

Creating Enabling Environments

Leadership reflection prompts

- How do we know whether children feel welcome, safe and ready to learn in different parts of the school day?
- How do leaders ensure the physical and social environment reduces barriers rather than creating them?
- How are sensory, communication, emotional and physical needs considered across the school?
- How do staff make reasonable adjustments to routines, spaces and expectations?
- Are visuals, communication supports and accessible resources used consistently and meaningfully?
- How do we avoid practices that may stigmatise, isolate or shame learners?
- How are children, families and professionals involved in reviewing environmental adaptations?
- How do we ensure adaptations support dignity, independence and belonging?

What you might notice in practice

- Classrooms and shared spaces are calm, organised and accessible.
- Children know routines and expectations.
- Visual supports are used where they help understanding and independence.
- Staff consider sensory needs, communication needs and emotional regulation.
- Safe or regulating spaces are used supportively, not as exclusion.
- Children can access resources and equipment they need.
- Adaptations are reviewed and changed when they are not helping.
- Movement around the school is safe and accessible.
- Adults respond to distress or dysregulation with dignity and curiosity.



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Voices to listen to

Ask children and young people:

- Are there places that feel too noisy, busy or difficult?
- Do you know what is happening next during the school day?
- Are there resources or spaces that help you manage?

Ask families:

- Does your child feel welcome in school?
- Are there environmental barriers that affect your child's access or wellbeing?
- Are reasonable adjustments discussed and reviewed with you?
- Do you feel the school understands your child's sensory, communication, emotional or physical needs?

Ask staff:

- Do we understand how the environment affects learning, regulation and belonging?
- Are reasonable adjustments made consistently?
- Do we know how to review whether adaptations are helping?
- Are there parts of the school day or site that create barriers for some children?

Useful leadership activities

- Carry out an environment walk with a focus on accessibility, communication, sensory needs and belonging.
- Use pupil voice to map areas where children feel safe, included or overwhelmed.
- Review how safe spaces or regulation areas are used.
- Discuss with staff how routines can support predictability and independence.
- Use family feedback to identify environmental barriers that may not be obvious to staff.
- Review the accessibility plan alongside this principle.

Possible next steps

Leaders may want to identify:

- one environmental strength that supports inclusion;
- one barrier in the physical, sensory or social environment;
- one adaptation that could improve access or belonging;
- one way to involve children and families in reviewing the environment and/or school day.