



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA

Including a child with Down Syndrome in a mainstream setting:

For most mainstream teachers it is something new to be including a child with DS in their class. It can cause all kind of feelings of uncertainty! The good news is that you are part of a bigger community of teachers around the world who have found themselves in this situation, and they report that, with help and support, it has been an experience that has enriched their teaching practice and taught them that children with different learning profiles can indeed benefit and learn together.

What is Down Syndrome?

Down syndrome is a genetic condition or a chromosomal disorder. It is a type of disability that will affect the child's development in various ways, but children with DS are first and foremost children like any other who will play, learn and grow, albeit somewhat slower than a child without DS. Some children (not all) will have additional medical challenges.

Why include in Mainstream schooling?

Research has proven time and again that children with Down Syndrome have more potential to learn than previously expected and can benefit from attending a mainstream setting, especially in the Foundation Phase, if they and the teacher get the right support. South Africa's Inclusive Education legislation makes provision for learners with disabilities in the mainstream, especially in Full Service or Inclusive schools. In practice, you will have other children with learning or other challenges in school, and the DBE Screening, Identification, Assessment & Support (SIAS) policy is gradually being introduced to help guide schools in giving and accessing the support needed. This includes the drawing up of Individual Support Plans.

What do we know about how children with DS learn best and how do we accommodate that?

The following learning characteristics can be considered typical of most children with Down syndrome:

- Visual learning style – visual processing and visual memory skills are a strength
- Reading is usually a relative strength, compared to oral language
- Number-work can be an area of difficulty
- Social understanding and non-verbal communication is a strength
- Movement control (motor skills) can be delayed
- There is a possibility of auditory and/or visual impairments
- Specific speech and language delay is fairly common – but receptive language is usually stronger than expressive language
- Auditory short-term memory and auditory processing are areas of weakness

Down Syndrome Education International

Classroom/teaching strategies to support learners with Down Syndrome

- Children with DS will learn best with lots of visual material in and around the classroom.
- Repetition and a visual teaching approach will help reinforce whatever you are trying to teach or encourage in terms of behaviour. Be consistent with expectations.
- Teach by example as far as possible. Show him/her what to do and demonstrate what is expected. Use concrete and practical material. A class assistant will be a huge bonus if this can be arranged, but other children in the class can play a big role too.
- Practice with him/her the things you want him/her to do. Some children with DS can have shorter attention and concentration spans. They may be more easily distracted and have difficulty focusing on more than one task at a time. Generally, work broken into short sessions with regular breaks works well.
- Try to create a learning environment with a minimum level of background noise or movement, especially when you work on a one-to-one basis.
- Be consistent in instructions & expectations and allow time for children to hear & understand. Use short simple sentences. Tell him/her what to do rather than what not to do.
- Tell him/her when he is behaving well or being quiet and gentle and praise for this. Due to their good levels of social awareness and understanding, many children with DS are sensitive to failure and can be unwilling to work with new tasks or materials.
- Allow him/her to learn to work with peers. He can also be expected to make friends & enemies, get into trouble and learn to take responsibility for behaviour!
- Set goals and expectations that are realistic – but not too low. These kids can surprise us! These can be incorporated into an Individual Support Plan (ISP)
- Other children in the class will almost certainly benefit from the provisions you make for the child with DS, as well as some important life lessons along the way.

Resources:

Inclusive Education South Africa www.included.org.za

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOWDfnoek6E> “Don’t Limit me”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scyyNg3xBuE> “Students with DS in the classroom”

Down Syndrome South Africa www.downsyndrome.org.za see Education Support Pack

Down Syndrome Inclusive Education: www.down-syndrome.co.za

Department of Education: www.thutong.doe.gov.za/inclusiveeducation

Notes compiled by IESA. Please contact us for further information and resources:

Caroline Taylor caroline@included.org.za 021 762 6664 0723321952

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