

Dear Future Teacher,

Hello, I'm Willow.

Please don't be afraid.

You're wondering how you'll meet my needs and help me to feel safe. You're wanting me to be happy in your class, and worried that I won't be. You're not sure how you're going to manage a class of 28 children and me. How will you cope with the workload? The extra resources? How will you manage any extra staff that may come with me? The inclusion? Getting it right for every child?

If you're thinking all this, then you're already doing an amazing job – so: thank you!

Please know, I come to you like any other child. I come to you with love in my heart and a joy for learning. I come to you hoping to be given the same opportunities as the rest of my class. Please don't limit my ability because you have a limited understanding of me. There's so much more to me than a diagnosis...

It may take me longer to understand some lessons, but in doing so, I'll help another child consolidate their learning when they want to help me. I will be the first to tell you that one of my friends is upset because one of my superpowers is being able to read people's emotions really well.



It may take me a little longer to get ready for break, but this may encourage compassion in my classmates as they help and teach me to zip up my jacket. I will be the first to greet you with a genuine smile in the morning and give you that heart-warming feeling that reminds you, through the tiredness and the long days, why you became a teacher.

It may take me longer to articulate my thoughts, and as I do, I am teaching our class patience, acceptance and respect. I will be the first to show you that pure determination and perseverance pay off. At times I will surprise you and the pride we will both feel when I achieve something will shine bright.

It may take me longer to write things down, and in doing so, I may teach you to be more creative in your delivery and remind you that each of your children learns in different ways and has different outcomes, not just me. I will be the first to teach our class that differences on the outside make no difference whatsoever; it's our insides that show true humanity, true love and true kindness. I'll be the one to teach people that we're more alike than different.

It may take me longer to run to the end of the finish line, and as I try my best, my classmates will show friendship and camaraderie as they cheer me on from the side lines and for some, maybe even by my side. I will be the one showing them that it's not always about being first, it's about being a good friend, a good person.

I will be the first to educate you, enlighten you and prove to you that Down Syndrome doesn't limit a person or their worth, because I will show you that I am so much more than a person who happens to have Down Syndrome. I am smart. I am funny. I am naughty. I am kind. I am thoughtful. I am valued so much by you.

Dear Future Teacher, my hope is that you see me first, and my diagnosis second. I hope you'll see all the good that comes with me. And the extra help you worried about organising – you'll soon find it is a great asset.

You will lead by example and show my classmates and your colleagues that I'm nothing to be feared. After all, who's afraid of a five-year-old?

I can't wait to be in your class!

Yours,

WILLOW

Written by Clare Fraser, mum to Willow

