RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF PUPILS WHO HAVE DOWN'S SYNDROME

Introducing the International Guidelines for the Inclusive Education of Learners with Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome International worked with experts, including the Down's Syndrome Association to create:

International Guidelines for the Education of Learners with Down Syndrome.

These guidelines have been written by educational professionals and experts in the field with input from their global network of members and stakeholders to ensure their global relevance and value.

They provide best-practice guidance for learners, teachers and managers in pre-school, school and post-school education settings to promote life-long learning. They are available to download in full here.

We have summarised some of the key points below with page numbers in the guidance for additional information where appropriate.

Inclusive teaching (pages 26-28 and 31-33 of the guidance)

- Inclusive education, being the practice of welcoming, valuing and supporting the learning of all students in the shared general classroom, requires teachers who are able to successfully manage the learning in these settings.
- Teaching in an inclusive classroom requires the learning needs of all students to be accommodated.
- The evidence for the benefits of education in inclusive settings is clear. Inclusive classrooms offer opportunities for vicarious learning of culturally and age related knowledge. However, the practice of 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.
- Students who have Down's syndrome should be withdrawn from their classroom for interventions as infrequently as possible.
- Explicit and patient teaching of school routines is essential.

High expectations

- Academic achievement should be expected for all learners who have Down's syndrome with provision of appropriate learning supports.
- Learners who have Down's syndrome are individuals with a variety of strengths and challenges. It is important to get to know the individual pupil and what they can do.
- All people who have Down's syndrome have the capacity to learn and continue to do so throughout their lives, where they have received good teaching with the right support from educators who expected them to be able to succeed. Opportunities to learn should continue beyond the school years and throughout adulthood.

A meaningful curriculum and engagement in the whole life of the school (pages 22-25 of the guidance)

- Students who have Down's syndrome should be given the opportunity to learn the curriculum specified for their school year level, adjusted as necessary to enable their engagement with the learning outcomes.
- Decisions about what is taught to learners who have Down's syndrome should be framed around the right to a broad and balanced curriculum and extra-curricula opportunities, on an equal basis with others, and not based on predictions about what will be needed for adulthood.
- Numeracy skills change with technological advances and adults who have Down's syndrome should be assisted to learn to use devices such as smart phones and computer applications, where they are in use by the general community.

Support for individual impairments (pages 6-9 of the guidance)

- Teaching staff should make appropriate adjustments as required, given that some learners who have Down's syndrome may have extensive social communication difficulties.
- Teaching staff should be aware of the high probability of vision and hearing impairments in learners who have Down's syndrome and that appropriate adjustments may be required to ensure effective learning and communication.
- Teaching should take account of limitations of verbal working memory and information manipulation in working memory.
- Visual supports for learning (including written words) should be used.
- See also the Down's Syndrome Association's resource 'Supporting children to learn'.

Understanding behaviour (pages 26-27 of the guidance)

- Behaviour is communication. It is necessary to determine the purpose behind the behaviour and act on the cause.
- If a student displays unusual behaviour, teachers first should rule out pain as a cause. Any behaviour change (such as a usually gentle child hitting a teacher or student) should be investigated by a doctor to rule out underlining causes such as wax in ear drums, menstrual pain, pre-menstrual tension (even prior to menarche), and constipation.
- Avoidant behaviour is common, and teachers need to guard against students using these strategies so that they develop persistence in learning.
- See also the Down's Syndrome Association's resources on understanding behaviour.