

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Down syndrome and learning](#)

Understand: [Understanding Down syndrome](#)

Date

18 June 2026

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/down-syndrome-and-learning/understanding-down-syndrome](http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/down-syndrome-and-learning/understanding-down-syndrome)

---

# Understanding Down syndrome

Down syndrome affects each person differently. Each person has their own unique profile of strengths and areas where they may need support.

## Definition

Down syndrome is a genetic condition that influences learning and development. It occurs because cells contain an extra chromosome. In New Zealand, it's a common condition across all cultures, with one or more children being born with Down syndrome every week.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/-4WNZj5Lv9k>

Jodi and Matt Parry, parents of twins with Down syndrome, bust some of the myths about Down syndrome.

Closed Captions

Source:

[Barcroft TV Born Different series](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4WNZj5Lv9k>

---

# Characteristics of Down syndrome

Every person with Down syndrome is a unique individual. Often students will have strong empathy with others, good social skills, good short-term memory and visual learning skills.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/Yobo8jbuu4U>

Sarah answers some questions about what it's like to have Down syndrome.

Closed Captions

## Source:

Attitude

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1pEecEFODR1WZtH5woZTpW>

They may also have some the following characteristics to different degrees:

- characteristic physical features – distinctive eye and nose shapes, low muscle tone, smaller in height, slower developing motor skills
- health and development challenges – cardiac conditions, depressed immune system, hard of hearing or low vision
- learning challenges – mild to moderate delays in developmental, behavioural, and interpersonal skills

## Influence on learning

Students with Down syndrome will each have different strengths and preferences as learners. They will also experience their own set of challenges dependent on the situation. Supportive environments and lifelong learning can help overcome many of these challenges and enable learners to maintain their cognitive skills over a lifetime.



Student with Down syndrome rehearsing level 2 drama presentation for peer feedback.

**Source:**

Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

[View full image \(867 KB\)](#)

### Common strengths and preferences

- Strong empathy with others, social understanding and non-verbal communication
- Good short-term memory
- Visual learning skills
- Regular positive affirmation

### Common challenges

- Learning new skills in short time frames
- Maintaining concentration, and understanding complex spoken instructions
- Communicating using spoken language
- Developing functional use of literacy and numeracy
- Acquiring new physical skills
- Sensitivity to loud environments and stressed individuals

Supportive environments and lifelong learning can help overcome many of these challenges and enable learners to maintain their cognitive skills over a lifetime.

This information was downloaded/printed from the Ministry of Education's website "Inclusive Education". Except where otherwise noted it is Crown Copyright 2018.

Information on the Inclusive Education website is regularly updated so we recommend you check the website version of this information to ensure it remains current.