

Prompting in a Special School Setting: A Teacher's Cheat Sheet

1. Designing Effective Prompts

Element	Guidance	Example
Purpose	Identify the learning intention.	"To help the student request assistance independently."
Targeted Skill	Focus on a specific skill (communication, movement, cognition, behaviour).	"Using 'I need help' on AAC device."
Level of Support	Match prompt to student's current level (physical, verbal, visual, gestural, etc.).	Use a gestural cue for a student who processes visual info better.
Least-to-Most Prompting	Begin with minimal support and increase only if needed.	Wait 5–10 seconds before offering another prompt.
Consistency	Use consistent wording and timing across staff.	All staff use: "What do you do next?" after a routine step.
Individualisation	Align with student's communication, mobility, and sensory profiles.	One student may need tactile support; another may use PODD or Key Word Sign.

2. Delivering Prompts

Prompt Hierarchy

- Natural Cue – Environmental or task-related (e.g. messy hands after lunch).
- Indirect Verbal – "Is there something you need?"
- Direct Verbal – "Say: 'Can I wash my hands?'"
- Gestural – Pointing or signaling.
- Model – Demonstrate the desired response.
- Partial Physical – Light guidance (e.g. touch elbow).
- Full Physical – Hand-over-hand assistance.

Prompt Timing

- Wait time: Give the student time to respond (5–10+ seconds).
- Fade prompts ASAP: Encourage independence.

Prompts Must Be:

- Respectful – Support autonomy and avoid learned helplessness.
- Clear & Simple – Use student's preferred communication mode.
- Non-verbal where needed – Visuals, gestures, modelling.

3. Tracking and Evaluating Prompt Use

Data Collection Strategies

Method	Description	Tool/Format
Prompt Level Chart	Record the prompt type needed for each task/response.	Tally or digital sheet with prompt codes.
Task Analysis	Break down a task and track the prompt level per step.	Checklist with data column (e.g., P = Physical).
ABC Recording	Used when prompt relates to behaviour (Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence).	Behaviour log sheet or app.
Video/Photo Review	Use short clips to reflect on prompt delivery and student response.	Secure video review platform with consent.
Teacher Reflection	Note student progress, staff consistency, and areas for prompt fading.	Weekly journal or shared team notes.

4. Measuring Prompt Efficacy

Indicator	What to Look For
Increased independent responses	Student initiates without prompts or with fewer prompts over time.
Prompt fading success	Gradual reduction in prompt level used.
Improved engagement and participation	Student is more confident and responsive.
Alignment with student goals	Prompts directly support IEP or curriculum-based outcomes.
Generalisation	Skill prompted in one context transfers to others.

5. Prompting Toolkit (Create for Each Class)

- Individualised Prompt Plans (linked to PLP or ICP)
- Laminated visual prompts
- AAC or key word sign charts
- Prompt level data sheets
- Prompt fading schedule
- Staff cheat card with prompt hierarchy
- Video examples of effective prompting (optional)

6. Prompting in Context: Curriculum Integration Examples

Learning Area	Prompt Example
English	Model then prompt: "Tell me who is in the story." (Visual + Verbal)
HPE	Gestural prompt to show where to move in a game or obstacle course.
Community Access	Indirect verbal prompt: "Is there something you say at the checkout?"
Science	Model and support "I think..." responses in simple experiments.
The Arts	Prompt to explore texture or sound using hand-over-hand to start.