

Supporting social inclusion in schools

This resource outlines some of the ways that educators, teachers, students and the broader school community can support building social connections for kids with Down syndrome.



Ensure that students with Down syndrome have the same opportunities as other students to be involved in all social activities that the school community offers, e.g. excursions, discos, sports days.



Talk regularly to all students about abilities and differences and how each student has something unique to contribute to the class.



Don't expect or rely on the family of the student with Down syndrome to attend school activities, like excursions or sports days, in a support role. It should never be an expectation for families to attend in order for the child to be involved.



Using peer to peer supports is a great way for all involved to learn, build friendships and have someone to turn for help. It is important however, that any 'buddy' initiative is not just to provide a support for the student with Down syndrome. Students with Down syndrome should also be provided with the opportunity and any support required to be a buddy to others as well.



Ensure the student with Down syndrome is not left with only the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) at break times. If the LSA is available at break times, ensure they are using their time to strategically facilitate play time, sports play or club work between the student with Down syndrome and their peers. Rather than being physically involved in play, the LSA should be encouraged to 'fade in and out' with support as necessary. A student who is being 'mothered' by the LSA, or spends break times only with the LSA, is less likely to be socially accepted by their peers.



Students should have the opportunity to first develop friendships organically, however a simple adjustment could be made for students who are experiencing difficulties establishing friendships. A 'circle of friends' approach may be used to strategically plan lunch time play activities which supports all students to participate. [Note: This approach is only recommended where there is a demonstrated need.]



Students who learn together are more likely to play together. Peer connection in the classroom is more likely to lead to peer connection outside of it as well. Ensure that the delivery of learning and supports in the classroom does not isolate the student with Down syndrome. Instead, it should provide opportunities for them to participate and be seen by their peers as a full member of the classroom. An LSA that is too closely attached and seen as a 'personal teacher' can hinder social and academic inclusion.