SEND 0 – 25 Service

Specialist Inclusion Support Service

Communication and Learning Difficulties Team

Creating a communication-friendly classroom

Practical guidance for inclusive, language-rich learning environments

A communication-friendly classroom reduces barriers to understanding, supports pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), and benefits all learners—especially those with neurodiverse profiles such as DLD, autism or ADHD.

Key Principles

- **Less is more**: Keep environments calm, predictable, and purposeful.

- **Clarity supports cognition**: Use visual and verbal supports consistently.

- **Consistency creates safety:** Pupils thrive in spaces that are predictable and clearly organised.

Core strategies

(1)   Neutral, Low-Clutter Displays

- Use neutral backgrounds (e.g., natural hessian or brown paper) to reduce visual overload.

- Avoid overstimulating or "busy" wall displays.

- Displays should be purposeful—either to celebrate work or support learning (not both).

- Limit visual distractions by leaving some wall space blank.

(2)   Only Display Language Pupils Can Read or Use

- Ensure all classroom labels, displays, and instructions are accessible.

- If pupils can't read it, it can cause confusion, not support.

- Consider symbol-supported text for key areas or routines using Widgit (see below).

(3)   Use Widgit Symbols for Visual Support

- Widgit symbols support understanding and reduce language load.

- Useful for:

  o   Visual timetables

  o   Zones of regulation

  o   Labels for trays and drawers

  o   Behaviour or class rules

  o   Visual prompts for tasks

  o   Clarity for displays

(4)   Keep the Front of the Room Clear

- Reduce distractions near the whiteboard/teaching space.

- Keep visual focus on teacher input by limiting competing stimuli.

- Avoid hanging number lines or posters directly behind teaching areas.

- Keep teacher desks clear and avoid putting teaching notices on the walls – keep in a folder

(5)   Zoning and Safe Spaces

- Use visual cues (floor markings, rugs, furniture) to clearly zone the room:

  o   Teaching zone

  o   Work zone

  o   Calm/safe zone

  o   Break or sensory area

- A calm space should be accessible for emotional regulation.

- Use visuals (e.g., Zones of Regulation) to support emotional understanding.

(6)   Use of Workstations (for Individual Support)

- Where needed, provide structured, low-distraction workstations for individuals.

- Particularly useful for pupils with autism, attention needs, or anxiety.

- Workstations should:

  o   Be clearly labelled

  o   Use visual task systems (e.g., First–Then boards or TEAACH)

  o   Minimise distractions

(7)   Clearly Labelled Resources

- Use both symbols and words on drawers, trays and shelves.

- Labels should be consistent in size and position across the room.

- Keep resource areas tidy and predictable.

(8)   Consistency Across the School

- Create a whole-school approach to communication-friendly practices:

  o   Shared display policy

  o   Standardised use of symbols

  o   Agreed routines for transitions and instructions

- Ensure all staff (including support staff) use the same visual supports and language cues.

- Encourage all classrooms to adopt similar layouts where possible.

- Deploy staff members to make sets of resources for all classrooms for consistency.

A range of easy ideas can be found here!

Quick checklist

	In Place	Action Needed
Neutral, clutter-free displays		
Widgit symbols used consistently		
Front of classroom kept clear		
Zones and safe space established		
Workstations for targeted pupils		
Resources clearly labelled		
School-wide consistency in place		