EARLY YEARS

Extract from the DSi International Guidelines for the Inclusive Education of Learners with Down Syndrome

The DSi International Guidelines for the Education of Learners with Down Syndrome discuss the importance of Early Interventions and supporting transitions to enable the inclusion of learners who have Down's syndrome.

The content below is adapted from pages 29-31 of the Guidelines.

Early intervention:

- **It is important to recognise that early interventions do not place an emphasis on 'remediating perceived deficits in the child'. They should focus on promoting development and the learner's inclusion in the education setting, rather than attempting to fix the learner or close the gap with typically developing peers.**

- **It is important to liaise with the family to get their input and support. An effective approach is where parents are taught the strategies for development in a guided tutorial fashion where the techniques can be practiced in the family setting on a daily basis. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that families are not overwhelmed with having to implement lots of interventions at home.**

- **A valuable approach to early intervention is to support children to engage in typical experiences known to promote development. Activities such as play, language-rich environments, music, art and sport are known to enhance development. Furthermore, children enjoy these activities.**

- **Interventions should always be evidence based and should take place within the classroom wherever possible, alongside or with peers, rather than in a separate classroom or learning space. Creative approaches to teaching may be required, which is likely to benefit other children in the class.**

- **The following strategies are supportive for learners who have Down's syndrome:**
    - **setting up and scaffolding situations for learning by imitation;**
    - **daily practice of targeted skills built into engaging class activities;**
    - **planned activities that become part of the child's routine;**
    - **support for positive behaviour and for friendships; and**
    - **adaptations which use learning strengths and support areas of difficulty.**
- **Monitoring and reporting of progress is important. Celebrate successes and do not focus on 'deficits'.**

Transitioning to school:

- **It is important that learners who have Down's syndrome are supported in their transition to school. Extra transition visits should be planned, and the use of social stories and picture books can be helpful.**
- **The family should also be supported to establish relationships and routines with the new school.**
- **Planning for transition should start early. Evidence for the benefits of education in inclusive settings is clear. However, the practice of inclusive education in a local school is not always done well and can lead to great strain on families, some of whom may make the decision to move their child to a specialist setting. It is critical that professionals, such as school leaders, support families to access inclusive placements.**
- **Professionals should refrain from giving advice about education unless they have the background knowledge and accurate information to do so.**
- **Resources and information about the learner who has Down's syndrome should be passed from the Early Years setting to the school. Assessments and diagnostic information should also be shared.**
- **Transition planning with professionals who provide support should be implemented in a way that ensures a continuity of support.**
- **Schools should not impose arbitrary transition requirements for learners who have Down's syndrome when they start school, such as half day attendance, only permitting attendance when a learning support assistant is funded, or attendance on only some days of the week. These practices are a form of exclusion.**

Further information is available within the guidelines, which can be downloaded here.