Hydrocephalus
Quick Teaching Tips

Every child with hydrocephalus is unique and each one will have individual strengths and skills.

Following operations or procedures to relieve the pressure of cerebrospinal fluid, the brains and nervous systems of children with hydrocephalus have developed in similar, and, in some cases, very different ways to typically developing children.

Creative thinking in the classroom by educators, and at home by parents and carers too, will help a child with hydrocephalus function better when learning new skills.

Classroom Management Tips

- Ensure that a child with hydrocephalus **sits near the front of the classroom** with a clear view of all boards and screens being used.
- Children with hydrocephalus sometimes have difficulty with **waiting** for tasks to begin so having other children in the class to **model the action required** helps when turn-taking. This gives the child with hydrocephalus time to settle in their seat and **prepare for learning** before their task begins.
- When giving instructions, repeat them in **written and spoken forms** for the child on a regular basis throughout lessons.
- **Visual prompts**, such as personal timetables and social stories, maintain the sequence of instructions and processes.
- Older children may require **electronic devices** to support their learning, provide scaffolding for processes and to prompt action.
- Children with **fine motor skills difficulties** may find laptops or tablets easier for recording their answers and responses.
- Young children find egg-timers useful to remind them how much time they have to complete a task.
- **Prefix instructions and questions** with the name of the child to re-affirm the command or question. This ensures that the child identifies with the instruction and that it includes them.

- Ambiguous instructions should be avoided so that a literal rather than implicit message is provided for the child.

- Irony, sarcasm, jokes and reading body language can make communication and social talk difficult for a child with hydrocephalus so **straightforward communication** is preferred.

- **Noise levels** can be distracting for a child with hydrocephalus, as can extreme quiet where the ticking of a clock can be heard. A break-out space or quiet area is an important option for a child with noise sensitivity.

- Resources used for pupils with **other learning needs**, such as dyslexia or dyscalcula, can be effective for children with hydrocephalus too. **Multi-sensory** reading schemes are often an effective tool.

- **Hydration** is vital for all children and particularly for children with hydrocephalus. It is important a hydrocephalic child has plenty of water throughout the day because brain function can be affected when a child is dehydrated.

- **Fatigue** is often a difficulty for children with a brain injury like hydrocephalus

The Learning Environment

The developing brain of a child with hydrocephalus needs to be nurtured by being explicitly taught to make connections in order to function effectively in mainstream life. Neural plasticity and the adaptive capacity of the nervous system gives educators the opportunity to teach children with a brain injury how to overcome their impairment by forming these new neural connections.

The low profile of hydrocephalus as a disability and the **complex subtleties** of how the condition presents in different children can lead to the difficulties in education settings.

The effects of hydrocephalus can have many overlaps with other neurological conditions.

The teaching techniques outlined in SEN Support **planning** for the different effects of hydrocephalus can prove useful to a range of neuro-disabilities.

Children with hydrocephalus can thrive and achieve in line with their peers by their teachers having a clear understanding of the particular effects of their brain injury, the modification of teaching methods and small changes to classroom management.

Creating a multi-sensory environment – tips and resources

Some children with hydrocephalus have sensory processing problems, which appear similar to the difficulties children with autism experience.

Schools may wish to conduct a sensory audit, such as this one outlined by the **Autism Education Trust** as part of their good practice.

http://www.aettraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/37.1-Sensory-audit-tool-for-environments.pdf

There are many techniques to prevent children from being bewildered by their environment. It is imperative that supportive strategies are in place at an early stage so that they become part of the child's daily routine. **Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour** a paper by the Children with Disabilities Team, Falkirk Council Children's Services – provides helpful guidance.

_http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/social-care/disabilities/docs/young-people/Making%20Sense%20of%20Sensory%20Behaviour.pdf?v=201507131117