



Building a
Neuroinclusive
School

TOOL

Neurodivergent Learner Characteristics



Neurodiversity
in Education
Project



Building a Neuroinclusive School

We've created this easy-to-use tool to help you notice, recognise, and respond to the unique characteristics of neurodivergent learners in your classroom.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

● Notice ●

behaviour that seems different.

● Recognise ●

that this might be due to neurodiversity, which could be a strength or a challenge (or both!) for the student's learning and development.

● Respond ●

by adjusting your support to better meet the student's needs.

You don't need to have all the answers. What really matters to your students is your effort to understand how their brain works, how you can support them, and the strong relationship you're building together.

This tool is a guide to help you get started. If you need more support, reach out to your Learning Support Coordinator, SENCO, or other professionals.

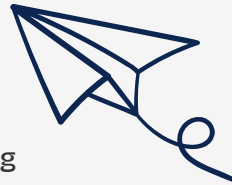
Building A Neuroinclusive School is a FREE learning platform and community-building programme for primary and secondary school leaders and teachers.



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Overview

1. Thinking
2. Learning
3. Doing
4. Beliefs About Learning
5. Organising For Learning
6. Focusing
7. Expressing Emotions
8. Interacting With Peers
9. Interacting With Teachers
10. Interacting In Their Environment



Check out more FUN and PRACTICAL resources at
www.neurodiversity.org.nz/bns or by scanning the QR code



1.

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Thinking



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Deep, connected thinking
- Big picture thinking
- Sees all the different possibilities
- Strong memory, logic and reasoning
- Strong visual thinker

Sticking Points

- Seems stuck in one way of thinking and not able to choose a different approach when this is needed
- Applies creative thinking when logical reasoning is needed or vice versa
- Doesn't seem able to remember or notice details OR is overly focused on details

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Give students the overarching ideas first then tie details to these
- Recognise and celebrate the different ways of thinking that all contribute to learning
- Harness creative thinking by teaching and using creative thinking strategies across all learning
- Allow opportunities for deep and complex thinking for students who relish it

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Learning



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Great ideas in conversation
- Shows high abilities in some areas
- Has specialised areas of knowledge

Sticking Points

- Avoids written work or written work doesn't reflect thinking or discussion
- Has uneven achievement across subjects and skills
- Isn't particularly interested in school subjects
- Easily bored and rushes through work

Respond

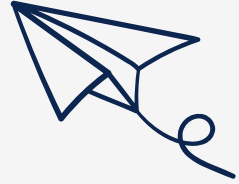
Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Use many different ways for students to show what is known, including using technology
- Understand, celebrate and leverage all strengths
- Support transfer from interests into school subjects

You might notice differences in this area:

Doing



You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Great focus and engagement when constructing, deconstructing and tinkering
- Can express themselves and their ideas creatively in art, music and/or drama
- Able to produce or engage in detailed, fine work

Sticking Points

- Physically clumsy or awkward
- Difficulties working with shapes, maps or games requiring visual or spatial skills

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Give options of hands-on, artistic, construction, or tech-enabled activities across all learning experiences
- Build understanding of body in space through movement activities

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Beliefs about Learning



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Can be intensely involved with learning in the moment
- Keen to achieve well
- Enjoys learning for its own sake

Sticking Points

- Perfectionism and frustration showing up as withdrawal or challenging behaviour
- Fixed and limiting ideas about abilities or limits
- Refuses or avoids some tasks, may seem lazy or non-compliant

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Teach students to understand themselves as learners
- Ask students about their own sticking points as learners and develop strategies to work around these together
- Use successful experiences to promote and teach a growth mindset

5.

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Organising for Learning



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Understands or quickly works out what is expected in learning or social activities
- Can set and work towards their own goals
- Seems well organised and able to stay on-track

Sticking Points

- Doesn't keep track of time
- Finds it hard to get started and to keep going with activities
- Struggles to keep track of their things
- Finds it hard to understand the expectations of activities or social situations

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Use and teach simple organisation systems and strategies
- Give chunked time expectations for tasks
- Make the expectations clear and explicit

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Focusing



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Intense focus when interested, and passionate interests
- Interested in absolutely everything
- High energy

Sticking Points

- It can be hard to 'change gears', or very scattered focus
- Interests can be restrictive or limiting
- Moving, doing or talking all the time
- Could be seen as lazy and uninterested
- May struggle to sit long enough to eat

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Use visual timers and visual timetables for easier time management and transitions
- Celebrate all interest areas and gently introduce related interest areas
- Build movement into normal classroom life

7.

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Expressing Emotions



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Emotional sensitivity
- Highly empathetic
- Strong sense of fairness

Sticking Points

- Limited regulation of emotions
- Deep feelings that override everything else that's going on
- Sense of difference

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Make space for all emotions
- Actively teach emotional regulation skills for all learners

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Interacting with Peers



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Strong social awareness and empathy
- Prefers the company of just one trusted friend or adult

Sticking Points

- Seems isolated: often alone, few friends, tags along
- Dominates others or overwhelms them
- Different ways of getting along with others

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Talk with students to find out about their social preferences and goals and help them to achieve these through active skills teaching
- Engineer and support opportunities to connect with like minds

You might notice differences in this area:

Interacting with Teachers



You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Enthusiastic, hard-working and conscientious, when the conditions are just right
- Gets on with things in a settled way
- Asks a lot of questions

Sticking Points

- Doesn't seem to listen to or follow instructions
- Dominates teacher time through excitement, confusion or frustration
- Seems confused or distant, not engaged in activities

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Check in with students individually and regularly
- Give instructions in multiple ways and in different sized chunks
- Give multiple ways to work with the teacher, for example through a quiet conversation, a notebook or shared doc

Notice

You might notice differences in this area:

Interacting in their Environment



Recognise

You might see one or more of these characteristics:

Strengths

- Sees, hears and feels everything that's going on
- Processes information very quickly
- Takes time to think deeply about ideas
- Involved in everything going on

Sticking Points

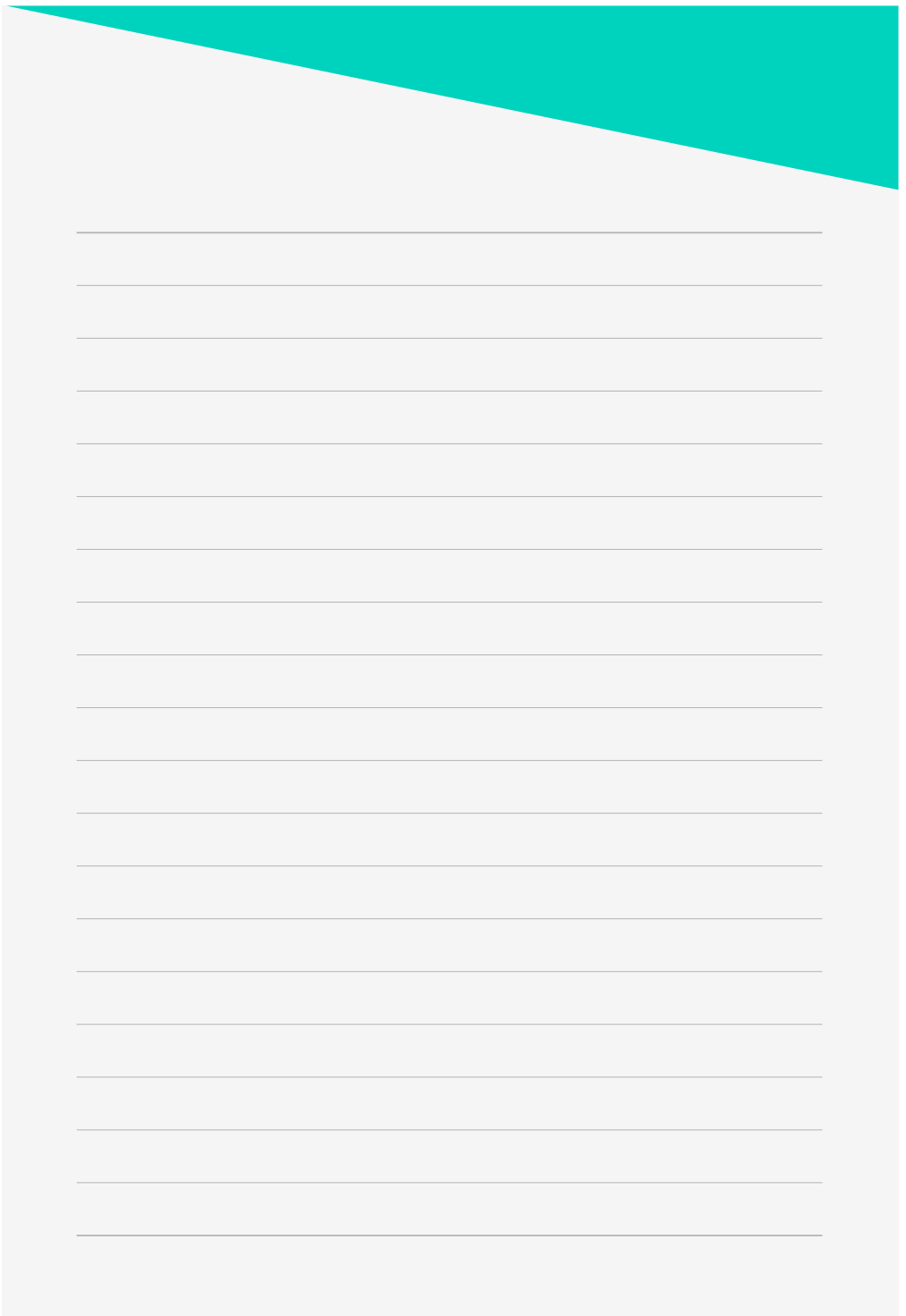
- Big or unexpected responses to sensory input
- Uneven pace of thinking and learning
- Loses track of time and things really easily
- Struggles with unexpected change - needs time to transition

Respond

Depending on the strength or sticking point you observe, you might try one or more of these strategies:

Strategies

- Take a sensory stocktake and calm the sensory environment, creating a separate calm space that is available for all
- Provide simple sensory tools for all students
- Have more flexible pacing for all learners
- Communicate changes in advance



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