

SHADES OF ENGAGEMENT																			
A practical environmental adaptation with measurable impact on engagement																			
Mountfield Heath School																			
Authors – Jacqui Rochester & Ella Brunton																			
THE BIG QUESTION																			
What were we trying to understand?																			
Can adapting one classroom environment improve engagement for the pupils learning in it?																			
WHY THIS MATTERS The Challenge For autistic pupils, the physical environment is not neutral. Stark colours, glare and sensory load can reduce regulation, attention and readiness to learn. This project tested whether one practical leadership decision — repainting a classroom using an autism-friendly colour palette — could improve engagement and peer interaction.	WHAT WE TRIED The Innovation - Repainted one classroom using an autism-friendly, low-arousal colour palette. - Created a green calm corner with soft furnishings to support regulation and re-engagement. - Gathered staff, pupil and school council feedback alongside engagement observations. - Education and clinical colleagues worked together to plan the environmental changes, observe their impact, reflect on the findings and adapt practice.	PROJECT AT A GLANCE Setting: Specialist independent primary school Participants: One class of 6 pupils, with 3 pupils observed in detail Focus: Autism-friendly classroom repainting Measures: Engagement Scale, staff interviews and pupil voice Partners: Education staff, OT, SaLT, SLT, pupils and families																	
WHAT CHANGED? — KEY FINDINGS																			
Did it make a difference?																			
HEADLINE FINDING All 3 observed pupils recorded higher engagement scores after the classroom changes. Following the classroom changes, all 3 observed pupils recorded higher engagement scores, alongside staff reports of improved regulation, calmer use of space and more shared attention.	RESULTS SNAPSHOT Average Engagement Scale scores before → after <table><tr><th>Pupil</th><th>Before</th><th>After</th><th>Gain</th></tr><tr><td>P</td><td>8</td><td>18</td><td>+10</td></tr><tr><td>H</td><td>6</td><td>17</td><td>+11</td></tr><tr><td>J</td><td>3</td><td>11</td><td>+8</td></tr></table> All 3 observed pupils showed increased engagement. Across the three observed pupils, higher engagement scores were accompanied by staff observations of improved regulation, calmer use of space and more shared attention.		Pupil	Before	After	Gain	P	8	18	+10	H	6	17	+11	J	3	11	+8	PUPIL PROGRESS & STAFF FEEDBACK Regulation improved: pupils settled more readily and used the calm corner purposefully. Engagement strengthened: pupils sustained attention and participated more consistently. Peer interaction grew: pupils showed more shared attention, play and group involvement. Staff noticed the difference: the room felt calmer, softer and more conducive to learning.
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P	8	18	+10																
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VOICES FROM THE PROJECT — WHAT WE HEARD																			
PUPIL VOICE “It’s nice and peaceful.” “I like the calmy corner.” “I feel calm.”	STAFF VOICE “The whole room feels much calmer.” “As soon as I walk in the room, the colours automatically make me feel calmer.”		PARENT / CARER VOICE Families gave consent for pupils to take part, while pupil assent and confidentiality were considered throughout the project.																
LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAYS What can school leaders learn? - Audit classrooms through a sensory lens, not just a compliance lens. - Treat environment as part of behaviour, attendance and belonging strategy. - Use pupil voice before making decisions about learning spaces. - Make regulation easy to access, not dependent on adult rescue.	FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE What changed because of this work? - The pilot moved from classroom test to whole-school implementation planning. - The evidence gave leaders a clear case for investing in low-arousal environments. - The work modelled integrated practice across education, OT, SaLT, SLT, pupils and families. - Environmental design became a practical lever for inclusion, regulation and engagement.		WHAT’S NEXT? Future Development - Scale the palette across the school. - Prioritise lighting as the next environmental improvement. - Track impact on engagement, regulation, belonging and peer interaction. - Embed pupil voice in every future environmental change.																
KEY TAKEAWAY — ONE MESSAGE TO REMEMBER																			
Environment is not simply decoration. In this project, changes to the classroom were followed by improved regulation, engagement and readiness to learn.																			