NEURODIVERSITY-FRIENDLY CLASSROOM DESIGN
CHECKLIST

Sensory-Friendly Environment

- Quiet corner or calm-down area available
- Soft seating (bean bags, cushions, or low chairs)
- Access to fidget tools or sensory bins
- Dimmable lights or lamps instead of harsh fluorescents
- Natural light or adjustable window coverings
- Visual noise minimized (limited posters or overstimulation on walls)

Flexible Seating & Movement

- Multiple seating types (e.g., floor cushions, stools, chairs with back support)
- Standing desk or tall work surface available
- Students allowed to choose seating based on comfort
- Movement-friendly tools (wiggle cushions, chair bands, yoga balls)
- Clear policy for optional movement breaks

Acoustic Awareness

- Soft materials (rugs, curtains, bulletin boards) to absorb sound
- Headphones available for students with noise sensitivity
- Minimized background noise (from fans, tech, or hallways)
- Furniture and bins have soft-close or noise-dampening features

Visual Organization & Structure

- Consistent classroom layout (furniture not frequently rearranged)
- Clear zones for different activities (reading, independent work, group time)
- Color-coded or labeled storage for supplies
- Daily schedule visible in both picture and text format
- Step-by-step task instructions posted where needed

Lighting & Visual Comfort

- No direct glare on desks or screens
- Soft white or warm-toned bulbs in lamps
- Fluorescent lighting covered or filtered
- Seating placed to minimize eye strain from windows or overheads

Inclusive Design Elements

- Visuals and posters reflect diverse learners and communication styles
- Calm, neutral color palette (avoids bright/neon overstimulation)
- Student input is included in classroom setup when possible
- Space feels welcoming, organized, and accessible for all students

Optional Add-Ons (Nice to Have)

- "Reset" station with calming tools (weighted items, sensory bottles, etc.)
- Timer or visual countdown clock for transitions
- Whiteboard or dry-erase surface for flexible instructions
- Choice boards or "how I learn best" profiles displayed

Final Tip:

Pick one category per month to audit and improve. Small shifts in your classroom design can lead to big gains in attention, comfort, and confidence—especially for neurodivergent learners.

Kinnealey et al. (2012) – Classroom modifications for attention support; Stalvey & Brasell (2006) – Stress balls and focus; Barrett et al. (2015) – Classroom design impact on learning; Higgins et al. (2005) – Visual environments in education; Tobin & Tippett (2014) – Learning space flexibility; Dornhecker et al. (2015) – Stand-biased desks and activity; CAST (2023) – Universal Design for Learning (UDL); Shield & Dockrell (2008) – Noise and academic performance; Picard & Bradley (2001) – Sound interference in classrooms; Dawson & Guare (2018) – Executive skills and structure; Young & Lampert (2020) – Inclusive learning environments; Harvard GSE (2018) – Inclusive classroom design; Earthman (2004) – Lighting and learning conditions; ASID (2021) – Designing for sensory comfort; Booth & Ainscow (2016) – Index for Inclusion; Nind & Vinha (2012) – Inclusive research and participation; AOTA (2021) – OT-led classroom design; Harris & Graham (1996) – Visual timers and strategy supports