

---

## Differentiation in Primary Schools

---



---

## Differentiation in Primary Schools

---

For a pupil with Down syndrome to be, and feel included in a lesson, be it in YR or Y11, the top set or the bottom group, the lesson **will** need to be differentiated.

When differentiating for your pupil, it is important to consider their learning profile and plan for their individual needs based on personal strengths. It is vital that you get to know the student, their attainment level, their interests and what drives them to achieve success.

All children with Down Syndrome have different strengths and barriers to learning, but with an awareness of the Profile for Learning you can plan and differentiate lessons to compliment the individual.

### **The Learning Profile: Strengths**

- Strong visual learning skills.
- Kinaesthetic learners.
- Ability to use sign and gesture.
- Ability to read by whole word recognition.
- Ability and desire to learn from peers.
- Learn best from pictorial, concrete and practical materials.
- Keen communicators despite language problems.
- Respond well to structure and routine.

### **The Learning Profile: Barriers to Learning**

- Delayed fine and gross motor skills.
- Auditory and visual impairment.
- Speech and language delay.
- Short term auditory memory difficulties affecting listening, processing, storing/remembering and sequencing.
- Shorter concentration span.
- Consolidation and retention problems. Generalisation, thinking and reasoning.

- Avoidance strategies.

After planning the learning focus for the whole class, consider what it is that you would like your child with Down Syndrome to learn. Ask yourself, what is essential for them to learn? What information would I like them to process? Or what skill do they need to practise?

**Key Points:**

- Keep it basic
- Keep it simple
- Keep it **visual**

Remember that children with Down Syndrome need lots of repetition before retaining new information and therefore activities may need to be repeated and repeated before new information or skills are retained.

Communication between staff is key to effective differentiation. If when the pupil and the TA arrive at a lesson, neither of them knows what to expect so that the TA must differentiate “on the hoof”, the TA’s role becomes compensatory rather than complementary. Ultimately it is the child who misses out. If planning is shared in advance with the Teaching Assistant, then the pupil will benefit from that knowledge and preparation.

If the Teaching assistant is preparing the lesson, then they must not only have the learning objective and context of learning in mind, but time to resource and plan appropriately. In a busy classroom environment, time is precious, but preparation is key to engagement and success. A close relationship with the child will mean an awareness of their interests and strategies that work for the individual – this will make planning and differentiation easier to manage and will likely produce a more successful learning experience.

**Language Difficulties**

Language can often be the greatest sticking point when it comes to the pupil having difficulties accessing the lesson, especially when the vocabulary is complex, abstract or unfamiliar. So, focussing on language acquisition and vocabulary building can be learning objectives in themselves.

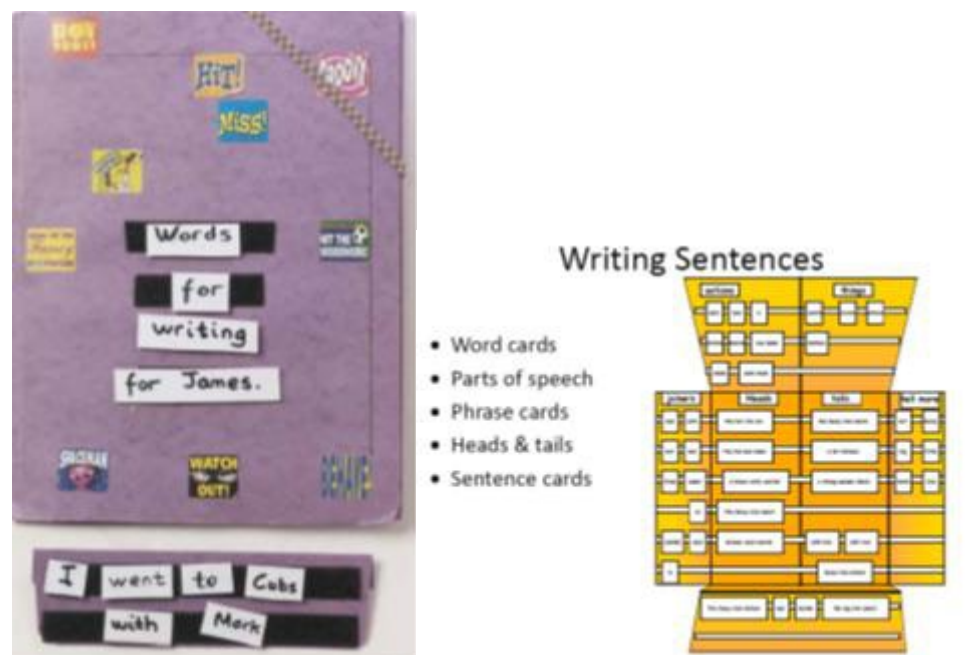
The pupils will understand language and concepts much more easily if they are reinforced visually with pictures, diagrams, symbols and readable text. Children with Down syndrome find it harder to understand deeper meanings, and abstract and unfamiliar concepts,

so relate language and concepts to familiar and meaningful experiences.

## Writing Difficulties

The vast majority of pupils with Down syndrome will have fine motor, speech and language, short term memory and processing difficulties. These interact with each other and can cause great difficulties in their ability to process, remember, sequence and record information.

However, it is essential that the pupils develop language, thinking, sentence construction and writing as a skill as **independently** as possible, depending on the level of the individual child. One sentence structured and written or recorded as independently as possible is much often more worthwhile than a paragraph of copied words which carries little meaning or understanding.



If concept learning is the object of a particular lesson, then look for ways to record that knowledge other than by necessarily writing it down. Often, the effort required in getting the letter formation right, or staying on the line, or keeping it neat, uses up all of the child's short-term memory and he/she forgets what they are supposed to be writing so the content is lost. Keep writing as an objective in itself and separate from recording knowledge.

Cloze procedure, multiple choice, matching answers to questions are all valid alternatives to writing. Having a words folder (see above) is another very effective resource that many pupils are comfortable with and enjoy using. The folder opens out to reveal a bank of words with which the pupil can then use to build sentences.

## **Teaching Strategies**

- Use a variety of short tasks, varied in nature so that your pupil will stay focused for longer.
- Set tasks which are appropriate to the pupil's level of skill and learning profile ie, visual, concrete, hands on activities.
- Use materials which reflect the pupil's life, interests and understanding.
- Speak directly to the pupil, using simple and clear instructions.
- Reinforce speech with visual resources or signs.
- Give enough time for a pupil with Down Syndrome to process language and respond.
- Group the pupil with peers and use them as support.
- Children with Down Syndrome are visual learners so keep it hands on and visual
- Have short sessions with plenty of breaks.
- Focus on learning one thing well – a single concept or key word.
- Ensure worksheets are simple and clutter free.
- Written text needs to be big and bold.

## **Some common pitfalls**

- Too much writing expected
- Too much talking.
- Overloading and multi-tasking.
- Having too low expectations.
- Worksheets which are too busy or too complicated.

## **Worksheets**

In preparing worksheets for a pupil with Down's syndrome the following tips may be helpful.

- Use meaningful material within or close to the pupil's experience.
- Introduce new concepts in a familiar context.
- Make the tasks self-contained.
- Provide plenty of visual clues: words, symbols, pictures, diagrams.
- Ensure illustrations tie in closely with text and task.
- If possible, try out several different versions of the same worksheet to discover what works best for the individual pupil.
- Leave a wide border all around the edge of the page.

- Highlight and explain key words and any that are new to the pupil.
- Illustrate key words if possible.
- Use type or print, not handwriting.
- Use subheadings to break down and structure the written sheet.
- Use a simple uncluttered layout. Too busy a page causes confusion.
- Break up continuous text. Highlight instructions in some way: in a box, particular font or colour.
- Use coloured as well as white paper, both for variety and to help the pupil distinguish one subject area from another.
- Use simple and familiar language. Keep sentences short and concise.
- Avoid ambiguous words. Use active rather than passive verbs.

### **Further support**

Our School Liaison Service can provide further advice and support. Contact us by emailing: [info@upsanddowns.net](mailto:info@upsanddowns.net)