

Disability - schooling choices

Choosing a school for a child with a disability takes careful planning. The school you select should offer support programs that suit your child's needs. Some specialist schools may only enrol children with a specific disability.

Starting school is an important step for all children. If your child has a disability there are extra things for you to think about to prepare for that step. Planning will help to smooth out the process.

You will want to consider which school best suits your child - this will partly be determined by the sort of support your child needs at school.

Choice of schools

All children have a right to enrol in their local primary school. Schools develop educational programs which aim to meet the individual needs of children. You will need to consider where you want to send your child to school. Your choices include:

- Local government primary school
- Specialist schools - there is a range of specialist schools located across the state
- Catholic primary school - the Commonwealth Government provides funding which is distributed through the Catholic Education Office to support schools to include children with disabilities
- An independent school where the inclusion of students with disabilities is actively supported.

How to decide which school

Children are able to commence school at the beginning of the year if they are five years of age by 30 April of that year. It's best to start planning which school your child will attend 12 - 18 months before your child is due to start school. To help decide which school will best suit your child you should:

Make an appointment with the school principal to discuss what their school can offer your child

- Attend school open days
- Speak to parents whose children have started school
- Talk to people who know your child, such as their preschool teacher or early childhood intervention worker.

Questions to ask

Some examples of the questions you should ask at the school are:

- What is the size of the school?
- What are the number and size of prep classes?
- Does the school have any previous experience with children with disabilities?
- Will your child physically have access to all school facilities?
- What support programs are available for your child?

What to do after you've chosen a school

If you have decided on a government school, there are a number of steps to take: Contact the principal and ask that your child be enrolled.

Ask the principal for a copy of the 'Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments Handbook', and the 'Educational Needs Questionnaire'. Complete a 'Submission of Application' - this application form is sent to the Department of Education - they will assess it and decide what resources should be provided.

Non-government schools have similar procedures.

The support groups explained

You may become involved with the following groups:

- **Student Appraisal Group** - a range of people are asked to join the parents in this group to gather important information about your child's needs.
- **Program Support Groups** - help set educational goals and programs for your child. The group is usually made up of a parent or guardian of the child, the class teacher and the school principal.

Special resources

As well as a specific education program, your child may need:

- An integration teacher who will assist the classroom teacher
- Special equipment or modifications so that your child can access the school
- Therapy such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy or speech pathology
- An aide to assist their inclusion in the educational program.

Help your child prepare for school

You can help your child to prepare for school. It's a good idea to:

- Visit the school with your child
- Ask your child's preschool teacher or early childhood intervention worker to call the school and talk about their abilities and needs
- Ask people who have been working with your child to write a report about their development and skills
- Talk to your child about school.

Where to get help

- Department of Education
- Catholic Education Office
- Association of Independent Schools
- Department of Human Services - Disability Services and School Nursing Program
- Centrelink (former Department of Social Security).

Things to remember

- Start planning 12 to 18 months before your child starts school
- All children have a right to enrol in their local primary or Catholic school
- School is compulsory for children once they reach six years
- Some parents choose a combination of a specialist school and local primary school
- The support group will help you with applications for resources and funding.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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