

Inclusive education can provide better language and academic outcomes



In some countries, children with Down syndrome are educated in mainstream, or regular, classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers. Educational research suggests that there are distinct advantages to inclusive education.

What educational research has shown

Since the 1980's an increasing number of children with Down syndrome are being educated in regular or mainstream classrooms with non-disabled peers. A number of educational research studies have considered the benefits or disadvantages of being in a mainstream compared with a special education classroom.

Gert de Graaf and colleagues published a systematic review of the studies conducted from 1970-2010 in a number of countries^[1] and conclude that results show that children educated in mainstream classrooms develop better language and academic skills even after selective placement is taken into account. There is no difference in outcomes for self-help skills possibly because many of these are learned and practiced at home. For social networks, behaviour and social competence there are few differences or small advantages to mainstream placements. The children are well accepted by their peers but less often seen as 'best friends' and support for friendships in and outside school is recommended.

The de Graaf team have conducted the most comprehensive investigations of factors influencing academic outcomes for children in mainstream placements in the Netherlands.^[2] They reported that the children receive more teaching time focused on academics in mainstream but progress was also influenced by the child's cognitive abilities, parent educational level and the time parents spent teaching their child academics at home. In follow up work this group have reported that children with IQs of 35-50 in mainstream placements make more academic progress than children with IQs above 50 in special schools.^[3] Further they report that in the first years of primary/elementary school reading development directly benefits from mainstream placement.^[4] This findings are

supported by the work of DSEI researchers.[5,6]

How this is helping

The evidence of the benefits of mainstream inclusive education has led to an increase in mainstream placements for children with Down syndrome in preschool and from the start of full-time education in some countries.



Unanswered questions

Future research is needed to:

- explore the extent to which language gains are due to a richer language environment in a mainstream classroom, more language teaching or more exposure to literacy
- develop more effective training programmes for teachers in mainstream education
- to better understand how to improve the social inclusion of children with Down syndrome in and out of school

References

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