



Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

Supporting Children with Down Syndrome.

Why?

- Down syndrome is a genetic condition. While individuals with Down syndrome may share some physical traits, each person is unique, with their own strengths, weaknesses, personality and character. Just like everyone else, these are shaped by their friends, families, and life experiences.
- Although children with Down syndrome have a wide range of abilities, they will all experience some degree of learning difficulty, ranging from mild to severe.
- Children with Down syndrome are not just generally delayed, they have a specific profile of learning, with characteristic strengths and weaknesses. It is crucial that schools understand a child's strengths and weaknesses in order to adapt the curriculum and enable them to reach their full potential.



Characteristics that promote learning	Characteristics that hinder learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Good visual awareness and visual learning skills. ✓ Ability to learn through gesture, sign and imitation. ✓ Ability to learn through practical, hands-on activities and modelling. ✓ Ability to read and learn through the written word. ✓ Desire to engage and interact socially with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Auditory and visual difficulties. ✓ Delays in fine and gross motor skills. ✓ Speech and language difficulties. ✓ Short-term, working, and sequential memory difficulties. ✓ Attention difficulties. ✓ Difficulties with generalisation and reasoning (thinking skills).

How?

Independence: It is important to promote independent skills and facilitate opportunities for children to be fully integrated with their peers.



- Provide opportunities to work and play with and alongside good role models to support the development of language and social skills. This will also promote learning through imitation, which is typically an area of strength.
- Establish consistent routines and schedules to help pupils understand what to expect. Use visual timetables, now and next boards and visual aids to support this.
- Simplify tasks and break them down into small steps. Incorporate visuals, including photos, to support understanding.

	Monday
	Silent Reading
	English
	Spelling
	Playtime
	Maths
	Lunchtime

Speech and Language: Children and young people with Down Syndrome will typically have speech and language difficulties. Strategies to support language development should be an integral part of the curriculum. Here are some general strategies to support language development:



- Reinforce speech with facial expression, gesture and sign (Makaton is recommended).
- Use a range of media to support language understanding, objects, pictures, photos and video.
- When giving instructions, keep sentences short and use familiar vocabulary.
- Provide opportunities to develop language through drama and play.
- Use programmes such as the [Reading, Language Intervention \(RLI\)](#) and [See and Learn](#) to develop language skills through literacy.
- The use of conversation diaries or [personalised books](#) is an effective way of developing receptive and expressive language. Include photos and visuals to help pupils when sharing their news.



Reading: For many children with Down Syndrome, reading can be a strength. As children tend to be strong visual learners, see and learn approaches are much more effective. Whilst children will not necessarily learn to read through phonics, it is recommended that they take part in letter and sound/phonic lessons with their peers. This will be useful as reading skills develop and also support the articulation of speech sounds.



- When teaching letters: match letters to speech sounds, sort objects/pictures by initial sounds, and sort words from known sight vocabulary by initial letters. Use visual phonic resources and signing to support.
- When children have about 50 words of vocabulary, start to teach word recognition. Start by matching pictures and then move on to matching words to words, then selecting words from an oral prompt, e.g. give me 'daddy'.
- Use the words they are learning to create simple books related to personal experiences, including photographs of the pupil and other family members.
- You may want to consider schemes such as: [POPs Reading Scheme for Children with Down Syndrome](#), [A Reading and Language Intervention for Children with Down Syndrome \(RLI\)](#), [See and Learn – by DSE](#)

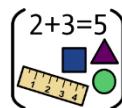
Writing: Difficulties with motor skills, memory, and sequencing can make it challenging for children to develop writing skills. To support this, it is important to:



- Provide focused support to develop letter formation and fine motor skills. Try a range of pencil grips, use bolder lines, and guides to support consistent sizing. Incorporate fine motor skills activities; programmes such as [Clever Fingers](#) may be useful.
- To support spelling, teach words that are within a child's understanding and will also promote speech development. Use multi-sensory methods, e.g., look-say-cover-write-check, finger tracing/spelling and wooden letters. Reinforce more abstract words with symbols ([Widgit](#) is ideal), teach simple word families and use early spelling apps.
- Incorporate alternative methods of recording using a range of media and assistive technology, e.g., pictures, video and photos.

[Clicker by Crick Software](#) includes a range of tools to support writing as well as tools to support learning and language development, e.g., matching activities, Clicker Books, Clicker Sentences, Clicker Talk, etc.

Numeracy: Generally, children experience difficulties in developing mathematical understanding, and the acquisition of mathematical concepts can occur at a slower pace. Challenges with language, conceptual understanding, short-term memory, and sequential memory can impact maths development. Therefore, it is crucial to provide practical learning experiences using concrete manipulatives. This will help children visualise concepts and overcome difficulties in grasping more abstract ideas. Below are some general strategies:



- Relate maths activities to everyday situations and objects, such as counting when giving out books.
- Teach practical maths skills using money, time, and measurement.
- Support the development of numeracy skills through practical and play activities.
- Draw on visual and multisensory learning strengths to aid the development of maths understanding. [Numicon](#) is an excellent example of a visual and multisensory resource recommended for children with Down syndrome.

Things to note:

Visual Impairment: Although children with Down syndrome tend to be good visual learners due to their strong visual memory skills, many children have some form of visual impairment. About 60-70% of children with Down syndrome are prescribed glasses before the age of 7. In addition to short or long-sightedness, children tend to see less detail, contrast, and colour.

Below are some suggestions to support visual difficulties:

- Enlarge text to font size 36 for young readers.
- Consider where the pupil sits and where you stand when talking to the child, and ensure they can see your facial expressions clearly and any focal points.
- Provide high-contrast materials with high visibility, e.g., use a black felt tip rather than a pencil, and yellow paper rather than white.
- Reduce the amount of detail on materials – presentation should be simple and clear.
- Use exercise books with bold lines.

For more advice on visual difficulties contact [Bradford's Visual Impairment Team](#).

Down Syndrome Training and Support Service Ltd run a wide range of training courses for teachers and teaching assistants working with pupils with Down Syndrome from birth to 16 years. Details can be found at: [Speech & language | Down Syndrome Training and Support Service Ltd \(downsyndromebradford.com\)](#)

References:

- [Including Pupils With Downs Syndrome Primary - NASEN](#)
- [Teaching reading skills to children with Down syndrome – Down Syndrome Education \(DSE\)](#)
- [Learning about number and maths - DSE](#)
- [Teaching number skills and concepts with Numicon materials - DSE](#)