

Dear Fellow Parent,

A big Hello and a bigger Wow! Our little angels are already in Grade IV and so grown up! It seemed only like yesterday, when they started their school. It is the same feeling for us, but a little more overwhelming because for us, it wasn't as predictable! It was possible because of this amazing school, kind and hard working teachers and most importantly YOU and your lovely children! We are parents of Aarshia and are writing to send a 'Thank you' and give you a little more information about her.

Most of you already know us, but some of you may not. After the shuffling last year, we couldn't really reach out to new parents and we take the sole blame for it. However, this is our sincere attempt and we would keep up at it from now on.

You may have heard about or seen 'Aarshia' and may have noticed some differences yourself, so in the spirit of inclusion and understanding, we want to share with you a little bit about her and her diagnosis of 'Down Syndrome.'

'Down syndrome' is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition caused by an error in cell division at the time of conception, that results in an extra 21st chromosome. It happens to 1 in 700 children.

In other words

There are normally 46 chromosomes in each cell, 23 inherited from your mother and 23 from your father. When some or all of a person's cells have an extra copy of chromosome 21, the result is 'Down syndrome.'

I know that's a little technical, and also took me a long time to understand, so here is a simpler version: Chromosomes contain the directions that tell our bodies how to grow. These directions tell our bodies what colour our eyes and hair will be, how big our nose will be, whether one will be a good singer, and many other things. When a person has an extra chromosome, it mixes up their body's directions a little. That is why people with 'Down syndrome' look a little different and have to try harder to learn.

There are also some other health complications that may occur in individuals with Down syndrome. Some include heart defects, low muscle tone, thyroid disease, and vision and hearing problems.

Aarshia has all of them! She had an open heart surgery to fix her complicated heart when she was one and a half. We thought we had lost her but she came out victorious! The Good news is that she is fine now and so is her heart :)

It is important for us to share all these information with you, because we knew your children would be telling you about Aarshia, in one context or the other, and it was only fair that you had all the right answers to communicate and help them with their curiosity.

You are an important piece here, because we can't do this alone! We need your help. If your child says, "I sometimes can't understand what Aarshia says" you can say, "Aarshia has Down Syndrome, which means her speech is a little delayed, you could give her a little time to finish her sentences,"

"Research suggests that children who study in inclusive classrooms with peers of varied needs, grow up to be more empathetic and compassionate."

The biggest thing here is basic understanding, and as it is with children in her class, things are going great. I am thankful that with the values you have inculcated in them, they are helpful, sensitive and cooperative and they are only going to become more considerate and patient of human differences.

In the end, I would like to 'Thank-you' all once again for helping Aarshia and encouraging children like her to achieve all that she is capable of!

Warm Regards
Aarshia's Parents