

Second Level Whole-Staff Seminar

Appropriate Language Use

It is important that we use appropriate labels and terminology when referring to people who have a disability or who have special educational needs. These guidelines may be of help.

GUIDELINE 1: See the person, not the disability.

Do you need to use a label or a category at all in describing this student? His / her first name is the most important label he / she has. Use this in the first instance. Do not make the child's disability his / her predominant or only characteristic.

GUIDELINE 2: If using a label, use people-first language.

Terminology has changed over the years. Whereas in the past, the disability may have taken precedence, it is now generally accepted that we use 'people-first' language. This means we say:

<i>Person with a disability</i>	rather than	<i>Disabled person</i>
<i>Child with autism</i>	rather than	<i>Autistic child</i>
<i>Person with mental illness</i>	rather than	<i>Crazy / mad / depressed person</i>

GUIDELINE 3: Use currently accepted terminology.

Some labels that were used in the past are no longer deemed to be acceptable, because they have been seen as offensive. Use the currently accepted terminology.

Examples:

<i>Person with General Learning Disability</i>	has replaced	<i>Mental Handicap / Mentally Handicapped</i>
<i>Person with a Visual Impairment</i>	has replaced	<i>Blind person</i>
<i>Physical Disability</i>	has replaced	<i>Cripple / Spastic</i>
<i>Wheelchair user</i>	has replaced	<i>Wheelchair bound</i>

Note 3(a): People who are *deaf* may wish to retain this term, rather than the term *hearing Impairment*

GUIDELINE 4: Be sensitive to the feelings of others.

Avoid making fun of or cracking jokes about people with disabilities.

Avoid making offensive or derogatory remarks.

Avoid using the phrase 'suffers from' if describing someone who has a disability.

Treat people with disabilities as you would treat all other members of society – with respect and dignity.