

Sensory Tools Policy

St Laurence in Thanet Church of England Junior Academy



This set of values is reflected in all our policies.

Joy Hope Forgiveness Love Resilience

Approved by:	L.Buckland/Governing Board	Date: 1 st July 2026
Last reviewed on:		
Next review due by:	1 st July 2028	

1. Policy intention

At St Laurence-in-Thamet CE Junior Academy, we recognise that some pupils may benefit from the use of sensory tools to support regulation, attention, access to learning and inclusion.

Sensory tools may include items such as fidget tools, chew tools, ear defenders, wobble cushions, chair resistance bands and other agreed sensory resources. These tools can be particularly helpful for some pupils with autism, ADHD, sensory processing differences, anxiety or other identified additional needs.

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance so that sensory tools are used safely, purposefully and consistently across the school. Sensory tools should support learning and regulation. They should not become a distraction, a toy or a general preference item.

2. Legal and SEND context

Schools have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities. This may include the use of auxiliary aids where these reduce barriers to learning and participation.

A sensory tool may be considered a reasonable adjustment where:

- the pupil has an identified need which affects self-regulation, attention, sensory processing or anxiety
- the tool helps the pupil to access learning or reduce distress
- the adjustment is practical, manageable and proportionate
- the tool does not create a health, safety or hygiene risk
- staff can manage its use within normal classroom routines

The school does not have to agree to the use of a sensory tool where:

- the request is based on preference rather than an identified need
- the item creates a safety or hygiene concern
- the item distracts the pupil or others from learning
- the item is being misused
- a more suitable or safer alternative is available
- the item would require unreasonable levels of staffing or supervision

3. Definition of sensory tools

For the purpose of this policy, sensory tools are resources used to support a pupil's regulation, attention or sensory needs.

They may include fidget tools, chew tools or chewable jewellery, ear defenders, wobble cushions, resistance bands or therabands, textured strips, calm boxes or agreed sensory resources and movement or sensory break resources.

Sensory tools are therapeutic aids. They are not toys.

4. Principles for use

Sensory tools will only be used where they are purposeful and beneficial for the individual pupil.

Any agreed sensory tool should:

- support access to learning
- help the pupil regulate or remain focused
- be quiet and discreet
- be safe and age-appropriate
- be easy to clean (chew toys cleaned by parents not school)

- not distract the pupil or others
- be used in line with adult guidance
- be reviewed regularly

Where a tool is not helping the pupil, is being misused or is disrupting learning, staff may remove it temporarily and discuss alternative support.

5. Request and approval process

The school will consider the use of sensory tools as part of the graduated approach of assess, plan, do and review. Decisions will be based on observations of the pupil's needs, discussion with parents or carers, pupil voice where appropriate and advice from relevant professionals where this is available. Parents, carers, class teachers or pupils may raise a request for the use of a sensory tool.

The usual process will be:

1. The request is discussed with the class teacher in the first instance.
2. The class teacher considers how the pupil presents in class and whether a sensory tool may support learning or regulation.
3. The class teacher discusses the request with the SENCo and a sensory tool is chosen by the child and SENCo/teacher.
4. A short trial may be agreed.
5. The impact of the tool is reviewed.
6. If the tool is helpful, it is recorded on the pupil's SEND plan, pupil passport or provision notes as appropriate.

Sensory tools brought from home must not be used in school unless agreed by the SENCo.

6. Roles and responsibilities

Senior leadership team

- ensure this policy is shared with staff and implemented consistently
- support staff in applying the policy
- ensure reasonable adjustments are considered fairly
- review the policy as needed

SENCo

- advise staff on the appropriate use of sensory tools
- approve ongoing use of sensory tools where needed
- seek advice from external professionals where appropriate, such as Occupational Therapy, Specialist Teaching and Learning Service or Speech and Language Therapy
- ensure agreed support is recorded and reviewed
- support communication with parents and carers where needed

Class teachers

- consider requests from parents, carers or pupils
- monitor whether the tool improves focus, regulation or access to learning
- ensure tools are used appropriately in the classroom
- remove or pause use if the tool becomes a distraction or safety concern
- liaise with the SENCo where further advice is needed

Parents and carers

- speak to the class teacher before sending sensory tools into school
- provide information about their child's needs and how the item is used at home
- ensure any item sent from home is safe, clean and suitable
- support the school's expectations for appropriate use
- replace any item that becomes unsafe, damaged or unsuitable

Pupils

- use the tool only in the agreed way
- keep the tool to themselves
- not share, swap or trade sensory tools
- stop using the tool if an adult asks them to
- tell an adult if the item is damaged or dirty
- understand that misuse may mean the tool is removed or reviewed

7. Approved sensory tools

The school may agree the following types of sensory tools where appropriate:

- small, quiet fidget tools
- textured strips
- stress balls
- tangles or marble mesh-style fidgets
- silent putty or blu-tac, where appropriate
- chew tools made specifically for oral use
- chewable bracelets or necklaces with appropriate safety features
- ear defenders
- wobble cushions
- chair resistance bands
- small smooth objects such as a pebble
- school-approved regulation resources

8. Items not usually suitable

The school will not usually allow items that are noisy, visually distracting or likely to be misused. This may include:

- fidget spinners
- pop-its used as toys rather than planned resources
- slime
- monkey noodles
- items that click, flash, bounce, leak or make noise
- items with small loose parts
- items that are shared between pupils
- any item that becomes a distraction or safety concern

9. Chew tools and chewable jewellery

Chew tools can be helpful for some pupils who seek oral sensory input. However, because they are placed in the mouth, they require careful management. Chew tools brought from home must be approved before use in school.

Any chew tool must:

- be purchased from a reputable source
- be designed specifically for oral use
- be made from non-toxic, food-safe material
- be age and stage appropriate
- have no internal parts
- be in good condition
- show no signs of cracking, splitting, discolouration or sharp edges
- have a working breakaway clasp if worn around the neck
- be clearly named
- be for single-pupil use only

Parents and carers are responsible for ensuring that chew tools are cleaned regularly and replaced when needed. The school may remove a chew tool from use immediately if it appears unsafe, damaged, unhygienic or unsuitable. Where a pupil is a heavy chewer, parents and carers may be advised to seek further advice from a dentist, GP, Occupational Therapist or other relevant professional.

10. Hygiene and storage

Sensory tools must be kept clean and stored safely. Expectations include:

- chew tools are for individual use only
- chew tools must not be shared
- items should be stored in a named container, tray, bag or agreed place when not in use
- staff may carry out visual checks of chew tools and other sensory items
- damaged, dirty or unsafe items will be removed from use
- parents and carers will be informed if an item needs to be replaced
- the school is not responsible for items from home that are lost, damaged or broken

11. When sensory tools may be used

Sensory tools may be used at agreed times, depending on the pupil's needs. They may be appropriate during:

- independent work
- listening times
- periods of high concentration
- specific regulation times
- agreed sensory breaks
- transitions, where this has been planned
- assemblies or lunch times, where sensory sensitivity is known

They may not be appropriate during:

- group discussions
- practical activities where both hands are needed
- PE or high-risk activities
- playtimes, unless specifically agreed

- tests or assessments, unless this is an agreed access arrangement
- direct teaching, if the tool stops the pupil listening
- any situation where the tool creates a safety risk

Class teachers have discretion to pause use if the tool is not supporting learning.

12. Ear defenders

Ear defenders may be agreed for pupils with auditory sensitivity, anxiety or sensory processing needs.

They may be useful during assemblies, dining hall times, music or loud activities, fire drills where planned support is appropriate, busy transitions and periods of sensory overload.

Ear defenders should not be used as a default for the whole school day unless this has been specifically agreed as part of an individual plan.

They may be removed or restricted where the pupil cannot hear important safety instructions, they block access to teaching, they increase isolation, they are being used to avoid all participation rather than support regulation or a safer or more inclusive alternative is available.

13. Trial period and monitoring

Where a sensory tool is agreed, the school may use a trial period, usually between two and four weeks. During this time, staff may consider:

- whether the pupil appears more regulated
- whether the pupil is more able to access learning
- whether the tool reduces or increases distraction
- whether the tool is being used safely
- whether the tool is affecting other pupils
- whether a different strategy may be more suitable

14. Alternatives to sensory tools

A sensory tool will not always be the best support. Staff may also consider:

- movement breaks
- heavy work activities
- sensory circuits
- calm spaces
- The Ark or other planned regulation support
- seating adjustments
- wobble cushions
- resistance bands on chair legs
- visual timetables
- now and next boards
- chunked learning tasks
- adult check-ins
- access to water
- crunchy snacks, where appropriate and agreed

The aim is always to identify the support that best meets the pupil's need in the least distracting and safest way.

15. Misuse of sensory tools

If a sensory tool is misused, staff will remind the pupil of the expectations. Misuse may include:

- throwing the item
- chewing an item that is not designed for chewing
- sharing the item
- using it to distract others
- playing with it rather than using it for regulation
- refusing to put it away when asked
- using it in an unsafe way
- damaging the item deliberately

16. Record keeping

Where a sensory tool is agreed as an ongoing support, this should be recorded on one or more of the following as appropriate:

- pupil passport
- SEND plan
- provision map
- EHCP provision notes
- risk assessment, where relevant
- individual regulation plan
- sensory support plan

If misuse continues, the tool may be removed and the pupil's support plan reviewed. This should not be treated as a punishment where the pupil has an identified sensory need. Instead, staff should consider whether the tool is the right support, whether the pupil needs further teaching about how to use it or whether a different strategy would be more appropriate.

Records should include the agreed tool, when and where it can be used, the reason for use, any safety or hygiene requirements, review date and staff responsible for monitoring.

17. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if there are changes to statutory guidance, health and safety advice, school procedures or pupil need.

Policy agreed by:	
Date:	
Review date:	

Appendix 1: Sensory tool request form (staff)

Pupil name	
Class	
Date of request	
Requested by	Parent / carer / pupil / class teacher / other
Item requested	
Reason for request	
What strategies have already been tried to support the pupil's attention, regulation or sensory needs? Have these strategies been successful?	
Need intended to support	Attention and focus / anxiety / oral sensory seeking / auditory sensitivity / emotional regulation / movement seeking / sensory overload / other
How is this currently affecting learning or regulation?	
Has the item been used at home or in another setting?	Yes / No
Trial agreed?	Yes / No
Trial start date	
Trial review date	
Agreed expectations for use	
Decision after trial	Continue / continue with changes / stop and try alternative support / seek further advice
Staff member	
SENCo	

Appendix 2: Chew tool safety checklist (staff)

Pupil name	
Class	
Date	
Name of chew item	
Source / supplier	
Purchased from a reputable source	Yes / No
Designed for oral use	Yes / No
Non-toxic / food-safe material	Yes / No
Age and stage appropriate	Yes / No
No internal parts	Yes / No
No cracks, splits, sharp edges or discolouration	Yes / No
Breakaway clasp present if worn around the neck	Yes / No / Not applicable
Clearly named	Yes / No
Suitable storage provided	Yes / No
Parent / carer understands cleaning expectations	Yes / No
Approved for use	Yes / No
Reason if not approved	
Checked by	
Role	
Parent / carer signature	
Date	

My Sensory Tool Promise

My sensory tool is to help me learn and stay regulated.

I agree to:

- ★ use it in the way adults have shown me
- ♥ keep it to myself
- ★ not share it with other children
- ♥ use it quietly
- ★ keep it in the agreed place when I am not using it
- ♥ tell an adult if it is broken, dirty or unsafe
- ♥ put it away if an adult asks me to

I understand that if I do not use it safely or properly, adults will help me find a better way to manage.

Pupil name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Adult name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Home-School Agreement Addition

Sensory tools and additional support items

We recognise that some children may need additional resources to support regulation, attention, sensory needs or emotional wellbeing. This may include items such as ear defenders, fidget tools, chew tools or other sensory supports.

To ensure that these items are safe, purposeful and used appropriately, parents and carers agree to speak to the class teacher before sending any sensory or support item into school. The class teacher may discuss this with the SENCo before the item is agreed.

Where a sensory tool is needed, school will usually provide suitable resources from within school in the first instance. Items brought from home must be agreed by school before use and must be safe, clean, age-appropriate and suitable for the school environment.

Parents and carers understand that:

- sensory tools are used to support learning and regulation, not as toys
- school may remove or pause the use of an item if it is unsafe, unhygienic, distracting or being misused
- chew tools must be designed for oral use, kept clean and checked regularly for damage
- items must not be shared, swapped or traded with other pupils
- school is not responsible for items from home that are lost, damaged or broken
- any agreed support will be reviewed to make sure it is helping the child access learning

By signing the Home-School Agreement, parents and carers agree to work with school to ensure that any sensory tools or additional support items are used safely, appropriately and in the best interests of the child and wider school community.

Parent/carers name	
Parent/carers signature	
Child's name	
Class	
Date	