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## Down Syndrome

I'm not a 'Down's'. I am a person with Down syndrome ... Down syndrome is just something I have, not who I am.

Share the Journey, 2007 Calendar Down Syndrome Ireland

Down syndrome is a genetic condition caused by the presence of an extra chromosome.

While students with Down syndrome may share certain physical traits, each student is an individual and the level of general learning disability will range from mild to profound. The student with Down syndrome may have problems such as heart defects, respiratory problems and eye defects, and may variously exhibit the following characteristics: auditory and visual impairment, delayed fine- and gross-motor skills, difficulties with thinking and reasoning and applying knowledge in new situations, limited concentration span, poor auditory memory, speech and language impairment and sequencing difficulties.

Generally speaking the student with Down syndrome will be better able to understand language than to communicate it expressively. Consequently cognitive skills are often underestimated. Each student with Down syndrome should be treated as an individual whose education is based on an assessment of his/her strengths and needs.

Some students with Down syndrome may have Atlanto Axial Instability (AAI), which is an abnormality in the vertebrae of the spinal column. Physical activities such as gymnastics and aquatics are particularly dangerous for those with AAI and may result in spinal damage. An X-ray is required to diagnose this condition and it is advisable that an AAI X-ray is requested in respect of students with Down syndrome who enrol in schools.

The inclusion of children with special needs should be reflected in the ethos of the school and backed by a consistent policy of inclusion. The entire school community is responsible for ensuring that the school's inclusion policy is maintained during their daily interaction with the child with Down syndrome. It can be very confusing for the child if they receive mixed messages from one staff member to the next. Children with Down syndrome are particularly sensitive to the way other people behave. Consequently, providing a solid definition of appropriate social boundaries is vital (Down Syndrome Ireland, 2004).



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