My Ideal School Cards
A Checklist for Practitioners

A guide for school staff and professionals

My Ideal School Cards:
Before, During and After checklist

A quick support checklist for staff

BEFORE

- [ ] Agree the purpose of the activity and who will use the information.
- [ ] Explain the activity in an accessible way and gain the child's agreement to take part.
- [ ] Agree how the child can pause, stop or ask for a break.
- [ ] Identify the child's preferred way to communicate.
- [ ] Choose a familiar adult, suitable room and manageable session length.
- [ ] Reduce interruptions and allow enough time so the child does not feel rushed.
- [ ] Prepare the Ideal School Cards and Helpful Strategies cards.
- [ ] Prepare any paper, pens, pencils, sticky notes, whiteboard, pictures, symbols or communication aids the child usually uses.
- [ ] Decide how ideas will be recorded and stored.
- [ ] Agree with the child and their parent or carer who the information may be shared with.
- [ ] Plan how the child will be shown that their views have been listened to and valued.

DURING

- [ ] Follow the child's pace and keep the activity flexible.
- [ ] Remind the child that they do not need to speak.
- [ ] Offer the child a comfortable way to respond, such as pointing, choosing, nodding, drawing, writing, using symbols or communicating through a trusted adult or peer.
- [ ] Use simple, concrete explanations when a card is unclear.
- [ ] Check that Yes, No and Maybe are understood as choices, not right or wrong answers.
- [ ] Offer choices about where to sit, who joins them, or whether to use a comfort item where appropriate.
- [ ] Use the child's agreed signal for a break or stop.
- [ ] Notice signs that the child may be overwhelmed, such as becoming very still or being unable to use their usual way of communicating.
- [ ] If needed, reduce demands, pause or finish at a natural stopping point.
- [ ] Avoid pressing for an answer or asking repeated open-ended "why" questions if the child appears uncomfortable.
- [ ] Record the child's choices accurately and ask permission before taking photographs.
- [ ] At the end, check what area was completed and what should happen next.

AFTER

- [ ] Record the child's key choices, priorities and agreed next steps.
- [ ] Store notes and photographs in line with the setting's information-governance procedures.
- [ ] Share information only with the people agreed with the child and their parent or carer, unless safeguarding procedures require otherwise.
- [ ] Arrange a follow-up discussion with the child's permission, involving their parent or carer and relevant school staff where appropriate.
- [ ] Agree a small number of realistic actions.
- [ ] For each action, record what will happen, who will be responsible, when it will begin and when it will be reviewed.
- [ ] Tell the child what will happen next so they know their views have been listened to and valued.
- [ ] Review the plan at least termly, or sooner if needed, to consider whether the support remains appropriate.
- [ ] Consider whether successful approaches could be used more consistently in other parts of school.
- [ ] Only consider later targeted support around speaking when the child feels comfortable and the agreed changes have had time to become established.
- [ ] Ensure any further support is led by the child, introduced at their pace and broken into small, manageable steps.

The Ideal School Cards are not designed to elicit speech. They can help adults understand and create the conditions in which the child feels safer, more comfortable and better able to participate.