

INCLUSIVE TEACHING ASSESSMENT GUIDE

A practical framework to evaluate classroom accessibility

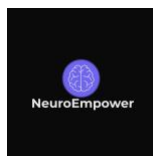
Designed for teachers, teaching assistants, SENDCos, pastoral teams and school leaders.

The purpose of this guide

To identify barriers in the environment, teaching approach or task - and to make practical changes that improve access, participation, regulation and belonging for all learners.

NeuroEmpower

Practical, strengths-based neurodiversity support for education and the workplace



How to Use This Guide

An inclusive classroom is not simply one where neurodivergent learners or pupils with additional needs are present. It is one where learners can access information, understand expectations, regulate themselves, communicate, participate and demonstrate what they know without unnecessary barriers.

The framework looks at 12 areas of classroom accessibility

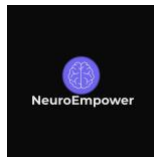
1. Classroom environment & sensory accessibility
2. Instructions & communication
3. Executive functioning
4. Predictability, routine & transitions
5. Emotional regulation & SEMH
6. Psychological safety & belonging
7. Participation & communication choices
8. Accessible learning materials
9. Assessment & demonstrating knowledge
10. Attention, movement & regulation
11. Task initiation, motivation & cognitive load
12. Strengths-based inclusive practice

Scoring

0 - Not currently in place	Significant accessibility barriers are present.
1 - Developing	Some support exists, but it is inconsistent or dependent on individual staff.
2 - Mostly accessible	The approach is usually available and works for most learners.
3 - Embedded and inclusive	The approach is routine, flexible and does not depend on a learner disclosing a diagnosis.

Use the score as a reflection tool, not a judgement

Context, resources, pupil needs and the physical environment matter. Aim to identify one or two realistic actions in each priority area rather than trying to change everything at once.



1. Classroom Environment & Sensory Accessibility

Some learners process sensory information differently. Noise, lighting, movement, smells, temperature or physical proximity can significantly affect concentration, regulation and access to learning.

Sensory accessibility

A learner who looks distracted may be working hard to filter sensory information. Reducing unnecessary sensory load can free up capacity for learning.

Consider:

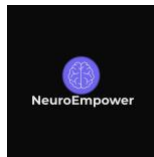
- ☐ Lighting is comfortable and unnecessary glare or flickering is reduced.
- ☐ Learners are not expected to tolerate excessive background noise unnecessarily.
- ☐ Noise-reducing headphones or ear defenders can be used when appropriate.
- ☐ Seating arrangements can be adapted according to individual need.
- ☐ Learners have options away from high-traffic areas.
- ☐ Classroom displays are purposeful rather than visually overwhelming.
- ☐ A quieter or lower-stimulation space is available when possible.
- ☐ Sensory tools can be used without unnecessary attention being drawn to the learner.
- ☐ Movement and changing position are permitted when safe.
- ☐ Staff recognise sensory overload rather than automatically interpreting behaviour as defiance.

SCORE

____ / 30

Observations

Priority action



2. Instructions & Communication

Working memory, processing differences, language processing and attention can all affect the ability to retain multi-step instructions. A learner appearing not to follow an instruction does not necessarily mean they were not listening.

Accessibility question

If a learner forgets an instruction, can they independently find it again - or do they have to repeatedly ask an adult?

Consider:

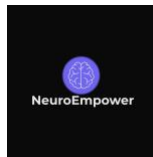
- ☐ Instructions are clear, specific and concise.
- ☐ Important information is also available visually or in writing.
- ☐ Tasks are broken into manageable steps.
- ☐ Learners are given processing time before being expected to respond.
- ☐ Staff check understanding without putting learners on the spot.
- ☐ Examples of completed work are provided where helpful.
- ☐ Language is literal and unambiguous when clarity is important.
- ☐ Key vocabulary is introduced before complex tasks.
- ☐ Learners know where to find instructions again if they forget them.
- ☐ Staff avoid relying on repeated verbal reminders as the only support.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



3. Executive Functioning

Executive functioning supports the mental processes involved in getting things done: starting, planning, prioritising, remembering, organising, switching, monitoring, managing time and regulating attention.

Reframe the question

Instead of "Why haven't they started?" consider "What is making starting difficult?"

Consider:

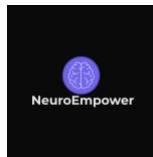
- ☐ Large tasks are broken into smaller stages.
- ☐ Learners can clearly see where to begin.
- ☐ Deadlines and expectations are explicit.
- ☐ Visual schedules or checklists are available.
- ☐ Equipment and resources have predictable locations.
- ☐ Learners receive prompts before transitions.
- ☐ Time expectations are made visible.
- ☐ Teachers support task initiation rather than repeatedly saying "get started".
- ☐ Important information is not dependent entirely on working memory.
- ☐ Organisational skills are taught and supported rather than assumed.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



4. Predictability, Routine & Transitions

Unexpected change can increase cognitive load and anxiety. Predictability does not mean every day must be identical; it means learners are given enough information and preparation to understand what is happening.

Helpful principle

Make the invisible visible: what is happening, what is changing, what happens next and what the learner needs to do.

Consider:

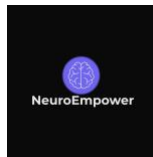
- ☐ The lesson structure is clear.
- ☐ Learners know what will happen next.
- ☐ Visual timetables are available where appropriate.
- ☐ Changes are communicated as early as possible.
- ☐ Learners receive warnings before activities finish.
- ☐ Expectations during transitions are clear.
- ☐ Supply teachers and timetable changes are explained.
- ☐ Learners know what to do if they are unsure.
- ☐ Staff recognise transition difficulty may link to executive functioning or anxiety.
- ☐ Additional preparation is provided for significant changes.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



5. Emotional Regulation & SEMH

Dysregulation may occur when the demands being placed on a learner exceed their current capacity. Behaviour can communicate overwhelm, uncertainty, sensory distress, fear, frustration or unmet need.

Regulation before expectation

When the nervous system is overwhelmed, access to learning becomes much harder. Regulation support can be a route back into participation.

Consider:

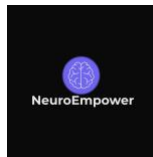
- ☐ Staff respond to distress with curiosity before consequences.
- ☐ Learners can request a break.
- ☐ Regulation strategies are available proactively.
- ☐ Pupils do not have to become extremely distressed before receiving support.
- ☐ Staff recognise individual signs of overload.
- ☐ Calm spaces are used for regulation rather than punishment.
- ☐ Learners are supported to return to learning following dysregulation.
- ☐ Emotional experiences are validated while appropriate boundaries remain clear.
- ☐ Staff avoid public confrontation wherever possible.
- ☐ Relationships are prioritised alongside behaviour expectations.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



6. Psychological Safety & Belonging

Learners need to feel safe enough to ask questions, make mistakes, request support and be themselves. Inclusion should create belonging, not simply physical presence.

Belonging matters

A learner can be physically included in a classroom while still feeling that their natural way of communicating, moving or learning is unwelcome.

Consider:

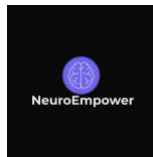
- ☐ Mistakes are treated as part of learning.
- ☐ Learners can ask for help without embarrassment.
- ☐ Neurodivergent differences are spoken about respectfully.
- ☐ Staff use inclusive, strengths-based and non-deficit language.
- ☐ Differences in communication are respected.
- ☐ Safe stimming is not automatically discouraged.
- ☐ Pupils are not required to make eye contact to demonstrate listening.
- ☐ Bullying relating to disability or difference is challenged.
- ☐ Classroom examples represent different types of learners and families.
- ☐ Learners feel that they belong rather than merely being accommodated.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



7. Participation & Communication Choices

Participation does not always need to mean speaking in front of the class. Different communication routes can increase engagement while reducing unnecessary pressure.

Participation is broader than speaking

Look for understanding, engagement and contribution in different forms - not just verbal confidence, eye contact or speed of response.

Consider:

- ☐ Learners have different ways to contribute.
- ☐ Thinking time is provided before answering.
- ☐ Alternatives to random cold-calling are considered.
- ☐ Pair or small-group discussion can be used before whole-class discussion.
- ☐ Learners can contribute through writing, technology or visual responses.
- ☐ Communication differences are respected.
- ☐ Quiet learners are not assumed to be disengaged.
- ☐ Confident speakers are not assumed to have no support needs.
- ☐ Group work has clear roles and expectations.
- ☐ Pupils can request clarification privately.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action

8. Accessible Learning Materials

Accessible resources reduce avoidable cognitive and visual barriers. Small changes in layout and format can make information easier to process for many learners.

Universal benefit

Clear formatting, chunking and multimodal access can support many learners - not only those with a formal diagnosis.

Consider:

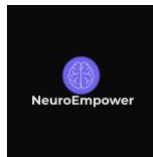
- ☐ Worksheets are clearly structured.
- ☐ Pages are not unnecessarily crowded.
- ☐ Fonts are clear and readable.
- ☐ Adequate spacing is used.
- ☐ Important information is visually highlighted without overloading the page.
- ☐ Instructions are separated from large blocks of text.
- ☐ Digital documents can be enlarged where necessary.
- ☐ Assistive technology is welcomed and normalised.
- ☐ Audio or text-to-speech options are considered.
- ☐ Learners can access material using more than one format where appropriate.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



9. Assessment & Demonstrating Knowledge

Accessibility is not about lowering expectations. It is about reducing barriers that prevent a learner from demonstrating their actual knowledge, skill or understanding.

Keep the learning objective central

Ask whether the format of the assessment is measuring the intended knowledge - or accidentally measuring handwriting, memory, speed or tolerance of sensory demand.

Consider:

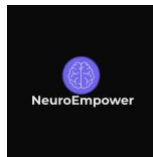
- ☐ Learners understand exactly what is being assessed.
- ☐ Assessment instructions are clear.
- ☐ Reasonable adjustments are consistently implemented.
- ☐ Extra processing time is provided where appropriate.
- ☐ Assistive technology is available where appropriate.
- ☐ Writing ability is not unintentionally assessed when it is not the learning objective.
- ☐ Alternative methods of demonstrating understanding are considered where appropriate.
- ☐ Feedback is clear, specific and actionable.
- ☐ Learners know what they did well as well as what needs developing.
- ☐ Assessment methods are reviewed for unnecessary disadvantage.

SCORE

____ / 30

Observations

Priority action



10. Attention, Movement & Regulation

Attention does not always look like sitting completely still and maintaining eye contact. Some learners concentrate more effectively while moving, doodling, fidgeting or looking away.

Observe function, not appearance

Before correcting movement, ask whether it is disrupting learning or helping the learner stay regulated and attentive.

Consider:

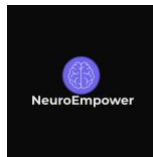
- ☐ Movement breaks are available.
- ☐ Safe fidgeting is accepted.
- ☐ Learners can change position when appropriate.
- ☐ Staff differentiate between movement and disruption.
- ☐ Lessons contain changes in activity where possible.
- ☐ Long periods of passive listening are reduced where possible.
- ☐ Key information is repeated or reinforced.
- ☐ Learners can use tools that support attention.
- ☐ Staff recognise that attention can fluctuate.
- ☐ Regulation strategies are normalised across the class.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



11. Task Initiation, Motivation & Cognitive Load

Knowing what needs to be done and being able to start doing it are different skills. Overwhelm, uncertainty, perfectionism, working-memory demand and executive functioning can all create barriers to initiation.

Reduce cognitive load

Make the first step small and visible. A clear starting point can turn an overwhelming task into something a learner can begin.

Consider:

- ☐ Learners know the first step.
- ☐ Staff provide starting prompts rather than repeating the whole instruction.
- ☐ Tasks have visible milestones.
- ☐ Large workloads are chunked.
- ☐ Learners receive feedback during longer tasks.
- ☐ Choice is incorporated where appropriate.
- ☐ Interests and strengths can be used to increase engagement.
- ☐ Perfectionism or fear of failure is recognised as a potential barrier.
- ☐ Teachers recognise that overwhelm can look like avoidance.
- ☐ Support decreases gradually as independence develops.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action

12. Strengths-Based Inclusive Practice

Neurodiversity inclusion should not focus exclusively on challenges. Learners need opportunities to recognise their strengths, interests, creativity and different ways of thinking.

Strengths and support can coexist

Recognising strengths does not minimise support needs. Inclusive practice makes room for both challenge and capability.

Consider:

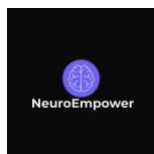
- ☐ Learners' strengths are actively identified.
- ☐ Interests are valued within learning.
- ☐ Different ways of thinking are recognised positively.
- ☐ Creativity and alternative problem-solving are encouraged.
- ☐ Pupils are not compared unfairly with peers.
- ☐ Support is collaborative rather than imposed.
- ☐ Learners have opportunities to explain what helps them.
- ☐ Staff avoid stereotypes about autism, ADHD, dyslexia or other neurodivergence.
- ☐ Success is recognised beyond academic attainment.
- ☐ Learner voice influences adjustments and classroom practice.

SCORE

___ / 30

Observations

Priority action



Classroom Accessibility Score

Add the scores from all 12 assessment areas. Each area is scored out of 30, giving a maximum score of 360.

#	Assessment area	Score / 30
1	Classroom environment & sensory accessibility	_____
2	Instructions & communication	_____
3	Executive functioning	_____
4	Predictability, routine & transitions	_____
5	Emotional regulation & SEMH	_____
6	Psychological safety & belonging	_____
7	Participation & communication choices	_____
8	Accessible learning materials	_____
9	Assessment & demonstrating knowledge	_____
10	Attention, movement & regulation	_____
11	Task initiation, motivation & cognitive load	_____
12	Strengths-based inclusive practice	_____

Total score

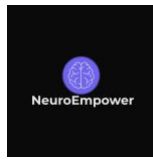
Your score

_____ / 360 Percentage: _____ %

Interpreting the results

80-100% - Strong Inclusive Practice: Accessibility is embedded across many areas. Continue gathering learner feedback and reviewing individual barriers.

60-79% - Good Foundations: Many inclusive approaches are established, with opportunities to improve consistency.

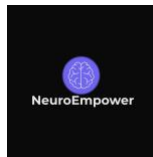


40-59% - Developing Practice: Some inclusive strategies are present, but learners may experience significant barriers depending on the lesson, environment or member of staff.

Below 40% - Priority for Development: Accessibility should become a key development area. Begin with the barriers having the greatest impact on participation, regulation and access to learning.

Important

The percentage is a reflective indicator, not a measure of teacher quality. Use it to guide conversations, priorities and practical improvement.



Learner Voice Check

One of the most important parts of an accessibility assessment is asking learners themselves. Their experience can reveal barriers that are not obvious from observation alone.

Learning

- What helps you understand something new?
- What makes lessons harder to follow?
- What helps you remember instructions?
- What helps you get started?

Environment

- Is there anywhere in the classroom where it is difficult to concentrate?
- Are there noises, lights or other sensory things that bother you?
- Where do you learn best?

Regulation

- How do you know when you are becoming overwhelmed?
- What helps you feel calmer?
- What would make it easier to ask for a break?

Communication

- How do you prefer teachers to give you instructions?
- What makes it easier to ask for help?
- Is there anything teachers sometimes misunderstand about you?

Strengths

- What are you good at?
- What do you enjoy?
- When do you feel most successful at school?

Make learner voice accessible

Do not rely only on spoken answers. Depending on the learner, consider writing, visuals, rating scales, choices, drawing, AAC, a familiar adult or time to respond later.

The Five-Question Accessibility Check

Before deciding that a learner is simply "not engaging", use these five questions to look for barriers.

1	Do they understand what is expected?
2	Can they remember what they need to do?
3	Do they know how to begin?
4	Is the sensory and emotional environment manageable?
5	Do they have an accessible way to ask for help?

From behaviour to barrier

Instead of: Why won't this learner comply?

Try: What is getting in the way?

Instead of: Why are they not concentrating?

Try: What would help them regulate their attention?

Instead of: They know how to do this.

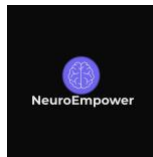
Try: Do they currently have the executive functioning capacity to access what they know?

Instead of: They should be more organised.

Try: Have we explicitly taught and supported the organisational skills required?

Instead of: They need to become more resilient.

Try: Is there an unnecessary barrier we can remove?



What Inclusive Teaching Can Look Like

Inclusive teaching does not mean creating an entirely different lesson for every learner. Often it means building flexibility and clarity into everyday teaching.

Say it. Show it. Write it. Do not rely entirely on spoken instructions.

Chunk it. Break large or multi-stage tasks into manageable parts.

Make time visible. Use timers, timelines, countdowns or clear checkpoints rather than assuming learners can internally judge time.

Give warning of change. Prepare learners for transitions and unexpected changes whenever possible.

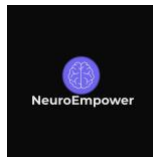
Offer different ways to participate. Do not define engagement only by eye contact, stillness or speaking.

Support regulation early. Do not wait until a learner reaches crisis point before making support available.

Ask the learner. The person experiencing the barrier may have the clearest insight into what needs to change.

Key message

Inclusive teaching is not about making learning easier. It is about making learning accessible.



Accessibility Action Plan

Use one action plan for each priority barrier. Focus on a specific, observable change and review whether it improves access for the learner.

Barrier identified

What are we currently seeing?

What might be contributing to this?

Consider: sensory processing, executive functioning, communication, working memory, processing time, emotional regulation, anxiety, transition, task demands or the environment.

What adjustment will we try?

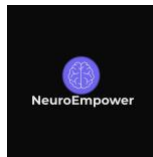
Who will support this?

When will we review it?

What does the learner think?

Has it helped?

☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ Not yet ☐ Further adjustment required



Final Reflection

Use this page after completing the assessment to turn reflection into a manageable improvement plan.

Three things we already do well

1.

2.

3.

Three accessibility barriers we want to reduce

1.

2.

3.

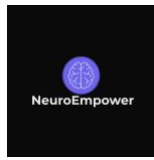
One change we can make immediately

One longer-term change

Review date

Remember

When we move away from asking "What is wrong with this learner?" and begin asking "What barriers are they experiencing?", we create classrooms where more learners can access learning, regulate, participate and belong.



About NeuroEmpower

NeuroEmpower provides practical, strengths-based neurodiversity training and support for schools, workplaces, organisations, parents and professionals.

Our work includes

- [] Neurodiversity training for education and workplace settings
- [] Executive functioning and practical strategy training
- [] SEMH-informed support and professional development
- [] Sensory processing awareness
- [] Inclusive leadership and workplace inclusion
- [] Coaching and mentoring
- [] Practical resources for neurodivergent learners, families and professionals

For training, consultancy and resources

Visit www.neuroempower.org

Important note

This guide is designed as a reflective educational tool. It does not replace an individual assessment, professional advice, statutory SEND processes, safeguarding procedures, school policy or a learner's individual support plan.

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