plan may be used instead.

Children who may benefit from a sensory adaptation:

- Those who need extra/less sensory input to concentrate;
- Those who fidget to self-regulate when overwhelmed;
- Hypervigilant children who need grounding and body feedback;
- Children who pick at skin, bite nails, or engage in self-stimulatory behaviours as a way to self-regulate;
- A sensory tool may not be the most suitable or appropriate alternative to seeking medical professional advice e.g. GP, Occupational Therapist (OT) or Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT).

Hygiene and safety

- chew tools are for single-users only;
- chew tools must be stored in a clearly named box/container for individuals;
- cleaned daily per manufacturer/NHS guidance;
- consider dental advice if heavy chewing.

When and where allowed

- Some parts of the school day may be more fidget-friendly than others. Consider allowing fidgets during: Listening to new teaching concepts; silent or independent work; moments where extra concentration is needed.

But they may not be suitable for:

- Group discussions;
- Writing tasks where both hands are needed;
- Playtime where they might cause issues in the playground (getting lost, traded, stolen!);
- Teacher may withdraw use if distracting.

Trial and monitoring

- 2–4 week trial with simple monitoring form: baseline on-task / disruption observations, teacher comments, pupil self-report (if appropriate);
- If no benefit or increase in distraction, stop and try alternatives;
- Does this meet the child's sensory needs?
- Can they use it without disrupting themselves or others?
- Is there a better way to provide the input they need?

Record keeping

- Record on SEND/pupil profile and, if appropriate, in EHCP provisions or support plan.
- Include review date.

Signed: *TMChappell*

Date: 03.11.25

Also read:

- Sensory Tools in School: Staff Guide
- Sensory Tools Monitoring Form
- Child Contract for use of fidget/chew tool