



## HighLight Key – A Stimulating Learning Environment

Environment matters. God took great care to prepare a stimulating and beautiful environment for Adam and Eve to explore and to learn about him and his world. Environment can have a positive or negative effect on the learner. In a school with a Christian ethos the environment should reflect and celebrate that ethos and a Christian worldview (see HighLight Key: Worldview). Relevant illustrations, art, artefacts; concepts relating the learning to the worldview; words of God (including promises to encourage the learner) all add to a stimulating environment. In the Christian worldview, every subject reveals God and is an expression of the knowledge and wisdom in him.<sup>1</sup> God is Scientist, Mathematician, Linguist, Historian, Geographer, Artist and much more. A Christian environment, therefore, should be stimulating, positive and of good quality. It should be kept freshly updated.

The school environment contributes greatly to the atmosphere which is set. The first impression of a school is given by its foyer and corridors. They should be welcoming, clean, orderly and bright. The walls and displays should record meaningful work, learning experienced through school visits, and praising of achievement.

The classroom environment should also be bright, colourful, orderly, informative, provoking enquiry and kept freshly updated. It will stimulate the learners and cause them to value their learning.

### Points to consider when setting up the Learning Environment

*If the aims of a school are to be achieved in terms of teaching and learning it is essential that teachers arrange the learning environment effectively. The following guidelines aim to help with the set up of classrooms and to ensure consistency across the school.*

The effective use of space, large and small, is a key element in successful teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible: Colossians Chapter 2 verse 3



Are you using your space effectively?

The classroom needs to be organized to be flexible – facilitating whole-class, group and individual work. Furniture needs to enable ease of movement around the room, to ensure there are no congestion points or dead spaces. School policy may encourage a designated carpet area where all children can see the (Interactive) Whiteboard. Tables should be organised for differentiated groups, remembering you can also use practical areas. The classroom needs to be tidy and uncluttered and have systems to ensure children take a large share in the responsibility.

Placing and using furniture, equipment and resources thoughtfully will contribute to an effective classroom.



Are the furniture, resources and equipment clearly labelled, available to children and used to their best effect?

Location of trays and cupboards to store exercise books needs careful consideration, in order that sides are left clear for display use. All resources should have a place and be available and accessible to all children. Trays, shelves storage boxes etc. should be labelled in a uniform style. Computerised labels and handwritten labels should be produced in relation to the school's handwriting policy.

Trays are useful for storing group's Literacy books, Maths books and Topic books. Check the school policy about whether children require their own individual trays.

Each group needs a tray with basic equipment e.g. a pencil pot, dictionaries.

There should be a place for book bags. (A storage box or expanding linen basket are suitable). Is there a tray/place for classroom assistants to store classroom work?

The preparation of the children's books is another vital consideration.



Will the children's books be neatly labelled and carefully presented?

If the school has a policy on which books to use for particular subjects, it is important to follow this. The books should be labelled consistently either using computer labels or

handwritten by the children. Be clear about how books should be presented and cared for.



Will all the information needed be clearly visible?

Have a place to display the timetable for the day: timings, content and organisation of the day's learning. A pictorial timetable helps the visual learners. Allow an area to display the classes learning intentions and success criteria for every lesson. Have a place to display the weekly timetable, the week's plans and playtime activity/duty rotas. This is essential information for anyone covering your class. Any class groups should be displayed. To make this flexible, it is good practice to laminate individual names and use Blue Tac or adhesive to move them around on group charts. Have the school marking codes, fire procedures, the school mission statement, discipline plan, a copy of the Lord's Prayer/School Prayer and code of conduct on display. Display anything relevant to the school's Behaviour Policy that will be used – such as team points, merit charts. Ensure the children's cloakroom pegs are labelled. A welcome sign on all doors that enter your classroom, including the class name and teacher's name, helps build a sense of identity and directs people to the right place.

Displays should be used to celebrate the learning achievement and effort of the pupils within the school and play a big part in creating and stimulating the learning environment in which children feel comfortable. Whenever possible, there should be an opportunity for the work of every child to be displayed and celebrated, encouraging all pupils even though content varies according to ability.

**Each class should have:**

**A Literacy and Maths display. This does not have to be on a display board.**

**An interactive spelling display. If possible this should be adapted for each new spelling pattern looked at and children should be able to add to it with post-it notes or white board pens.**

**A topic display with space for artefacts. The children should be encouraged to contribute to this during the topic.**

**Displays linking to a range of curriculum areas over the year.**

**Consider a writing or Role play area – this is particularly important for younger children. Ensure the school's presentation policy is followed regarding mounting, attaching work to displays.**

**Displays should be maintained throughout their lifetime.**



Are your displays engaging the children?

Your displays should be as interactive as possible – asking questions, involving physical contact, extending vocabulary and challenging children’s thinking.

Have you got a range of displays to show end products; to show processes; to teach/challenge; to celebrate; to act a starting point; to support the current learning; to be interactive?

Ensure both a 2D and 3D element to your displays. Use artefacts, books, maps, photos. Consider using drapes to ‘soften’ the edges of a display and to link the wall element to a table top.

Displays should make clear the Learning Intention behind the activity.

Children’s work should be sensitively displayed, so that other children can see it. It should be mounted in line with the school’s policy. A variety of different work associated with a topic makes a more interesting display than several pieces of the same work.

Ensure that, over a period of time, all children have some of their best work displayed.



Do you have a range of prompts?

Put up lists of subject specific vocabulary; commonly used/function words; the range of words that mean the same (add, plus, sum, total)

If appropriate display, on a washing line, cards that the children will be working on e.g. words with the long vowel phoneme.

Put alphabet and number friezes up in different places (high, at eye level, on wall, on desk top). Use as appropriate for your year group. Ensure there are questions attached to these lines.

Show good examples of accurate letter formation and where to use punctuation.

Do children know what to do?

E.g. “Stuck with a spelling? Try these five things first (and then the sixth bullet point is “Go and ask an adult”)

E.g. “Finished and don’t know what to do next? Why not.....



Are you setting a good example?

**Ensure the teacher’s desk/stations/trays/cupboards do not become a dumping ground and set a double standard, but reflect the expectations made of the children. All outside areas must be kept tidy at all times.**

THE PRACTICAL OUTWORKINGS OF THIS KEY MAY BE FOLLOWED USING THIS CHECKLIST:

<b>Is there an IMPACT board? (important for visual learners)</b>	
<b>Are there artefacts, photos, 3D items on display? (Kinaesthetic learners)</b>	
<b>Are books celebrated in different areas of the classroom? (Promoting Reading)</b>	
<b>Does the learning environment reflect the current topic?</b>	
<b>Is there evidence of current spelling patterns/rules? (visual learners)</b>	
<b>Is there evidence of current Maths work/resources?</b>	
<b>Is there evidence of visual supports for sentence level work (e.g. punctuation/connectives)? Is it being used? Has it come from a series of lessons?</b>	
<b>Are there challenging questions in the classroom which promote higher order thinking?</b>	
<b>Is topic and Maths vocabulary displayed in the classroom? (visual learners)</b>	
<b>Are there areas of the classroom that are softened e.g. with drapes, boxes?</b>	
<b>Is there a range of high quality pupils’ work displayed from across the curriculum? (valuing work and whole curriculum)</b>	
<b>Are areas free of clutter?</b>	

The above checklist helps teachers to develop an environment in which they can demonstrate pupils’ value, as well as providing useful and challenging learning opportunities. Pupils should, as part of their stewardship, be encouraged to care for their learning environment, and may be able to have some creative responsibility within the classroom for displaying their work. Children should be exercising their God-given creativity and stewardship in these ways within the classroom.

### **The Learning Environment in the Secondary School**

The learning environment is equally important in secondary schools, although it is not always regarded as a priority. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that, in many cases, secondary teachers are more mobile, rather than being based in one room. HighLight encourages subject teachers (where they do have a base) to make their rooms a distinctive and stimulating expression of their subject. The walls can then be used to remind students of key facts and formulae and to honour the students’ work. Where there are rooms that are not specifically designated as a subject base it is

important that the environment is not neglected but allocated to a class or to a couple of teachers who share responsibility for it. Students' art work can and should be celebrated, as can other pieces of work. There are many inspiring posters and pictures available, for example of wild life, varied cultures, sportsmen and women or natural wonders of the earth and the universe that can be framed and used to enliven and encourage students, giving them a wider vision. These will need to be frequently changed and moved throughout the school year. The covert message given by such attention to the environment is that the students matter. This is also part of creating an environment where we show care and celebrate learning. Creative décor and display also provide a more pleasant and stimulating environment which raises tone and morale.

In these varied ways, environment contributes richly to an atmosphere conducive to the joy of learning in God's world.