

## Special Education Support Service: Down Syndrome

### Strategies to Promote Language

**Note: The Special Education Support Service wishes to acknowledge and thank Fidelma Brady, Education Officer with Down Syndrome Ireland for permission to use this document.**

- To reduce the effects of any hearing loss, pupils with Down syndrome should be placed near the front of the class and background noise kept to a minimum.
- Teachers ought to speak clearly and directly to the pupil, taking care over similarly sounding words such as 'trees' and 'cheese'. The teacher should maintain eye contact and use visual cues such as pictures, signs or exaggerated facial expressions to support speech.
- To gain the pupils attention, use their name before giving them an instruction or asking them a question.
- Consider writing new vocabulary on the board, once the pupil has learned to read, and other pupil's answers repeated back
- Think about supporting verbal input in visual form, i.e. keywords, symbols or drawings.
- Keep note of the pupil's expressive and comprehension abilities. Ensure that their true abilities are not underestimated. Observe them and write down the gestures, signs and words that they already use. Ask the parents to do the same at home and compare the two lists.
- Listen and respond to all of the pupil's communications. Create opportunities for them to make choices.
- Give the pupil time to organise their thoughts and find the words they want to use. Count to 30 before jumping in.
- Use styles of conversation that will encourage the pupil to expand on and develop their verbal contribution. Try to avoid closed questions that require only a one word answer.
- Simplify your language whenever you can. Try to use key words in a sentence e.g. saying "Come here" instead of "Come closer so that I can hear what you are saying".
- Repeat individually any instructions given to the class as a whole. Check the pupil has understood by asking them to repeat back what you said.
- Give the pupil with Down syndrome opportunities to practice their language in situations that are meaningful for them. Wherever possible, encourage them to take the lead e.g. giving instructions to their peers as teacher's helper.
- Give choices. Instead of "Where were you when you lost your book?" try "Where's your book? On the floor? In your tray?"



- To improve short term auditory memory, play memory games such as “I went to market and I bought...” Teach rehearsal techniques e.g. repeating sub vocally an instruction as they complete a task or take a message.