

# Down's Syndrome



## WHAT IS DOWN'S SYNDROME?

Down's Syndrome is a genetic condition which 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, although this will range from mild to severe. Generally, 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 thus widens with age.

## GOOD PRACTICE

- Attending mainstream schools provide many advantages for the child with Down's syndrome, both academically and socially.
- Children with Down's 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 differentiated programmes of work:
- **Factors that facilitate learning**
  - Strong visual awareness and visual learning skills.
  - Ability to learn and use sign, gesture and visual support.
  - Ability to learn and use the written word.
  - Tendency to model behaviour and attitudes from peers and adults.
  - Ability to learn from practical material, hands-on activities and demonstration.
  - Keen to communicate and socialise with others.
- **Factors that inhibit learning.**
  - Auditory and visual impairment.
  - Delayed motor skills – fine and gross.
  - Speech and language impairment.
  - Short term and working memory problems.
  - Shorter concentration span.
  - Difficulties with consolidation and retention.
  - Difficulties with generalisation, thinking and reasoning.
  - Sequencing difficulties.
  - Avoidance strategies.
- **The right support for the child is important:**
  - 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
- **The role of the TA is:**
  - 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 child with Down's syndrome either individually or in a group, by exchanging roles.

### Things to consider:

- Think about seating: make sure the pupil is near the front of the class, facing the board and teacher.
- Provide regular opportunities to develop hand to eye coordination.
- Teach the whole class Makaton or sign language to develop communication skills.
- Support working memory and information processing by using a range of visual resources: pictures, sign and gesture, key words, icons, artifacts and symbols.
- Many children with Down's syndrome have a short concentration span and are easily distracted so plan short, focused tasks followed by a break.
- Pupils with Down's syndrome generally take longer to learn and need frequent opportunity to consolidate new skills.

### TOP TIPS:

- Make sure that the child is included in the classroom- they are an important member of the class
- Communicate effectively with parents- a home-school book may be useful
  - Use pupil voice to understand the child's wishes