

Policy No. WEL032 SENSORY ROOM POLICY

Policy:

This policy describes the purpose of a sensory room and sets out the requirements for when and how a sensory room may be used by a school to support a student.

Summary:

- For the purposes of this policy, a sensory room is a controlled and intentionally created space that provides multi-sensory resources to support a student’s sensory needs to enable them to engage in learning.
- The naming of sensory rooms varies from school to school. Sensory rooms may be referred to as, among other names, multi-sensory environments, Snoezelen® rooms, multi-sensory rooms, sensory playgrounds, sensory gardens, sensory modulation rooms, Zen rooms and quiet rooms.
- Schools are expected to support a student’s learning within regular learning spaces such as classrooms as much as possible.
- An Occupational Therapist with relevant expertise must be consulted in the design, implementation and evaluation of a sensory room and in devising specific programs for individual students.
- Sensory rooms are only for students assessed by an Occupational Therapist to have sensory needs.
- Sensory rooms must not be used in the disciplining of students.
- Sensory rooms are to be used to promote a student’s engagement in their learning and achieve their learning goals in a manner that proactively supports and responds to the student’s sensory needs. This will commonly involve making a sensory room available to a student proactively to prevent problem, challenging or maladaptive behaviours, before the problem, challenging or maladaptive behaviour occurs. Sensory rooms are not intended to be used in response to problem, challenging or maladaptive behaviours.
- Sensory rooms may sometimes be used to reinforce and reward positive behaviour where it will assist the student’s overall learning and engagement, but this use should not be its main purpose.
- Every student using a sensory room must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with specific learning goals and outcomes linked to the use of the room, and their progress and achievement, regularly evaluated and documented in their IEP or similarly named plan.
- Schools that have a sensory room must develop a statement which articulates how the sensory room is to be used in the school, consistent with this policy.
- Sensory rooms are to be used with guidance from an Occupational Therapist and, if applicable, the student’s treating health practitioner.
- The Department does not support the use of deep pressure equipment, such as weighted blankets and vests, worn by or applied to students as they can pose a risk to the health and safety of students.

Details:

Student Learning

Sensory rooms are to be used by schools as a resource to support students’ sensory needs so they can achieve their learning goals.

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Sensory rooms are to be used in a manner that proactively supports and responds to the student's sensory needs not reactively in response to challenging behaviours.

Schools with sensory rooms must keep students engaged in regular education settings, such as classrooms, for most of each school day.

Every student using a sensory room must have learning goals and outcomes linked to the use of the room. A student's progress and achievement must be evaluated and documented in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) or similarly named plan.

Students must be actively supervised and engaged in sensory activities by staff when in sensory rooms.

Supervisory staff must support students' safe use of sensory rooms and to engage in learning according to the student's needs.

An Occupational Therapist and other appropriately qualified allied health practitioners must be involved in the implementation and evaluation of student supports in sensory rooms.

Schools must provide consulting Occupational Therapists with a copy of this policy and ensure compliance with it and the Department's Records Management Policy.

Use of Sensory Rooms

Students must not be left alone in a sensory room and must be supervised and engaged in sensory activities and experiences provided by a staff member.

Doors of sensory rooms must remain open whilst the room is in use. This includes when staff are working with one or more students in the room.

Sensory rooms must be continually evaluated by school staff to ensure they are safe, are being used as intended, and are contributing to positive student outcomes, as described in a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or similarly named plan.

All equipment in sensory rooms must undergo periodic checks by school staff to ensure they are in good working order and are safe to use.

Student use of sensory rooms must be scheduled to provide equitable access by all students with an identified need. Equitable access should be based on student need, not simply equity of time.

Prohibited equipment and practices

Sensory rooms must not be used in the disciplining of students. Using sensory rooms in response to student behaviour may reinforce the student's use of the challenging behaviour.

Sensory rooms must not be used for the purpose of separating students from their peers, either during class or break times.

Sensory rooms are not an alternative curriculum or alternative to formal education.

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Sensory rooms are not alternative play spaces for students who prefer not to play outside.

The use of deep pressure equipment on students, such as weighted blankets and vests, is not supported by the Department as they pose a risk to the health and safety of students.

Design of sensory rooms

An Occupational Therapist with relevant expertise must be consulted in the design, implementation and evaluation of a sensory room and in devising specific programs for individual students. In remote areas in-situ consultation may not be possible so consultation may need to be by phone or email.

The design of a sensory room must be based on the needs of the students using the room and the school's local context. The needs of students using a room may vary over time necessitating modifications to the room.

Schools that are proposing to establish a sensory room should provide details to the school community about how the room will be used and how student outcomes will be evaluated, consistent with this policy.

Schools must critically reflect on their need for a sensory room, acknowledging that their establishment can take considerable time, resources and funds.

Sensory interventions

Schools are expected to support students (including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder) in the classroom and across the school environment and routines, within existing tiered supports, as much as possible, without the use of a designated sensory room. Schools can refer to Behaviour — Students and Students with Disability.

Definitions:

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

A written statement of the educational program designed to meet a student's individual needs.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

A degree-based health professional regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Occupational therapists use a whole person perspective to work with individuals, groups and communities to achieve optimal health and wellbeing through participation in the occupations of life, including education.

Problem, challenging or maladaptive behaviour

Behaviour that interferes with the learning of the student or the learning of other students.

Sensory Room

A controlled and intentionally created space that provides multi-sensory resources to support a student's sensory needs to enable them to engage in learning.

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Related Policies:

- [Behaviour — Students](#)
- [Duty of Care](#)
- [Performance and Development for Teacher Class Employees](#)
- [Privacy and Information Sharing](#)
- [Procuring Low-value Construction Works and Services](#)
- [Procurement — Schools](#)
- [Records Management — School Records](#)
- [Restraint and Seclusion](#)
- [School-funded Capital Projects](#)
- [Students with Disability](#)
- [Supervision of Students](#)

Relevant Legislation:

- [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment \(Child Safe Standards\) Bill 2015 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Disability Standards for Education 2005 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Act 2006 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Ministerial Order No. 1038 – Teaching Service \(Employment Conditions, Salaries, Allowances, Selection and Conduct\) Order 2017 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Ministerial Order No. 1039 – School Council Employees \(Employment Conditions, Salaries, Allowances and Selection\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [Ministerial Order 870 – Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools \(PDF\)](#)

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