



Down
Syndrome
Ireland

Supporting students

with Down syndrome
transition from Primary
to Post Primary School



Transition to Post Primary School

The move from primary to post-primary school can often be difficult, if not traumatic, for any student. The school atmosphere is suddenly quite different than before – the single teacher classroom has been replaced by a host of classes with as many different teachers. Then, on top of the challenge of managing their own timetable, homework and study, students have to cope with varied subject contents and new teaching methods within the framework of a longer school day.

For a student with Down syndrome, that bit of extra thought, planning and preparation will ease this transition - to the benefit of both the new arrival and the school. Essential to a smooth transition are mutual visits between the student's primary school resource teacher/class teacher and the child's new educators in secondary school. Complementary visits in both school environments will, in particular, provide the secondary educators with a firsthand

understanding of their new student's daily routine. Previous experience has shown that a smooth transition to secondary school is greatly encouraged by simple initiatives, such as the student making a few visits to the new secondary school with a resource teacher and/or classmate.

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Preparation - What can the primary school do?

- Have a member of staff nominated to deal with transition and liaison with local post-primary schools.
- Foster and develop links with local post-primary schools. Get to know them in detail. What does each school have to offer? What programmes are available? What physical adaptations and resources are in the school for children with special needs?
- The nominated teacher should be familiar with the different options for post-primary curriculum, assessment and examinations.
- Make contact with the chosen school as early as possible, to allow time for all necessary provisions to be put in place for the child before they begin.
- Meet with the parents, and discuss any issues or concerns they may have regarding the transition process.
- A representative of the primary school should attend open evenings at the post-primary schools in the area.
- Integrate transition planning into the SPHE curriculum during 6th class. Pupils with special education needs (SEN) will need to be taught explicitly about post-primary school and the changes involved. This includes issues such as:
 - Getting used to timetables and abbreviated subject names;
 - Moving between classes during the day;
 - Keep track of the different dates that homework is due, using their homework journal;
 - New facilities and routines (using their locker, what to do during lunch break, the class tutor system, etc.).
- Find out as much information as possible about the new school and allow the child to start a 'workbook' or 'journal' as part of their transition preparation.

Down Syndrome Ireland has developed a sample transitions workbook for students and it is available to download on our website, www.downsyndrome.ie

The workbook could cover such issues as:

- School map
- School timetable
- Homework
- Different subjects
- Having any equipment needed
- School rules
- Meeting new people
- Making new friends

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- It is important that the primary school would provide as much information as possible to the post-primary school. Such information should cover areas such as:
 - Details of any assessments carried out and results.
 - Identified areas of particular difficulty.
 - Exemptions granted.
 - Results of any recently administered tests in literacy and numeracy.
 - Information on the pupil's individual strengths.
 - Information on the pupil's individual needs and any strategies that may have been successful in addressing these.
 - Level of additional teaching support received in primary school.
 - Level of SNA support received.
 - Details of the curriculum studied - were any adaptations made?
 - Relevant information on the child's social skills and behavior.

- Primary schools are not permitted to pass on confidential information (psychological reports, tests results, reports) to the post primary school without first obtaining parental permission. However, it is very important that all relevant educational information is passed on to the new school to ensure a smooth transition and allow the school to make appropriate provisions. It's worth bearing in mind that just because a child has qualified for resources at primary level does not mean these same resources will automatically transfer from primary to post primary school. New applications must be made for each child at post primary level.

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Preparation - What can the post-primary school do?

- Ensure that there is a positive school climate for all incoming first years, including a comprehensive anti-bullying policy.
- Make parents welcome and try to dispel any worries or feelings of negativity.
- Invite parents, pupils and staff of primary schools to open evenings.
- Have a fun open day at the school for all proposed pupils.
- Nominate a staff member to co-ordinate transition.
- Meet with the teachers from the primary school and the child's parents.
- Carefully review any reports received from the parents.
- Consider the entrance exam/transition test - how does it cater for pupils with SEN?
- Apply early for resources for each student with SEN to avoid any gaps in service provision upon arrival.
- Plan the timetable and subject choices for pupils with SEN.



- Does their timetable need to be adjusted?
- Is it necessary to reduce the number of subjects?
- During the initial weeks of post-primary school, many children will experience tiredness while adjusting to the new, longer school day. This is especially true of children with SEN.
- When adapting to a new routine, consistency is important for children with SEN. Try to avoid any major disruptions to the timetable and daily routine of incoming students until such a point where it is felt that they are well settled.

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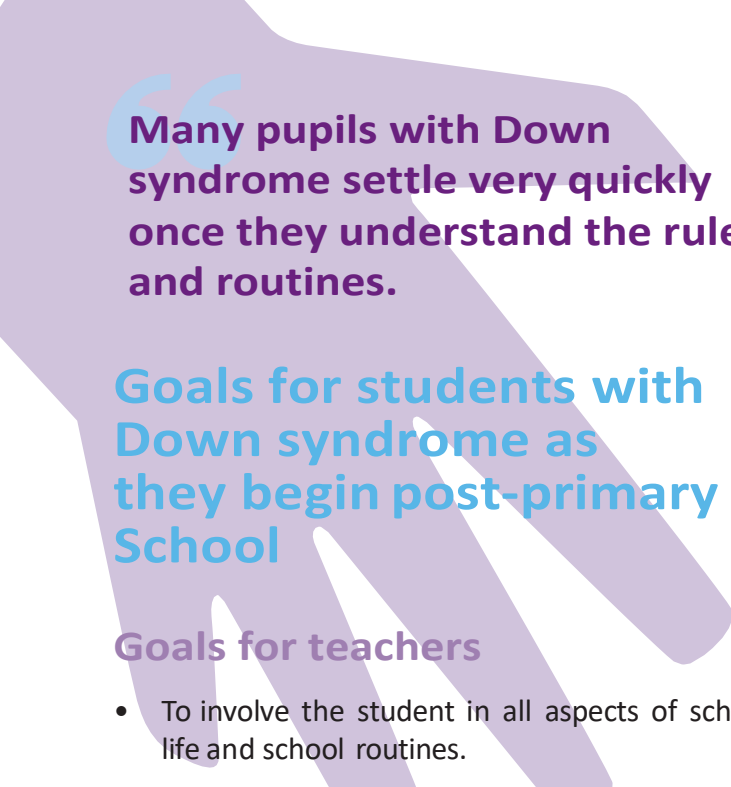
Strategies for a successful transition for students with special needs:

- It is vitally important that the child meets all members of the post primary school staff.
- The child needs to develop familiarity with the layout of the new school - lunch area, hall, library, toilets, classrooms etc.
- The child will need to practice the correct route into the school - which gate? Which door to use?
- It is a good idea to provide a map of the school buildings and grounds for the child and their parents. This map should be colour-coded, if possible.
- Make sure that the child is familiarised with routines in the post-primary school.
- Visits to the post-primary school should cover assembly and break times as well as different subject classes, etc.
- Many pupils with Down syndrome settle very quickly once they understand the rules and routines.
- Information should be issued to the primary school and to the student's parents on class / school rules, uniforms, P.E. arrangements, etc. as early as possible.
- Information should also be issued on any clubs and extra curricular activities available in the post primary school.
- Decide on practical issues such as lunch:
 - Do students bring a packed lunch?
 - Is there a canteen?
 - Do children buy lunch from the local shops?
 - Which is the best option for the child with Down syndrome?

Summary:

- Start planning early, preferably at least in fifth class in primary school.
- During the first term in sixth class, visit and agree on the post primary school.
- Ensure that a transition plan is included in the programme for the child during sixth class (as part of their IEP).
- Make sure that everyone involved with the child is included in drawing up the transition plan. This includes the:
 - Class teacher
 - SEN teacher
 - SNA
 - Post-primary school staff - the SEN coordinator, year head, SEN teacher
 - Parents/guardians
 - Any relevant outside agencies - speech & language therapists, educational psychologists etc.

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Goals for students with Down syndrome as they begin post-primary School

Goals for teachers

- To involve the student in all aspects of school life and school routines.
- To support social independence in school and the development of friendships with peers.
- To support the development of leisure skills and inclusion with peers in break and lunchtimes.
- To encourage, model and expect age-appropriate, socially acceptable behaviour at all times.
- To be familiar with the research findings which demonstrate a specific cognitive profile associated with Down syndrome and to adapt teaching methods appropriately.
- To provide access to all areas of the school curriculum at a level appropriate for the individual teenager.
- To recognise the importance of teaching reading and writing daily.
- To develop speech, language and working memory skills as well as literacy skills.
- To have clear targets for speech and language work for each teenager and identify how these can be absorbed into all aspects of the curriculum.
- To facilitate independent learning and the ability to work and to learn as part of a group.
- To make full use of computer aided learning, with appropriate software for individual and group work.

Goals for parents

- Ensure the full involvement of the young person with Down syndrome in all aspects of family life including appropriate household tasks or jobs and responsibility for keeping their own room and possessions tidy.
- In partnership with the school, continue to work on and develop literacy and numeracy skills.
- Arrange for the young person's involvement in a range of social activities with both their typically developing and disabled peers.
- Consider involvement in sporting activities to promote fitness and health.
- Provide a stimulating speech and language environment for the young person by ensuring that they are spoken to, listened to and fully involved in family conversations.
- Insist on socially acceptable and age-appropriate behaviour at home and during all social activities.
- Address, with the support of the school and any relevant outside professionals, any difficult behaviours.
- Provide the young person with an appropriate level of choice wherever possible, to ensure they have a sense of control over their lives.
- Provide outlets for self-expression and creativity.
- Encourage and develop independence in personal hygiene and self-care.
- Foster and develop independence in the community and encourage regular use of community facilities and amenities – shops, public transport etc.
- Plan for and address issues relating to puberty and development, relationships and sexuality.
- Communicate openly with the young person and provide them with the requisite information for their needs, appropriately pitched to their level of understanding and ability.



Online training courses

The following courses are available:

- Supporting early development for children with Down syndrome from birth to 5 years
- Effective education for children with Down syndrome in school
- Implementing the Reading and Language Intervention for children with Down syndrome (RLI)
- Managing behaviour difficulties for children with Down syndrome
- Improving speech and language development for children and young people with Down syndrome
- Supporting the Reading and Language Intervention for Children with Down syndrome (RLI) - Accredited trainer training

Available from:

<https://www.down-syndrome.org/en-us/services/training/courses/>

The Down syndrome issues and information education & development series

A series of 34 books and checklists that cover developmental and educational issues from birth to 16 years

- Early Years {0-5 years}
- Primary & Junior {5-11 years}
- Secondary {11-16 years}

Available from:

The Down Syndrome Educational Trust
The Sarah Duffin Centre
Belmont Street
Southsea
Hampshire
England PO5 1NA

Telephone: + 44 (0) 23 9285 5330

Fax: + 44 (0) 23 9285 5320

E-mail: enquiries@downsed.org

Website: <http://www.downsed.org/>

Education support pack (Primary & Secondary)

A pack giving information and practical advice and strategies for the inclusion of a child with Down syndrome in mainstream educational settings.

Available from:

Down's Syndrome Association

155 Mitchum Road

London SW17 9PG

Telephone: 020 8682 4001

Fax: 020 8682 4012

Email: info@downs-syndrome.org.uk

Available as a free download from:

www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

Important links and websites

www.downsyndrome.ie

www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

www.downsed.org/

www.dsscotland.org.uk

www.ncse.ie

www.sess.ie

www.education.ie

www.ncca.ie

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