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Sensory and/or physical needs introduction

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Physical needs

A physical disability means a loss or limitation to a physical function which may affect a child's mobility, dexterity or stamina on a long term basis. A child or young person may be born with a physical disability or acquire it in life due to an accident, injury, illness or as a side effect of a medical condition. There may be an undiagnosed condition where the child presents with delayed development or impairment with their physical ability and/or presentation.

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as:

'...a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

The loss of physical capacity results in the child having a reduced ability, or inability, to perform body movements such as walking, moving their hands and arms, sitting and standing as well as controlling their muscles. A physical disability does not necessarily stop the child from performing specific tasks but makes them more challenging. This includes daily tasks taking longer to complete, such as getting dressed or difficulty gripping and carrying things.

Hearing impairment

Although permanent hearing loss is a relatively low-incidence need, as teachers and school staff, we need to be skilled at recognising when a child may be struggling to hear. Many children will experience some hearing impairment as a result of glue ear up to the age of 10 and although this may be medically referred to as "mild hearing loss" it can have a much greater impact on a child's ability to listen, concentrate and learn.

Hearing impairment/deafness covers a whole range of ability. Children with hearing impairment/deafness have the same potential to learn and achieve as any other child, given the right support and access to the curriculum. Most children with hearing impairment/deafness will be taught in mainstream schools. They may be the only one in their class or even their school.

Hearing impairment/deafness has the potential to delay language development (vocabulary acquisition, speech clarity, understanding instructions) as well as having a wider impact on cognitive, social and emotional skills. Early identification and appropriate strategies to minimise the barriers to learning are vital for a child with hearing impairment.

Visual impairment

Visual Impairment is a term used to describe any kind of non-correctable vision loss. Common refractive errors such as near-sightedness and far-sightedness can be corrected with spectacles or contacts. However, when one or more parts of the eye or brain that are needed to process images become diseased or damaged visual difficulties can occur. In these cases vision cannot be fully restored with medical treatment, surgery or corrective lens.

Young children with early onset severe vision impairment can experience delayed motor, language, emotional, social and cognitive development, with lifelong consequences. School-age children with vision impairment can also experience lower levels of educational achievement.

Sensory processing difficulties

Our brain develops through our life experiences. The majority of brain development occurs in the first 3 years of life, this is a result of our senses processing the information we experience.

Through sensing the world, we gain information relating to our movement and how we maintain our posture, we develop our likes and dislikes in relation to taste, texture and sound and learn to recognise danger.

We have seven senses, visual, auditory, taste, smell, tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive. These senses are the building blocks to academic learning, if there is a difficulty with any of these senses it can have an impact on academic learning or emotional control.

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