



CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL

What your classroom is telling you

An observation tool for teachers

Explore eight common student behaviours, what might be contributing to them, and practical changes to try.

Observe your classroom

A few moments of observation can help you notice patterns in how students sit, move and take part in learning. Use this tool to explore how your classroom setup and furniture support student comfort, movement and engagement.

WHEN TO OBSERVE Once students have settled into a lesson . Notice how they are sitting and moving.	HOW LONG TO WATCH Start with a 30-second scan from the doorway. Look closer to check grip and foot support.	WHAT TO NOTICE Look for patterns shared by several students across the room.
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This guide helps you explore classroom patterns. It cannot identify a condition or establish why a student behaves in a particular way. For ongoing concerns, follow your school's usual learning support process.

Tick the behaviours you notice across several students and add comments below.
Use a new sheet each time to compare observations.

Room: _____ Year: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Activity: ☐ Listening ☐ Writing ☐ Reading ☐ Group work Other: _____

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	OBSERVED	N/A
01 The whole-hand grip	☐	☐
02 Feet hooked, wrapped or tucked	☐	☐
03 Kneeling on the seat or standing to write	☐	☐
04 Upper body resting on the desk	☐	☐
05 Chair tipping	☐	☐
06 Frequent changes of position	☐	☐
07 Tapping, bouncing, spinning a pen	☐	☐
08 Sitting low in the chair or slouching	☐	☐

TEACHER COMMENTS

What did you see?

STUDENT COMMENTS

How are they feeling?

ONE CHANGE TO TRY

No change needed ☐

Review date: _____

Noticing a pattern? Explore pages 3–5 before deciding whether a change would help.

Eight behaviours to notice and explore

Watching how students sit and move can help you explore how the room supports their comfort and participation.

These behaviours are starting points for observation and conversation. Look for patterns over time, ask students how they feel and try a small adjustment where useful.

01 The whole-hand grip

WHAT YOU SEE

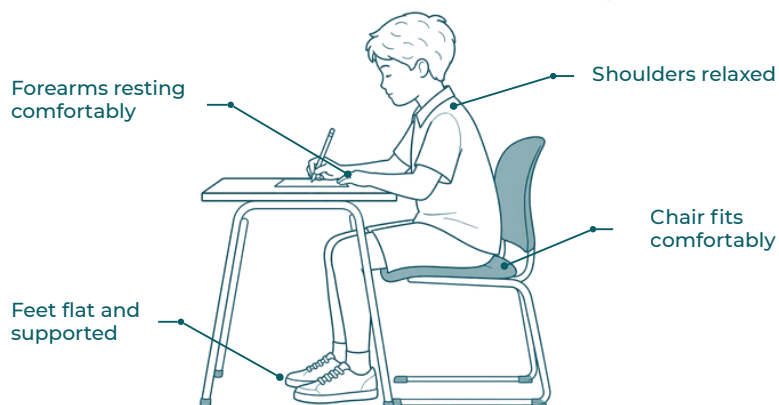
A child wrapping a full fist around the pencil rather than holding it between fingers and thumb.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

If sitting upright takes considerable effort, controlling the smaller movements of the hand may be more difficult. Seating and stability may be part of the picture, alongside developing hand skills. Look below the desk as well as at the pencil.

WHAT TO TRY

Feet flat on the floor or a stable footrest, bottom comfortably back in a well-fitting seat, and a desk at a height where the forearms can rest without the shoulders rising. Check the support, then notice whether writing feels easier. Ask about comfort and watch for changes in effort and control.



02 Feet hooked, wrapped or tucked

WHAT YOU SEE

Ankles wound around chair legs, feet tucked underneath the seat, or one leg folded beneath the body.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

The student may be seeking support, comfort or sensory input. Check whether their feet reach the floor and the chair fits. They may simply prefer sitting this way.

WHAT TO TRY

If feet are unsupported, try a better-fitting chair or a stable footrest, checking the desk height too. Review the fit as students grow. One chair size is unlikely to suit everyone.

03 Kneeling on the seat or standing to write

WHAT YOU SEE

A child up on their knees on the chair, or standing at their desk to write.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

The desk may be too high relative to the seat. Raising themselves to bring their forearms up to the table might be more comfortable. Sometimes it is simply a preference to sit this way.

WHAT TO TRY

Check the height of the chair and desk together. If the student works comfortably standing, consider a suitable standing-height option. Make sure the position is stable and the work is within easy reach.

04 Upper body resting on the desk

WHAT YOU SEE

A student leaning heavily on the table, resting their chest on it or repeatedly propping their head on a hand.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

The desk may be providing extra support. Observe if this happens from the start or later in the task. Tiredness, furniture fit and the position of the work are all worth exploring.

WHAT TO TRY

Ask about comfort and check the work height and reach. If several students start leaning heavily at a similar point, try a brief break or a change of position and see if that helps improve their posture.

Look at the wider classroom and environment



Noise, lighting, glare, temperature and ventilation can also affect comfort and concentration.

Take note of behaviours during certain activities, times of the day or in specific locations.

05 Chair tipping

WHAT YOU SEE

The chair tilted onto two legs and rocking, sometimes during listening rather than writing.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Tipping may be a way of finding movement or a more comfortable position. Notice when it happens and whether students have other opportunities to move.

WHAT TO TRY

Address unsafe tipping promptly. Check furniture fit and offer safe ways to move or change position. Seating designed to accommodate movement may help reduce tipping, alongside clear expectations for safe use.

06 Frequent changes of position

WHAT YOU SEE

Shifting, turning, getting up and sitting down again, or repeatedly changing position.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

In Furnware's classroom observations, younger students changed position more often than teenagers. Movement varies with the student, task and time spent sitting. Check comfort and if it affects their work.

WHAT TO TRY

Give students an agreed place to change position: a floor space, a standing spot or another place to continue the task. Agree when and how they can move safely. Ask whether the change feels more comfortable and helps them continue their work.



07 Tapping, bouncing, spinning a pen

WHAT YOU SEE

A foot moving, a knee bouncing or a pen turning in the fingers. Small, repetitive movements that may be easy to overlook.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

In Furnware's classroom observations, teenagers tended to show smaller movements, such as leg shaking and pen twirling. These alone tell us little about attention. Check engagement and if the movement disrupts others.

WHAT TO TRY

If the movement is comfortable, safe and unobtrusive, no change may be needed. If it distracts others, agree a quieter alternative. Older students also need opportunities to move, even when their movements are less noticeable.

08 Sitting low in the chair or slouching

WHAT YOU SEE

Students sitting low in their chairs, slouching or folding their arms.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

This can accompany tiredness, discomfort or disengagement. Students may also sit this way while listening and taking part. Posture alone gives an incomplete picture.

WHAT TO TRY

Check understanding through a question, conversation or the student's work. Ask whether they are comfortable. Use what you observe and hear to decide whether a change to the seating, position or activity would help.

Purpose of this tool

Use this guide to notice patterns in how students sit and move, and explore whether furniture, the activity or the room setup could better support them.

Similar behaviours can have different explanations. Observe over time, ask students about comfort and try a small adjustment where useful. This is an observation guide, not a diagnostic assessment.

WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

If a student reports pain, seems persistently uncomfortable or finds it difficult to take part, follow your school's usual learning support process. Follow any existing individual support plan and seek advice if concerns continue. Address immediate safety concerns straight away.



Research behind this guide

WHAT INFORMS THIS GUIDE

Furnware's classroom observations explore how students interact with furniture, their surroundings and one another.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy specialists from The Kids' Place provided their expertise to help identify what to observe. They later reviewed the findings and helped validate the research insights.

These insights, alongside wider guidance on seating and comfort, inform the practical prompts in this guide.

EXPLORE THE RESEARCH

Separate University of Waikato studies have investigated Bodyfurn seating, student movement, classroom behaviour and students' experiences.

Explore the findings, methods and limitations on our research evidence page, or read how measuring more than 20,000 students helped shape the original Bodyfurn® design.

[The Bodyfurn® research story →](#)



Want help checking furniture fit or classroom layout?
Talk to our learning space experts.