INCLUSIVE HOMEWORK

ADVENTURES IN LEARNING AT HOME

Homework provides learners with opportunities to revisit the work that they have done in school, and for parents to see what is being learned. It can help learners develop positive study habits and to develop independent learning skills. However, for pupils who have Down's syndrome it can also provide additional challenges. We provide some top tips below for you to use when planning homework activities.

TOP TIPS

It is important to link homework to classroom work, and that teachers modify homework to meet the individual learner's abilities and learning requirements. Homework should be seen as an integral part of learning.

Homework should not be used as a punishment or penalty for poor performance in the classroom by a learner who has Down's syndrome or just to catch up on work they have not completed in the dedicated time allocated.

Homework for learners who have Down's syndrome should be differentiated to ensure that they can be successful in their homework, with minimal support from their parents. Always start with what you know they can do, to ensure that they can succeed.

Be clear on what the purpose of the homework is – is it pre-teaching? Recap? Interleaving? To teach organisational skills and responsibility? Then consider how this purpose could be different for individuals or groups within the cohort, including the learner who has Down's syndrome. Whether the purpose is academic or organisational will impact on how it is adapted for the learner who has Down's syndrome. For example, if the purpose is to recap and revise, it might be that the adaptation is that homework is not set but the child attends a weekly 1:1 or small group revision class.

If the purpose is organisational, it might be that you work with their parent to set a realistic expectation for that child and it is the remembering to put it in the homework tray (whatever 'it' is!) or working independently at home for a set amount of time (5 minutes, ten minutes etc), that is the task.

Students including those who have Down's syndrome who have differentiation, adaptivity and additional to or different from provision in school will need the equivalent to be applied to homework as well. Consider their needs and provision (for instance as set out in their Education, Health and Care Plan) in relation to homework before the homework is set.

Be comfortable in setting a learner who has Down's syndrome with less homework, to meet the child where they're at, taking into account their abilities and home situation. It is perfectly acceptable for homework to look different for different children in your class.

Share information about the purpose with children in a way they can understand. Ensure instructions are clear and check that the learner who has Down's syndrome knows what is expected of them. You might need to demonstrate or provide examples during class time.

Having clear routines around homework will be beneficial – for instance, always setting homework on the same day.

If you are using online learning platforms for homework, ensure that these are fully accessible and that the learner who has Down's syndrome knows how to use them and has access to suitable devices to work on.

Learners who have Down's syndrome might need explicit teaching of skills around organising homework and meeting deadlines. Consider the use of colour coded calendars or diaries for example.

Consider the overall volume of homework being set and whether it is realistic.

Seek to understand any barriers to completing homework, for instance lack of quiet space or lack of access to resources that the learner relies on in the classroom (eg Numicon, number lines, dictionaries etc)

Allow alternative formats of response, for instance allowing the learner to make a video or record their answers rather than producing a long piece of writing.

Consider their individual targets and identified outcomes (for instance in their Education, Health and Care Plan) and how the homework being set supports progress towards these.

It is important that clear communication channels are put in place with the learner's parents, to discuss expectations about homework and for them to provide feedback on how the child or young person approached their home learning and what support was provided. Share information with parents proactively, have opportunities for them to attend sessions where they can learn about the rationale, expectation and systems (inc. differentiation), provide resources such as 'one page' guides etc. Consider meeting once a term to discuss the forthcoming curriculum and how they might be able to support their child's learning at home.

Homework can provide a useful opportunity for parents to support pre-teaching (eg of topic vocabulary), or over-learning of content taught in lessons. It also allows for more real-life experiences to be incorporated into learning, for example, visit a vet's waiting room if reading a book about a vet, or visit a local attraction if studying the Tudors. Any visits or activities need to be optional and by agreement with the parents.

Ensure processes are put in place to monitor the impact of homework in relation to the learner's individual targets and progress. Keep a record of engagement, scores, quality etc., not for the purpose of giving out sanctions but to identify patterns and be willing to adapt your approach based on feedback from parent, student and staff voice.

Think about how you can provide feedback on homework in a meaningful way, so that the pupil who has Down's syndrome can learn from their homework experience.

Thank you to Nicole Dempsey, Director of SEND and Safeguarding, Dixons Academies Trust, for her contribution to this resource.

