

Therapeutic Classrooms:

Creating Safe, Inclusive and Regulating Spaces for All Learners

In recent years, the concept of *therapeutic classrooms* has gained significant momentum in UK schools, and for good reason. As pupil needs become more complex, particularly for those with SEND, the evidence increasingly shows that the physical and emotional environment plays a critical role in behaviour, wellbeing and learning readiness. Therapeutic classrooms focus on creating spaces that are *calm, trauma-informed, attachment aware, inclusive and developmentally supportive*.

Below is an overview of the latest research, why this matters for every learner (not only those with SEND), and practical steps you can take to begin transforming your own classrooms.

Why Therapeutic Classrooms Matter

They support emotional regulation and social–emotional development

Research shows that thoughtfully designed environments significantly enhance students' social–emotional growth and behaviour. For example, therapeutic classrooms can act as a *refuge* where children develop regulation, build relationships and engage more positively with learning. This aligns with findings that trauma-informed, attachment aware spaces help children feel safe enough to remain in a learning state.

They improve outcomes for neurodiverse and SEND learners

Studies exploring inclusive and neurodiversity supportive design highlight that sensory sensitive, flexible and psychologically safe environments reduce anxiety, heighten focus and improve academic performance. For instance, research on therapeutic learning environments emphasises how lighting, acoustics, spatial layout and sensory considerations enhance attention and reduce stress for neurodiverse pupils. Other research stresses the need for adaptive spaces that respond to pupils' social, emotional and cognitive needs.

They reduce barriers to learning across the whole school

UK-based therapeutic classroom projects show reductions in school refusal, dysregulation and general barriers to learning, especially for pupils with ADHD, autism and ACEs. These benefits extend to *all* pupils by fostering calmness, connection, comfort and psychological safety, essential components of effective learning for every child.

What Makes a Classroom ‘Therapeutic’?

Therapeutic classrooms share several design principles:

- **Calm lighting rather than harsh fluorescents**
- **Comfortable and flexible seating** rather than rigid plastic chairs
- **Cosy breakout spaces**, cushions and blankets to support regulation
- **Clear, decluttered layouts** that reduce sensory overload
- **Nature and biophilic elements**, such as plants, which can lower stress
- **Warm, welcoming décor**, including framed pictures instead of busy displays
- **A focus on safety, connection and belonging**

You can explore real examples, videos and transformation stories on TPC Therapy’s website:

👉 <https://www.tpctherapy.co.uk/> [[tpctherapy.co.uk](https://www.tpctherapy.co.uk/)]

Practical Tips for Creating a Therapeutic Classroom

1. Start with sensory safety

Research-based design guidance emphasises reducing sensory overwhelm (e.g., harsh lighting, noise, clutter). Soft lighting, acoustic panels, calm colour palettes and predictable layouts can make a notable difference, especially for autistic and ADHD learners.

2. Incorporate flexible seating

From floor tables to corner sofas, flexibility empowers pupils to choose where they feel most regulated. Evidence shows that flexibility enhances focus and reduces anxiety for neurodiverse learners.

3. Build connection into the room layout

Round tables and cosy seating arrangements support communication, emotional development and cooperative learning, a key component of therapeutic classroom design.

4. Create calm breakout/retreat spaces

A small corner with cushions, blankets or soft lighting lets pupils temporarily withdraw and regulate. This supports emotional and behavioural needs across diverse learners.

5. Replace overstimulating displays with purposeful visuals

Therapeutic classrooms limit visual noise, instead using framed artwork, instructional prompts or affirmations. This reduces cognitive load and supports attention.

6. Embed trauma informed and attachment aware practice

The therapeutic environment is only one part; staff relational approaches complete the picture. TPC Therapy emphasises integrating the environment with consistent, connective relationships.

7. Make wellbeing a whole school priority

Research shows that schools benefit most when therapeutic design is part of wider culture change, reducing punitive discipline and creating emotionally intelligent communities.

Example Images & Inspiration

You can view transformation photos, furniture ideas and before/after examples at:

- **TPC Therapy – Therapeutic Classrooms Gallery:**
<https://www.tpctherapy.co.uk/therapeutic-classrooms/> [[tpctherapy.co.uk](https://www.tpctherapy.co.uk/)]
- **Therapeutic Classrooms Furniture & Soft Furnishings:**
<https://www.therapeuticclassrooms.co.uk/> [[therapeuti...ooms.co.uk](https://www.therapeuticclassrooms.co.uk/)]

These pages include examples such as cosy corners, calm LED lighting, rustic shelving and flexible seating arrangements that can be directly replicated in your setting.

Final Thoughts

Therapeutic classrooms are not a trend, they are an evidence based response to the changing needs of today's children. By prioritising safety, connection and emotional wellbeing, schools can create spaces where *all pupils, including those with SEN, can thrive*. The research overwhelmingly supports the move toward sensory safe, relationship centred environments that foster regulation, resilience and readiness to learn.

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