

Including Pupils with Down's Syndrome

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS
– PRIMARY –

A JOINT PUBLICATION BY THE DOWN'S SYNDROME ASSOCIATION
AND THE SCOTTISH DOWN'S SYNDROME ASSOCIATION



AIM OF THIS BOOKLET:

Many more children with Down's syndrome are now entering mainstream primary schools. This is the result of several factors. Pressure from parents with support from voluntary organisations led to the 1981 and 1993 Education Acts which encouraged LEAs to integrate pupils with special needs into mainstream schools if the parents so wished; more recently the 1997 Green Paper, Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs, with its push for inclusion, proposed that more pupils with SEN should attend mainstream schools.

Inevitably, many teachers will find the idea of including children with Down's syndrome into their classrooms daunting and will initially be apprehensive. However, experience shows that most teachers have the skills to understand these children's particular individual needs and are able to teach them effectively and sensitively.

This booklet is to inform teachers about the learning profile typical of children with Down's syndrome and good practice in their education, thus paving the way to successful inclusion.

WHY INCLUSION?

There are many reasons why a child with Down's syndrome should be given the opportunity to attend mainstream school. Increasing amounts of research have been published enhancing knowledge about the capabilities of children with Down's syndrome and their potential to be successfully included, while parental awareness of the value and the benefits of inclusion has grown. Moreover, inclusion is non-discriminatory and brings both academic and social benefits.

ACADEMIC

- Research shows that children do better academically when working in inclusive settings.

SOCIAL

- Daily opportunities to mix with typically developing peers provide models for normal and age-appropriate behaviour.
- Children have opportunities to develop relationships with children from their own community.
- Attending mainstream school is a key step towards inclusion in the life of the community and society as a whole.

Successful inclusion is a key step towards preparing children with SEN to become full and contributing members of the community, and society as a whole benefits. Typically developing peers gain an understanding about disability, about tolerance and how to care for and support other children with special needs. As David Blunkett writes, in his Foreword to the 1997 Green Paper, "[where] all children are included as equal partners in the school community, the benefits are felt by all".

A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

However, successful inclusion does not happen automatically. Experience shows that one of the most important ingredients in successfully implementing inclusion for children with special needs is simply the will to make it succeed. The attitude of the whole school is therefore a significant factor. A positive attitude solves problems of itself. Schools need a clear and sensitive policy on inclusion and senior management teams, which are committed to the policy and supportive towards the staff, helping them develop new skills within their classrooms.

SOME FACTS ABOUT DOWN'S SYNDROME

- Down's syndrome is the most common form of learning disability - about 1 in every 1,000 live births a year.
- It is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome. Instead of the usual 46 chromosomes, a person with Down's syndrome has 47.
- All children with Down's syndrome will have some degree of learning difficulty from mild to severe.
- Although Down's syndrome is due to genetic factors, environmental factors play an important part in development as with any child.
- Children with Down's syndrome vary as widely in their development and progress as typically developing children.
- Generally speaking, children with Down's syndrome develop more slowly than their peers, arriving at each stage of development at a later age and staying there for longer. The developmental gap between children with Down's syndrome and their peers widens with age.

A SPECIFIC LEARNING PROFILE NOT JUST DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY

Children with Down's syndrome are not just generally delayed in their development and therefore merely in need of a diluted curriculum. They have a specific learning profile with characteristic strengths and weaknesses. Being aware of the factors that facilitate and inhibit learning allows teachers to plan and implement meaningful and relevant activities and programmes of work. The characteristic learning profile and learning styles of the child with Down's syndrome, together with individual needs and variations within that profile, must therefore be considered.

The following factors are typical of many children with Down's syndrome. Some have physical implications; others have cognitive ones. Many have both.

FACTORS THAT FACILITATE LEARNING

Strong visual awareness and visual learning skills including:

- Ability to learn and use sign, gesture and visual support.
- Ability to learn and use the written word.
- Modelling behaviour and attitudes on peers and adults.
- Learning from practical curriculum material and hands-on activities.

FACTORS THAT INHIBIT LEARNING

- Delayed motor skills - fine and gross.
- Auditory and visual impairment.

- Speech and language impairment.
- Short-term auditory memory deficit.
- Shorter concentration span.
- Difficulties with consolidation and retention.
- Difficulties with generalisation, thinking and reasoning.
- Sequencing difficulties.
- Avoidance strategies.

A brief account of each of these inhibiting factors follows, with some strategies to address them which make use of the pupils' likely strengths and weaknesses in order to build a successful teaching programme. Many of these strategies will be recognisable as basic good teaching practice and so will be equally suitable for other pupils in the school.

Visual impairment

Although pupils with Down's syndrome tend to be very good visual learners and are able to use this strength to access the curriculum, many have some sort of visual impairment: 60-70% being prescribed glasses before the age of seven and it is important to allow for any specific visual impairment they may have.

STRATEGIES:

- *Place pupil near front of class.*
- *Use larger type.*
- *Use simple and clear presentation.*

Hearing impairment

Many children with Down's syndrome experience some hearing loss, especially in the early years. Up to 20% may have a sensorineural loss, caused by developmental defects in the ear and auditory nerves. Over 50% are likely to suffer from a conductive hearing loss due to glue ear caused by frequent upper respiratory tract infections which often occur as a result of smaller sinuses and ear canals. It is particularly important to check children's hearing, as this will affect their speech and language.

Clarity in hearing can also fluctuate daily and it is important to ascertain that inconsistencies in response are due to hearing loss rather than lack of understanding or poor attitude.

STRATEGIES:

- *Place pupil near front of class.*
- *Speak directly to the pupil.*
- *Reinforce speech with facial expression, sign or gesture.*
- *Reinforce speech with visual backup - print, pictures, concrete materials.*
- *Write new vocabulary on the board.*
- *When other pupils answer, repeat these answers aloud.*
- *Rephrase or repeat words and phrases that may have been misheard.*

Fine and gross motor skills

Many children with Down's syndrome have poor muscle tone and loose joints (hypotonia), affecting their fine and gross motor skills. This can delay milestones in motor development, restricting early years' experiences and delaying cognitive development. In the classroom, the delay in development of writing skills is particularly affected.

STRATEGIES:

- Provide additional practice, guidance and encouragement - all motor skills improve with practice.
- Provide wrist and finger strengthening activities e.g. threading, tracing, drawing, sorting, cutting, squeezing, building etc.
- Use a wide range of multi-sensory activities and materials.
- Keep activities as meaningful and enjoyable as possible.

Speech and language difficulties

Children with Down's syndrome typically have a speech and language impairment and should be seen regularly by a Speech and Language Therapist who can suggest individualized activities to promote their speech and language development.

The language delay is caused by a combination of factors, some of which are physical and some due more to perceptual and cognitive problems. Any delay in learning to understand and use language is likely to lead to cognitive delay. The level of knowledge and understanding and thus the ability to access the curriculum will inevitably be affected. Receptive skills are greater than expressive skills. This means that children with Down's syndrome understand language better than they are able to speak it. As a result, their cognitive skills are often underestimated.

COMMON FEATURES OF DELAY IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:

- Smaller vocabulary leading to less general knowledge.
- Difficulty learning the rules of grammar (leaving out connecting words, prepositions etc) resulting in a telegraphic style of speech.
- Ability to learn new vocabulary more easily than the rules of grammar.
- Greater problems in learning and managing social language.
- Greater problems in understanding specific language of the curriculum.
- Difficulty in understanding instructions.

In addition, the combination of having a smaller mouth cavity and weaker mouth and tongue muscles makes it harder to physically form words; and the longer the sentence, the greater the articulation problems become.

Speech and language problems for these children often mean that they actually receive fewer opportunities to engage in language and conversation. It is more difficult for them to ask for information or help. Adults tend to ask closed questions or finish a sentence off for the child without giving them much needed time or help to do it themselves.

This results in the child getting:

- Less language experience to enable them to learn new words and sentence structures
- Less practice to improve their clarity of speech.

STRATEGIES:

- Give time to process language and respond.
- Listen carefully - your ear will adjust.
- Ensure face to face and direct eye contact.
- Use simple and familiar language and short concise sentences.
- Check understanding - ask child to repeat back instructions.
- Avoid ambiguous vocabulary.
- Reinforce speech with facial expression, gesture and sign.
- Teach reading and use the printed word to help with speech and language.
- Reinforce spoken instructions with print, pictures, diagrams, symbols, and concrete materials.
- Emphasize key words, reinforcing visually.
- Teach grammar through print - flash cards, games, pictures of prepositions, symbols etc.
- Avoid closed questions and encourage the child to speak in more than one-word utterances.
- Encourage pupil to speak aloud in class by providing visual prompts. Allowing the pupil to read information may be easier for them than speaking spontaneously.
- The use of a Home-School Diary can help pupils in telling their "news".
- Develop language through drama and role-play.
- Encourage the child to lead.
- Set up regular and additional opportunities to speak to others - e.g. taking messages etc.
- Provide lots of short listening activities/games and visual and tactile materials to reinforce oral work and strengthen auditory skills.

Poor auditory short-term memory and auditory processing skills

Other speech and language problems in children with Down's syndrome stem from difficulties with their auditory short-term memory and processing skills. The auditory short-term memory is the memory store used to hold, process, understand and assimilate spoken language long enough to respond to it. Any deficit in short-term auditory memory will greatly affect pupils' ability to respond to the spoken word or learn from any situation entirely reliant on their auditory skills. In addition, they will find it more difficult to follow and remember verbal instructions.

STRATEGIES:

- Limit amount of verbal instructions at any one time.
- Allow time for child to process and respond to verbal input.
- Repeat individually to pupil any information/instructions given to class as a whole.
- Try to avoid lengthy whole class instruction/discussion.
- Plan for visual translation and/or alternative activity.

Remember: children with Down's syndrome are strong visual but poor auditory learners. Wherever possible, they need visual support and concrete and practical materials to reinforce auditory input.

Shorter concentration span

Many children with Down's syndrome have a short concentration span and are easily distracted. In addition, the intensity of supported learning, especially in a one-to-one situation, is much higher and the child tires much more easily than an unsupported child.

STRATEGIES:

- Build a range of short, focused and clearly defined tasks into the lesson.
- Vary level of demand from task to task.
- Vary type of support.
- Use peers to keep pupil on task.
- At carpet times - place the child at (not on!) the class teacher's knee.
- Provide a carpet square to encourage the child to sit in one place
- Working on computers can sometimes sustain a child's interest for longer periods.
- Create an activity box. This is useful for times when the child has finished an activity before its peers, needs a change of activity or time out. Put in a range of activities that the child enjoys doing, including books, cards, fine motor skill games etc. This encourages choice within a structured situation. Allowing another child to join in is a good way of encouraging friendships and co-operation.

Generalisation, thinking and reasoning

Where any child has a speech and language impairment, thinking and reasoning skills are inevitably affected. They find it more difficult to transfer skills from one situation to another. Abstract concepts/subjects can be particularly difficult to understand and problem solving may be affected.

STRATEGIES:

- Do not assume that the pupil will transfer knowledge automatically.
- Teach new skills using a variety of methods and materials and in a wide range of contexts.
- Reinforce learning of abstract concepts with visual and concrete materials.
- Offer additional explanations and demonstrations.
- Encourage problem solving.

Consolidation and retention

Pupils with Down's syndrome generally take longer to learn and to consolidate new skills and the ability to learn and retain can fluctuate from day to day.

STRATEGIES:

- Provide extra time and opportunities for additional repetition and reinforcement.
- Present new skills and concepts in a variety of ways, using concrete, practical and visual materials wherever possible.
- Move forward but continually check back to ensure that previously learned skills have not been overwhelmed by the new input.

Structure and routine

Many children with Down's syndrome thrive on routine, structure and clearly focused activities. Unstructured and informal situations are often more difficult for them. Equally, they can be easily thrown by any change. They may need more preparation and may take longer to adapt to changes in the classroom and to transitions.

STRATEGIES:

- Teach timetable, routines and school rules explicitly, allowing time and opportunities to learn them.
- Provide visual timetables: use the printed word, pictures, drawings, signs, and photos.
- Progress throughout the day can be tracked.
- Where a visual timetable is not suitable, provide sets of photographs (or prompt cards) displaying school activities. These can be shown to the child before the activity starts.
- Ensure child is aware of the next activity.
- Stick to routine as much as possible.
- Prepare child beforehand if you know there is going to be a change, and inform parents.
- Engage the child in preparing for the next activity by giving a specific task.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

The prime aim for any five-year-old entering mainstream school is social inclusion. As with any child, it is much harder to make progress in cognitive areas until they are able to behave and interact with others in a socially acceptable way and to understand and respond appropriately to the immediate environment. All children with Down's syndrome benefit from mixing with typically developing peers. They are often very keen to do the same as their peers and generally use them as role models for appropriate social behaviour and motivation for learning. This type of social experience, where the other children are setting normal expectations for age-appropriate behaviour and achievement, is extremely important for children with Down's syndrome who find their world more confusing and are less emotionally and socially mature. Even so, many often need additional help and support in learning the rules for normal and appropriate social behaviour. They do not learn well from incidental learning and will not pick up conventions intuitively, as do their peers. They will take longer to "learn the rules" than their typically developing peers. The focus of additional help and support in the early years should be on learning the rules for normal and appropriate social behaviour.

STRATEGIES:

- *Becoming aware of the major routines of the day.*
- *Learning to participate and respond appropriately.*
- *Responding to verbal requests and instructions.*
- *Learning to take turns, share and give and take.*
- *Learning to line up.*
- *Learning to sit at carpet time and assembly.*
- *Learning appropriate patterns of behaviour.*
- *Learning the class and school rules, both formal and informal.*
- *Working independently.*
- *Working co-operatively.*
- *Developing friendships.*
- *Developing self-help and practical skills.*
- *Caring for others.*

PLAY TIMES

Some additional help in including young children with Down's syndrome during playtime may be needed. However, any adult support the child has, if not used sensitively, can act as barrier to other children which, combined with speech and language difficulties, can make it much harder for children with Down's syndrome to:

- Initiate independent play with other children;
- Understand the rules of the game;
- Understand the "rules" of being a friend.

STRATEGIES:

- *Encourage co-operative learning by working with a partner or in small group.*
- *Do not always put the children with less able or less well-motivated pupils. Pupils with Down's syndrome can benefit from working with more able children if their work is suitably differentiated.*
- *Raise awareness of learning disabilities through, for example, whole class/school talk or during circle time. It is important that peers become familiar with the pupil with Down's syndrome, to understand their strengths, weaknesses and their capabilities, as well as recognising that they have the same emotional and social needs as themselves.*
- *Consider setting up friendship rotas or a buddy system.*
- *Use peer support instead of adult support whenever possible.*
- *Organise support to provide structured play sessions led by a LSA in the playground.*
- *Encourage participation in lunchtime or after school clubs.*
- *Encourage independence skills and practical skills e.g. giving responsibility - such as handing out books, taking messages etc.*
- *Encourage self-awareness, identity, self-esteem and self-confidence.*
- *Enable understanding through role-play, books, pictures, or at circle time.*

BEHAVIOUR

There are no behaviour problems unique to children with Down's syndrome. However, much of their behaviour will be related to their level of development. So, when problems occur, they are generally similar to those seen in typically developing children of a younger age.

In addition, children with Down's syndrome have grown up having to cope with more difficulties than many of their peers. Much of what they are expected to do in their everyday lives will have been much harder to accomplish due to problems with their speech and language, auditory short-term memory, motor co-ordination, shorter concentration span, and learning difficulties. The thresholds that trigger problem behaviours may therefore be lower than with their typically developing peers, i.e. they are likely to become frustrated or anxious more easily. Therefore, a child's having Down's syndrome does not lead inevitably to behavioural problems; but the nature of the difficulty makes them more vulnerable to the development of behaviour problems.

A particular aspect of problem behaviour is the use of avoidance strategies. Research has shown that, like many pupils with special needs, pupils with Down's syndrome tend to adopt such strategies, which undermine the progress of their learning. Some pupils tend to use social behaviours to distract

adult attention and avoid learning and seem prepared to work only on tasks which fall within a very narrowly defined cognitive range.

It is important to remain alive to the possibility of avoidance, to separate immature behaviour from deliberately bad behaviour, and to ensure that the child's developmental, not chronological, age is taken into account, together with their level of oral understanding. Any reward offered also has to take account of these factors.

STRATEGIES:

- *Ensure the rules are clear.*
- *Ensure all staff know that the child with Down's syndrome must be disciplined at all times with the same expectations as for any child.*
- *Use short, clear instructions and clear body language for reinforcement: overlong explanations and excessively complex reasoning are not appropriate.*
- *Distinguish the "can't do" from the "won't do".*
- *Investigate any inappropriate behaviour, asking yourself why the child is acting so. For example:*
 - *Is the task too hard or too easy?*
 - *Is the task too long?*
 - *Is the work suitably differentiated?*
- *Does the pupil understand what is expected of them?*
- *Encourage positive behaviour by developing good-behaviour prompt pictures. For example, showing a photo of themselves or others tidying up nicely can be enough to encourage them to do so.*
- *Reinforce the desired behaviour immediately with visual, oral or tangible rewards.*
- *Ignore attention-seeking behaviour within reasonable limits: it is aimed to distract.*
- *Develop a range of strategies to deal with avoidance behaviours: some will work better than others will for a particular pupil.*
- *Ensure that the LSA is not the only adult having to deal with the behaviour. The class teacher has ultimate responsibility.*
- *Ensure the child is working with peers who are acting as good role models.*

SUPPORT

Most children with Down's syndrome in mainstream schools will need additional support. This is commonly provided through a Learning Support Assistant (LSA*). However, the type of support the child receives can have a tremendous impact on the effectiveness of the inclusion and it is important that the role of the LSA is carefully established.

The following are useful guidelines when considering the role of the LSA:

IN TERMS OF THE CHILD:

- To increase access to the curriculum and develop learning.
- To ensure the child learns new skills.
- To help develop independence.
- To help develop social skills, friendships and age-appropriate behaviour.

IN TERMS OF THE TEACHER:

- To help differentiate or further modify lessons and activities planned by the teacher.
- To provide feedback to the teacher.
- To provide opportunities for the teacher to work with the particular child with Down's syndrome either individually or in a group, by exchanging roles.

It is also important that the LSA is seen as belonging to the whole class, giving help to all children in need of it, and not seen, as only belonging to the child with Down's syndrome. In this way, other children in the class can benefit from extra help and care too. The teacher must not abdicate responsibility for the child with Down's syndrome to the LSA.

One-to-one & withdrawal

In addition, support should not consist only or even primarily of the LSA working with the child in a one-to-one situation, especially if it involves withdrawal from the class, which should be avoided if possible. Although there will be times when some one-to-one is needed, this should be given only when absolutely necessary and should be within the classroom whenever possible.

STRATEGIES:

- Be aware that too much one-to-one support can result in the child failing:
- *To benefit from the stimulation and models provided by the peer group.*
 - *To learn to work co-operatively.*
 - *To learn how to work independently.*
 - *To develop social relationships with their peers.*

How many LSAs?

Generally speaking, it is not advisable to have one LSA to support a child. This can create over-familiarity and over-dependency on one adult and is very intense for both the child and the LSA. Consider having two LSAs instead of one, perhaps splitting the time between a.m. and p.m. This can also make it easier to replace one LSA if another is absent.

Planning support

SenCos, class teachers, learning support co-ordinators and support staff, need to meet regularly to plan, communicate, feedback and monitor progress. A communication book for all involved to record lesson plans, ideas, notes and feedback is often invaluable, especially where more than one LSA is involved with the child.

When planning support, it is vital to decide:

- **Who** will differentiate the work and how?
- **Who** is to find or make additional resources?
- **When** this is to happen and how often?

The class teacher or SenCo is ultimately responsible for differentiating activities but many LSAs are capable of adapting the activities further, if and when necessary. However, any extra time that this involves must come out of the LSA's support hours and time should be allocated for this to happen.

THE CURRICULUM

Although there will be a continuing need for targeting independence and social behaviour, the prime social inclusion targets should be achieved in the early years. More attention can be given towards accessing the curriculum as the child with Down's syndrome progresses through Key Stages 1 and 2.

However, as for all children, activities will need to be modified and adapted to suit the child's particular level of learning and development. In some cases this may mean that a new concept, topic or skill will have to be pared down to a very basic level with a tight focus on one particular aim that you wish the child to learn and understand.

Although, in some cases, this may mean that the child with Down's syndrome may be working at a very different level, it does not mean that the actual subject or topic that the child is working within is different from the other children. With forward planning and liaison with the LSA(s) this breadth of differentiation can be achieved successfully in many cases.

Supporting the Target Setting Process, DfEE, (1998) is a useful booklet to help schools set targets and assess achievement for pupils with SEN who are working below Level 1 and between Levels 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum in English and Mathematics. Performance criteria in personal and social development are also included.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Many pupils with Down's syndrome, as with other pupils with SEN, do not cope well with a number of common classroom practices: whole class teaching, learning through listening, and follow-up work based on the completion of unmodified text activities or worksheets. Therefore, teachers may need to look at their classroom practice and the whole learning environment of the class, so that activities, materials and pupil groupings are all taken into account. For some purposes, ability will be less important than pupils' learning styles. It is important, for example, to utilise the motivation and opportunity to learn from good role models that arise when grouping children with Down's syndrome with their typically developing peers.

***Note:** in Scotland new funding has created a new staffing level whose job it is to prepare resources for the teacher "learning support/ancillary".

In addition, research has shown not only that pupils with SEN prefer to work in groups but also that co-operative group work actually fosters learning.

STRATEGIES:

Decide when the child should work:

- In whole class activities.
- In groups or with partners in class.
- In groups or with partners in withdrawal area.
- As an individual independently or one-to-one.

And when the child is to be:

- Unsupported.
- Supported by peers.
- Supported by the LSA.
- Supported by the class teacher.
- Plan an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to target specific areas, needing special attention.
- Provide a clear visual timetable to help the child understand the structure of their day.

READING

There is much research outlining the strong links between reading and language development in children with Down's syndrome and reading is an area of the curriculum where many of these children can often excel. As the written word makes language visual, print overcomes any difficulties with "learning through listening".

Reading can thus be used:

- To aid understanding.
- To help access the curriculum.
- To improve speech & language skills.

However, it is important to be aware of how children with Down's syndrome learn to read, as this differs in some ways from the strategies recommended in the National Literacy Strategy. A key factor when teaching a child with Down's syndrome to read is the use of a whole word approach and many children are able to build up a sight vocabulary of familiar and meaningful words in this way.

This of course presents a particular problem given the insistence on the use of phonics in the Literacy Strategy. Using phonics to decode words can be more difficult for young children with Down's syndrome because it involves accurate hearing and discrimination of sounds as well as problem-solving skills. However, a basic knowledge of phonics can be gained by many children with Down's syndrome and should be introduced as they build up their sight vocabulary.

There may therefore need to be specific attention to differentiation for reading and other activities during the Literacy Hour.

WRITING SKILLS

Producing any form of written work is a highly complex task. Difficulties in short term auditory memory, speech and language, fine motor skills and the organising and sequencing of information make a considerable impact on the acquisition and development of writing skills for many pupils with Down's syndrome.

PARTICULAR AREAS OF DIFFICULTY:

- Sequencing words into sentence formation.
- Sequencing events/information into the correct order.
- Organising thoughts and relevant information on to paper.

STRATEGIES:

- Investigate additional resources to aid writing as a physical process - different types of writing implements, pencil grips, larger lines, boxes on page to encourage size of letters, lined paper/squared paper, writing board, computer aids.
- Provide visual support: e.g. Flash cards, Keywords, picture cues and sequences, sentence cues.
- Provide alternative methods of recording:
 - Scribe;
 - Underline or ring correct answer;
 - Cloze procedure;
 - Sentence card sequences;
 - Picture card sequences;
 - Use of computer with specialist software e.g., whole word computer programmes.
- Ensure that pupils are only asked to write about topics, which build upon their experience and understanding.
- If copying from board, select and highlight a shorter version for the pupil to copy, focusing on what is essential for that pupil or use cloze method on previously made worksheet.
- Encourage the use of cursive script to aid fluency.

SPELLING

As with reading, it is unwise to rely exclusively on phonics to address weaknesses in spelling, as many children with Down's syndrome will be spelling words purely from visual memory. However, in order to develop and expand their reading skills, they will need to learn some phonic skills but development in this area may be slower than that of their peers.

STRATEGIES:

Due to delayed speech and language skills and limited vocabulary it is important to:

- Teach words that are within their understanding.
- Teach words aimed to promote their speech and language development.
- Teach words required for specific subjects.
- Teach spellings as visually as possible.
- Use multi-sensory methods, e.g. look-cover-write-check, flash cards, finger tracing/spelling.
- Reinforce meanings of abstract words with pictures and symbols.
- Colour code similar letter groups/patterns within words.
- Provide a word bank with pictures to reinforce meaning and arranged alphabetically.
- Teach initial letter sounds graduating to simple blends and CVC words.
- Explore spelling activities on the computer.
- Teach simple basic word families.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS/CARERS

Although many parents will come into schools regularly, a home-school communication book is ideal as a way of communicating daily news. This is invaluable where the child's own speech and language skills are not developed sufficiently for them to convey their news clearly. Take care not to use this as a means of just conveying bad news.

TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Transition from primary to secondary can be traumatic for many pupils and many issues will affect all children whether or not they have special needs. However, transition for children with special needs can be particularly traumatic. A positive attitude from the receiving school is essential. In addition a good and well-prepared transition plan needs to be set in place to pave the way for it to be as smooth and trouble free as possible for pupil, staff and parents.

The first consideration that parents will have to think about is "which school?" In many cases there is one main secondary school which most of the primary pupils feed in to. For pupils with Down's syndrome, this is by far the most sensible option to go for socially, as they will be well supported by the peers that they have grown up with. However, sometimes there are overriding reasons for this not to happen and the pupil has to transfer to a different secondary school without the support of familiar peers from the feeder school. The transition plan must take into account the actual situation.

STRATEGIES:

- Start planning early e.g. start at Annual Review of year 5 (Primary 6 in Scotland).
- Use first term in year 6 to visit and agree the receiving Secondary school.
- Ensure Annual Review in last year of primary is held in the autumn term, allowing plenty of time to draw up a transition plan.
- Ensure that everybody involved with the child is invited, i.e:
 - From primary: class teacher, LSA and SenCo*;
 - From the already identified secondary school: SenCo, any learning support staff, possibly year or form tutors;
 - From outside agencies: any involved professionals e.g. speech & language therapist, educational psychologist, education officer, etc.
- Offer opportunities for the secondary SenCo/form teacher (Guidance staff in Scotland)/LSA to visit pupil in primary before transition to observe pupil in familiar and secure setting.
- Invite the secondary SenCo, secondary form teacher, etc. to pupil's final termly review at primary.
- Set up regular meetings with both primary and secondary staff to discuss planning and progress of transition plan.
- If possible decide who the LSA(s) will be in order to set up visits and training.
- Arrange secondary class groupings in such a way that the pupil with Down's syndrome has familiar and supportive friends in new class.
- If the Secondary school is not the usual one, which the Primary feeds into, take the pupil on a working visit to the main feeder primaries to help familiarisation with the new peers.
- Consider whether pupil with Down's syndrome needs extra pastoral care.
- Establish who will register any concerns, be main contact person, and what procedures will be carried out, e.g. a safety base for the pupil to go to (perhaps a learning resource room, or the SenCo's room).

VISITS

A regular feature of transition procedures is a programme of visits. Because many children with Down's syndrome are thrown by change and find it more difficult to adapt to new surroundings without extra help and preparation, this is an aspect that deserves separate consideration.

STRATEGIES:

- Other peers from their primary class to accompany the pupil with Down's syndrome.
- Pupil to meet headteacher and relevant members of staff - form tutor, any subject teachers, learning support staff, dinner supervisors, support teachers etc.
- Try to develop familiarity with layout of secondary school - dining room, hall, toilets, classroom, library etc.
- Practise route from playground into school - which door to go in etc.
- Provide the child and parents with a map of the school, colour coded if possible.
- Routines - visits should cover a playtime, lunch break, assembly etc. Many pupils with Down's syndrome settle quickly once they understand the routine and the rules.
- Issue information about class/school rules and routines, uniform (including PE).
- Issue information about the clubs and activities held in the school.
- Consider lunch: what is best initially - to pay in canteen and choose lunch or take a packed lunch?

PUPIL PROFILE

The receiving secondary school needs to understand the philosophy of the parents and the role which education plays in their life-plan for the pupil. One method of communication, which has proved very successful in aiding transition, is for the primary school and parents to prepare a profile of the child to be given to the secondary school during the process of transition. The profile is a little like a simplified Record of Achievement, in that it aims to give information about the child's background, achievements, interests, strengths and weaknesses, presented in a fair but positive light. Contributions should be sought from all those significantly involved in the development of the child: parents, year 6 class teacher, SenCo and speech and language therapist etc. Importantly, to give the child ownership, they should also have considerable input.

***Note:** in Scotland SenCos have the titles Principle Teacher Learning Support in Secondary and Learning Support Co-ordinators in Primary schools.

EQUIVALENTS IN YEAR GROUPINGS AND KEY STAGES

SCOTLAND	ENGLAND & WALES
P1 - Infants	Reception
P2 - Infants	Year 1 - Key Stage 1
P3 - Infants	Year 2 - Key Stage 2
P4 - Junior	Year 3 - Key Stage 2
P5 - Junior	Year 4 - Key Stage 2
P6 - Upper Primary	Year 5 - Key Stage 2
P7 - Upper Primary	Year 6 - Key Stage 2
S1 - Secondary	Year 7 - Key Stage 3
S2 - Secondary	Year 8 - Key Stage 3
S3 - Secondary	Year 9 - Key Stage 3
S4 - Secondary	Year 10 - Key Stage 3
S5 - Secondary	Year 11 - Key Stage 4
S6 - Secondary	Year 12 - Key Stage 4

■ GCSE = Standard Grades past.

■ Highers follow on at present from A Levels and Scottish 6th Year Studies.

■ Post 16 Qualifications: Scottish Vocation Qualification (SVQ) will be provided for in the new "Higher Still".

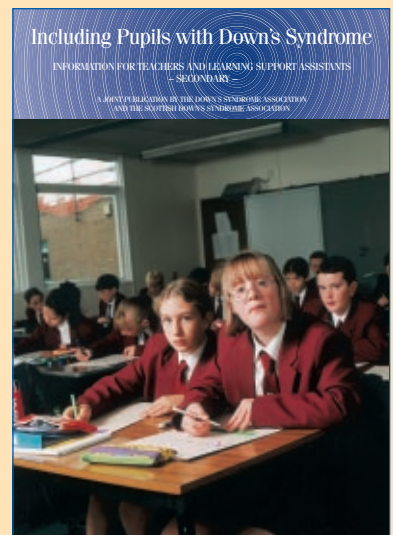
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To obtain the accompanying booklet on Secondary Education, please contact the DSA.

HELP FOR PEOPLE WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME



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