

Guidance on the use of Low Arousal Areas in Warwickshire Schools

(Please refer to separate guidance on the use of Quiet Rooms)

Definitions of terms used in this guidance

Low Arousal Area - a modified area identified within a school that offers a low sensory working environment.

Sensory input - how pupils experience input from their senses. Some pupils will have sensory sensitivity. This can affect one or more of the five senses, i.e. sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. A person's senses can be over-developed (hypersensitive) or under-developed (hyposensitive). Both can have an impact on how pupils experience school and access learning.

Quiet Room - a room that offers a pupil an opportunity to calm during the school day **(please refer to Guidance on the Use of Quiet Rooms)**.

1. Why would a school need Low Arousal Areas?

Some pupils struggle in schools because of the high level of sensory input within the school/classroom environment. This may be very relevant for pupils with an autism spectrum disorder. Other pupils may have sensory processing difficulties as a distinct diagnosis or have a need for a Low Arousal Area because of an additional physical need such as a visual impairment.

In these instances the Low Arousal Area may be used as a means of

- a) lowering the pupil's stress/anxiety levels caused by sensory input and
- b) increasing successful access to the curriculum.

Low Arousal Areas should be designed as teaching areas. This distinguishes them from Quiet Rooms, which are not intended as teaching areas.

2. Identifying and agreeing use of a Low Arousal Area for an individual pupil

The use of a Low Arousal Area should be discussed with and agreed by an Educational Psychologist or Specialist Teacher. These discussions should also include decisions on frequency of use. All discussions should be shared with parents/carers and their agreement should be recorded. Children and young people should be consulted in accordance with their age and level of understanding.

Use of a Low Arousal Area should be specified in the pupil's individual learning plan, facilitating regular review of its use.

3. Low Arousal Area layout and design

A Low Arousal Area is a teaching and learning area and should be set up to achieve optimum results for any pupils who access it. It may be located in a part of a classroom or in an appropriate corridor or open area of the school.

A table and chairs should be available. Soft furnishing may also be considered if the area is to be used for less structured teaching.

A Low Arousal Area should be an environment in which sensory clutter is reduced as much as possible. This could be in the form of visual or auditory stimulus. The décor should be simple and unfussy.

It is generally accepted that low arousal colours such as cream (not yellow or white) should be used for walls and patterned wallpaper should be avoided.

Some people with sensory difficulties can find it helpful if furniture is placed at the sides of a room and the central space is kept clear. Using colours that distinguish the walls, floors and furniture makes rooms easier to navigate.

It can be useful to put pupil's belongings in big, clear plastic boxes so that they can be easily stored away when not in use. The area will then be less cluttered and the pupil is less likely to be distracted.

Pupils should always have a choice about whether or not to access a Low Arousal Area. The Low Arousal Area can be a room but should be easy for a pupil to leave at any time. There should be no physical or other restrictions preventing the pupil from leaving the area.

Use of a Low Arousal Room should never be a physical intervention, the outcome of a physical intervention or a sanction.

The use of locks or double handles which effectively prevent the pupil from leaving a room as part of a sanction are, in any case, illegal (please also refer to Guidance on the use of Physical Intervention and Guidance on the use of Quiet Rooms).

Pupils must never be unsupervised while using a room designated as a Low Arousal Area. Staff may decide that allowing the pupil to be alone in the room for up to 5 minutes is appropriate in some circumstances but must be able to see inside the room at all times. Schools may consider taking the door off completely to ensure that it remains an open area.

Guidance prepared by:

Lynda Lowe, IDS Autism Team Manager

To be reviewed by 31/03/15