

SEND Bulletin NO. 10



Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is a genetic condition whereby a child is born with an extra chromosome. The condition is usually detectable at birth. People with Down syndrome have distinctive physical features. They often suffer from heart, breathing and eye problems and also have moderate to severe learning difficulties. This is a very wide spectrum. Some pupils will be able to have full access to and participation in the curriculum with appropriate levels of learning support. Others will have difficulties which prevent their prospering in a mainstream school for more than a year or two and will need close support in a special school or unit.

Children with Down syndrome are well known to be generally cheerful and loving. They can also be very active and lack any sense of danger or social propriety. A child with Down syndrome will normally need a dedicated teaching assistant to support their learning. However, Down syndrome learners can also be helped to participate in group and class activities to great effect. They will need to be encouraged to develop independence gradually and not be over-supported in the primary years. Outreach can often be arranged with a nearby special school in order to support the mainstream school in giving the Down syndrome pupil access to the curriculum.

Key characteristics

Children with Down syndrome may:

- walk and talk much later than other children
- have some auditory and visual impairment
- develop more slowly physically and be relatively immature emotionally
- have delayed fine and gross motor skills
- be strong visual learners but poor auditory learners
- have significant speech and language delay, relative to their cognitive abilities
- have difficulties with short-term auditory memory and auditory processing
- have a short attention span
- have difficulties with consolidation, retention, generalisation and transfer of skills
- have a tendency to avoidance strategies.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- ensure that learning activities are broken down into small steps and are clearly focused
- provide a multi-sensory approach to learning
- provide activities to develop motor skills
- use visual and concrete materials to aid understanding
- keep language simple and familiar
- make use of songs, rhymes and rhythm to aid learning sequences, such as the alphabet or days of the week
- keep instructions short and concise
- ask children to repeat instructions in order to clarify understanding
- vary the level of demand and type of support within a lesson
- allow time for children to process and respond to verbal input

- provide alternative methods of recording
- ensure repetition and reinforcement within a variety of contexts
- encourage participation in all school activities if possible
- encourage independence and self-help
- develop outreach liaison with a nearby special school
- monitor and record progress so that each small achievement is recognised.

Support agencies

- Down's Syndrome Association: www.downs-syndrome.org.uk
- Down Syndrome Education International: www.downsed.org
- Down's Syndrome Scotland: www.dsscotland.org.uk
- National Down Syndrome Society (USA): www.ndss.org

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne