



EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION:

Improving outcomes for students with disability

Background

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 require education providers to consult with the student and their associates (usually their parent or carer) before making an adjustment. This means that schools are obliged to consult and students and parents have a right to ask schools to consult with them about education adjustments.

Consultation must be about how the disability affects the student in relation to enrolment, participation, curriculum adjustments and access to support services. In deciding whether to make an adjustment, an education provider must consult the student about whether the adjustment is reasonable, whether it would assist the student to access and participate on the same basis as other students and whether it is the least disruptive and intrusive but beneficial adjustment for the student.

It is important that schools have access to information about the student and their needs in order to make the best decision about the adjustment required.

This fact sheet outlines what an effective consultation process looks like, what issues should be discussed, and provides suggestions about how to resolve difficult issues.

Key principles

Effective consultation is based on the following key principles.

Student focussed

A genuine discussion is held about the best interests of the student and what is needed to maximise their educational outcomes. Older students are involved in the process as appropriate.

Mutual respect

Different views are heard and acknowledged without interruption, criticism or judgement.

Accessibility and transparency

Communication is open and information needed to make an adjustment is shared. Ways to access information are transparent.

Balancing power

The respective roles and responsibilities of both parents and teachers in educating the student are acknowledged and respected.

Fairness

There is willingness to reach agreement or to find alternative ways to proceed if agreement cannot be reached. Processes for resolving issues are fair and equitable. All views are heard and taken into account in the outcome.

Accountability

There are opportunities for ongoing discussion and review. The agreement is recorded in writing.

Getting the most out of consultation

Based on these key principles, in order to get the most out of the consultation process students, parents and school staff should:

- work out what is the purpose of the discussion, in other words what outcome do you want?
- start a discussion early preferably before issues or problems arise
- know their rights and responsibilities
- show mutual respect
- try to stay calm, it may be necessary to bring in an independent person or postpone discussions if those involved are upset
- focus on what is best for the student
- recognise that each person has something to offer
- identify the key issue that needs to be addressed and focus on problem solving this
- where appropriate involve the student in the discussion
- work out who else needs to be involved in the discussion
- bring any relevant information to the discussion as part of the process of reaching agreement
- build in review points to follow up what has been agreed
- agree how ongoing communication will occur
- write down what has been agreed and what each person will do and when.

Figure 1: Quote from parent

“As parents we have expectations and hopes of what our children will achieve. Sometimes our expectations are different to the teacher’s and it is up to the parent to help the teacher in any way they can to show the true potential of their child I have found one way to overcome this potential conflict and to build a shared vision, is to establish good communication links with the school and class teacher”.

Caroline McCallum, primary school teacher and mother of a daughter with Asperger syndrome, quoted in [Positive Partnerships](#) materials.

Key issues to cover

Evidence and information

Learner profiles can assist students, parents and teachers to record and understand the student’s strengths, needs and appropriate learning strategies. Learner profiles can be used as resources for teachers and can be provided when a student changes teachers, classes or schools. This can reduce the need for repetitive explanations of the student’s needs to different people.

Assessments by health professionals are another source of evidence to be used in the adjustment process. Expert advice from health professionals should be based on a functional assessment of the student’s needs. Teachers can use this advice to work out the type of educational support needed.

Resources for adjustments

Access and participation are directly linked to resources in terms of teacher capacity and support services available. An effective consultation process includes transparency about funding decisions and how funds for students with disability are allocated in the school setting.

Some issues are easier to reach agreement about. Agreement about support should be updated on a routine basis and an independent third party should be involved in all consultations to ensure that agreements reached satisfy all parties involved, including students, parents, teachers and principals.

More information

A quick guide to help parents and carers prepare for meetings with schools is attached to this fact sheet.

Australian Government-funded websites

The [Safe Schools Hub website](#) has information on [connecting with your child's school](#) (www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/for-parents/your-part/connecting-with-your-child's-school) and on [children with special needs](#) (www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/for-parents/what-to-do-about-/special-needs).

The [Positive Partnerships website](#) includes information and resources for parents of children with an autism spectrum disorder (www.positivepartnerships.com.au).

The [Raising Children Network website](#) has information for [parents of children with a disability](#) (www.raisingchildren.net.au/children_with_disabilities/children_with_disability.html).

The [Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau](#) website has information to support parental engagement and community involvement in schools (www.familyschool.org.au).

Sources

Information in this fact sheet was adapted from the Ontario Ministry for Education (2007) [Shared Solutions](#) resource (www.edu.gov.on.ca) and from material developed for the Australian Government Department of Education through the [Positive Partnerships initiative](#). Positive Partnerships supports schools and families of children with an autism spectrum disorder (www.positivepartnerships.com.au). Please note that links to online resources are provided for information only and the views expressed in these resources do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education.



Quick guide to a consultation meeting

Table 1: Quick guide: preparing for a consultation meeting

Questions to answer	Notes
Date of meeting	
Time of meeting	
Where is the meeting being held	
Who is attending the meeting	
What do you want to come out of the meeting with?	
What is the key issue you are trying to address?	
What do you need to tell the people at the meeting?	
What are your rights and responsibilities? (Bring information with you)	
Write down what has been agreed. Ask for a written record of the discussion	
Do you need to meet again and if so when? How will ongoing communication occur?	

Table 2: Tips for reaching agreement

Do	Don't
Look for solutions	Look for someone to blame
Focus on the problem	Focus on the person
Take a collaborative approach	Take an adversarial approach
Use dialogue	Engage in debate
Focus on the student's interest	Focus on a predetermined outcome
Think that everyone can win	Think that someone has to lose
Focus on change	Focus on control