

Occupational Therapy Service Process in Special Schools

What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapists are concerned with how people function* in everyday life. We aim to work collaboratively with family and staff within the school.

Occupational Therapy focuses on promoting, maximising and maintaining the skills and abilities of children with a wide range of abilities and disabilities.

The term Occupational Therapy can often be confusing. It carries the misconception that the profession's focus is on occupation and job training. In fact, Occupational Therapists promote skill development and independence in daily 'occupations' in a broader sense. For an adult, this may mean doing the housework, going to the gym, going to the shops and/or work. For a child, this may include playing, accessing learning and being able to eat their meals.

Occupational Therapists aim to help children develop skills and promote independence through the use of meaningful activities. We aim to work towards the child practising skills in their daily activities in the settings and environments they need to do them in.

Occupational Therapists are able to analyse the skills necessary for individuals to perform activities. We do this by breaking the task down and identifying the areas of difficulty. Think of the child learning to write. To learn this task, the child must have:

- good sitting posture and balance,
- adequate joint stability and muscle strength,
- good body awareness and motor planning,
- good hand skills,
- mature visual perceptual and visual motor skills,
- good attention and concentration skills ...
- and the cognitive ability to learn this skill!

This is why it is so valuable for us to be able to observe children completing their everyday tasks, for example, in the classroom.

Occupational Therapy in Special Schools

In a special school, we know that children may have varying degrees of difficulty due to a number of factors.

We can support children to develop their daily living skills, for example, dressing, washing, eating, drinking, preparing snacks, personal hygiene, accessing the curriculum including recording work, accessing school outings, participation and access to play and leisure activities.

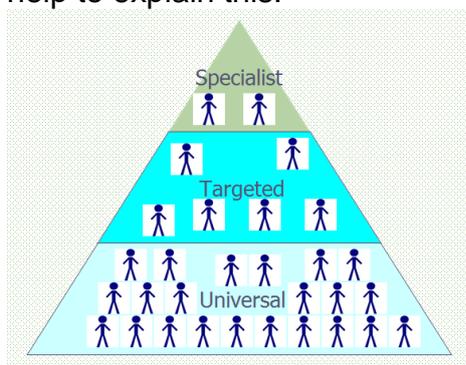
There are a range of specialist teachers skilled in developing children's abilities and independence via a broad and practical curriculum. The Occupational Therapist helps support and supplements these skills. What we hope to provide is an Occupational Therapy Service that enables collaborative working and joint goal setting and action planning.

OT Availability

Mondays 9am – 2.30pm Tuesdays 9am - 2.30pm

How Occupational Therapy Works Within the School and College

There are various ways the OT will provide a service to the school. This model may help to explain this:



Universal

This represents all children in the school. They are all likely to have some need to improve their functional* skills, but these needs can be met through the classroom/school environment.

Targeted

At this level individuals who need some level of additional support to improve their function. The OT may carry out a class observation and an assessment giving strategies to the classroom staff.

Specialist Level

At this level those children need specialist support from an Occupational Therapist. The OT will provide or co-ordinate support for the child.

Referral Process

A completed referral for Occupational Therapy is required for every request for intervention. Parents/carers can make a referral through teaching staff or other professionals or direct to the OT (through face-to-face or telephone call discussion). If your child is referred to the Occupational Therapy Service by a professional, you as parents/carers will be asked to give your consent.

* Functional = We - as humans - are designed *to do* or to function. Our ability to function in our environment supports our health and is also affected by our health. So when OTs address function, we are focusing on ways to support a person's ability *to do* what they need or want to do in the context of their daily lives.