ACD is the leading advocacy and information service for children with any type of a disability and their families living in Victoria.

We provide pre-service training and professional development on family centred practice and raise awareness of disability from a family perspective.

Our contribution to improvements in policy and service system delivery is driven by our deep understanding of what children and families need to have a good life.

It's what we are passionate about because we know from personal experience how disability changes lives. Raising a child with a disability brings rewards and achievements and but also many challenges.

Language interpreters
If you need a language interpreter to access our service, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50. Tell the operator your preferred language and that you want to speak to the Association for Children with a Disability on 03 9818 2000. This is a free service.

ACD Membership
Becoming a member of ACD helps create a better life for children with a disability and their families.

ACD members include parents, siblings, family members of children with a disability, young people with a disability, professionals who work with families, students and supporters.

We encourage you to join ACD and other disability-specific groups. Our combined aim is to work together on issues extending across all disabilities.

ACD membership benefits:
- 4 editions per year of ACD's member magazine NoticeBoard
- Free information resources for families
- Discounts on ACD workshops and events

ACD membership is:
- FREE for families for the first 12 months, then $16.50 (GST Inc) per year.
- $16.50 (GST Inc) per year for students and interested persons.
- $55 (GST Inc) per year for community organisations and professionals.

We have over 2,000 members and welcome new members and supporters.

In addition to membership, we also welcome donations. All donations over $2 are tax deductible.

For more information contact the ACD office on 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers), by email mail@acd.org.au or visit acd.org.au
Acknowledgements

Transition to Secondary School: Supporting students with a disability in the transition to Victorian government secondary schools

© Association for Children with a Disability (ACD) 2015

This booklet is available free of charge to families in Victoria thanks to the generous financial assistance provided by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training (DET).

Special thanks to the parents, students and staff who contributed to this booklet.


This document may be reproduced and distributed in full or part as long as appropriate acknowledgement is given.

---

Parent feedback

Your feedback will help us provide information that is relevant and of interest to families of children with a disability. After completing the survey please tear off this page and post to Association for Children with a Disability, Reply Paid 84584, Hawthorn VIC 3122. You can also email feedback to mail@acd.org.au or fax it to 03 9818 2300.

Did the Transition to Secondary School booklet provide you with the information you were looking for?  

Yes  No

What other information would you like to see included?  


Was the information easy to find?  

Yes  No

Could the layout or design be improved to make it easier to read?  

Yes  No

If yes, how?  


Is the size of this booklet right for this type of information?  

Yes  No

Does the booklet have the right balance of pictures and text?  

Yes  No

How did you receive this booklet?  


Do you use the internet to find information?  

Yes  No
Contents

Introduction .................................................................1
Transition Planning Guide ..............................................4
Secondary school options .............................................6
Choosing a secondary school .........................................13
Program for Students with Disabilities Year 6–7 Review ..........17
Enrolment procedure ....................................................19
Transition planning with the Student Support Group .............20
Supports for students with a disability at government secondary schools ........................................23
Making the transition .....................................................27
Developing a positive partnership with the school ..................30
Raising a concern ..........................................................33
Advocating for your child .................................................36
Towards independence ....................................................38
Advocacy organisations ..................................................44
Department of Education & Training (DET) .........................46
Web resources .............................................................47
Notes .............................................................................48
Parent feedback ............................................................51

Your feedback
We welcome your feedback on this booklet and any other aspect of our service. Send to:
Association for Children with a Disability (ACD), Suite 2, 98 Morang Road Hawthorn VIC 3122
Phone 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) Fax 03 9818 2300
Email mail@acd.org.au Web acd.org.au
Every child can participate, learn and achieve. Families expect that their child will receive the best quality education and school experience their chosen school can offer.

ACD is active in promoting effective parent-school partnerships and positive education outcomes for children with a disability. The best outcomes are achieved when students, parents and schools work together.
Going to secondary school is an exciting time for children and families, and it marks the next step in your child's education.

This booklet has been written for families of students making the transition from primary school to secondary school. It builds on a previous information resource published by ACD called 'Positive Education Planning: Supporting children with a disability in Victorian government primary schools'.

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school. Every child and family is different and the school you choose should meet your individual needs. Like all families, it's a good idea to start planning for secondary school when your child is in Grade 4 or 5. Start thinking about secondary school as early as possible, to allow yourself plenty of time to explore and weigh up your options.

Visiting schools, attending open days and meeting with principals, considering the specific needs of your child and family, and involving your child in the process can assist you in making this important decision.

Transition Planning Guide
The Transition Planning Guide on pages 4 and 5 is designed to help you plan for the transition from Grade 5 to Year 7. It includes key dates and timelines for moving through each step of the transition process. Notes pages are also included at the back of the booklet that you can use to record important information.
The transition to adulthood

Transitions are a good time to reflect on how far your child and family has come, to think about achievements and any obstacles you have overcome, and to plan for your hopes and dreams for the future. It’s also a time to look forward and to start thinking about how you will adjust your thinking and planning for your child, and for yourself, as the parent of a young person becoming a teenager.

Going to secondary school is a big step for all students. It is a move into the teenage years, with less reliance on parents and increased independence. The teenage years represent a transition from childhood to adulthood, and with this comes many changes—to physical development, emotions, behaviour and attitudes.

All young people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and secondary school plays an important role in their development. Parents constantly adapt to the developmental changes that occur from the time their children are babies, then toddlers, through to kindergarten, then as primary school children.

One of the biggest challenges for parents is adapting when their child becomes a young person at secondary school, with oncoming adolescence and the emergence of independence.

While this time can be challenging, by teaching your child to develop skills that build independence you can increase their self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities. This can help your child as they adjust to life at secondary school with a new learning environment and larger numbers of students and teachers.

As your child gets older, your role as a parent will become one of guiding and supporting them with their own decision-making, while still acting as their advocate.

I like that the school was already wheelchair accessible. The teachers are nice and everyone is friendly. I am into technology and we are getting interactive whiteboards, iPods and iPads. I do English, IT, humanities, maths, food tech, drama, music, and Indonesian. In P.E. I have been doing softball, and sometimes I do a physio session.

I am in the Year 8 band and I play percussion. We are going to perform at a regional youth concert. We have had lots of rehearsals, so I feel confident. I am also looking forward to the music camp. Only the students who play music can go to that, and it means we get out of school!

The things I don’t like about school are getting up early and having double periods of one subject. Sometimes the integration aides are late and I need help to get things out of my locker. The other students help me then. I didn’t know anybody when I started here. I used to read at lunchtimes but now I have made friends and everybody is really nice. In the future I want to be a video game developer or a lawyer, or author, or a teacher.”

Student

Web resources

Australian Curriculum in Victoria (AusVELS) (replaces Victorian Essential Learning Standards - VELS)
www.ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au

To source information regarding application of AusVELS for students with disabilities, search using the term ‘diversity’ or ‘diversity of learners’

Autism Resources - Department of Education and Training (DET)

Bully Stoppers - Department of Education and Training (DET) resource for students, parents, teachers and principals

Behaviour Support Plans

Complex Medical Needs: School Policy and Advisory Guide

Continued over page...
Planning for the transition
Supporting students with a disability at secondary school involves detailed planning by the Student Support Group, a quality personalised learning and support plan and appropriate supports.

In this booklet we refer to the programs and guidelines used by the Department of Education and Training (DET) for students with disabilities in government schools. This includes the Student Support Group Guidelines and the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines. These are available online or you can ask the school for a copy.

If your child has a recent diagnosis, the school may be eligible for additional resources under the Program for Students with Disabilities. For more information, see the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines and our Positive Education Planning booklet.

Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School resource
This resource assists schools to support students with additional needs to transition from primary to secondary school.

For more information visit www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/transtosecondary.aspx

Developing a positive partnership with your child’s school is the foundation of a successful school experience for your child and family. The best outcomes are possible when parents and schools work together.

While the information in this booklet focuses on transition planning for children with a disability in Victorian government primary schools, the planning principles will be similar if your child is going to an independent or Catholic school. With good communication and skills in advocating for your child, you will be able to address any issues as they arise. A list of advocacy organisations is included on page 44 and a list of web resources is included on page 47.

For more information about the transition to secondary school for children with a disability, contact ACD on 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) or mail@acd.org.au

“I believe our decisions regarding our children’s schooling are influenced by a number of things, such as our personal philosophies and values, life experiences and the information we have at the time.

Choosing a secondary school has been a challenge. What eventually made it easier was just to focus on a couple of key criteria, which for us included a suitable curriculum and a transport option that didn’t require too much driving.

After much soul searching, I chose a school that I was confident could meet my child and family’s needs. It’s been hard sometimes not to be swayed by what other people think and to wonder whether I’ve made the right decision.

I have come to the conclusion that, as parents, we just have to understand that we make our choices based on a number of different reasons and life situations. All of us just want the best for our children and we go about achieving that in different ways.”

Parent
Transition Planning Guide

This planning guide is a quick reference to the tasks and activities that you and the Student Support Group will need to keep in mind before your child starts secondary school.

Grade 5 and before

- Start talking to friends, neighbours and other networks about school options.
- Go to secondary school information evenings, open days, tours and meet with principals.
- Look at school websites and find out about different schools.

Grade 6 - Term 1

- Revisit the schools you are interested in and meet with principals again if necessary.
- Once you have narrowed down your choices, take your child for a visit to the school.
- Make a final decision on your preferred secondary school.
- Your child’s primary school will commence the Year 6–7 Review for students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities (students on Levels 5 and 6 are exempt from the Year 6–7 Review). Find out if any specialist appointments or assessments need to be booked for the Year 6–7 Review. Although the Year 6–7 Review is not required for students on Levels 5 and 6, detailed transition planning should still occur.
- Commence transition discussions at the Student Support Group meeting.

Grade 6 - Term 2

- Fill in the preference form provided by the primary school (for enrolment into local neighbourhood secondary schools).
- Your child’s primary school will complete the Year 6–7 Review for students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities. Relevant staff from the secondary school should be invited to the Application Student Support Group meeting.
- New applications for the Program for Students with Disabilities must be submitted in July.
Grade 6 - Term 3

- If you submitted preference forms for government secondary schools, you will be advised by the primary school which government secondary school has offered a place to your child.
- Your child’s primary school should convene a Student Support Group meeting with relevant staff from the secondary school to plan for the transition and other needs.
- Your child’s primary school may consider preparing a transition statement, a summary of important information about your child that can be given to the secondary school to assist them in planning appropriate supports for your child.
- Your primary school should be notified of the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review.

Grade 6 - Term 4

- Enrol your child into secondary school.
- Plan and prepare for orientation day.
- Request an extended orientation for your child and meet teachers.
- Request a Student Support Group meeting for Term 1 of Year 7.
- The primary school should work with your child on the transition program activities.
- The primary school may consider additional strategies to prepare your child for transition, such as social stories, if this is known to be helpful.
- Practice the transport route during the school holidays if your child will be taking public transport.
- Together with your child, consider other strategies to prepare for secondary school, such as becoming familiar with the school timetable and map of classrooms.

Year 7 - Term 1

- If attending a local neighbourhood school, consider asking for your child to attend school for a short time the day before other Year 7 students start, to bring books, locate their locker, bathrooms, Home room, and to meet teachers.
- Confirm the date for the Student Support Group meeting to be held in Term 1.
- Participate in the Student Support Group meeting to develop a personalised learning and support plan and monitor how your child is settling in.
If your child is already in a school that offers Foundation to Year 12, you may be quite happy for your child to continue their schooling where they are, or you may consider other options.

Your primary school community is a good starting place to find out about local and other secondary schools.

Friends, neighbours, and your disability support networks may also be good sources of information.


Most secondary schools are bigger and have more students, teachers and staff than primary schools. Many have diverse student populations from a range of cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, with a range of needs and abilities.

Large government secondary schools often have a broad range of subjects on the curriculum, and some have the capacity for a stronger focus on a particular area such as music or art.

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school and every child and family is different. The school you choose should meet the individual needs of your child and family.

**Government secondary schools**

All students have the right to a place in the designated neighbourhood secondary school and there is support to facilitate this for students with a disability. In most instances, the designated neighbourhood school is the one nearest to a student’s permanent residential address, except when schools have restricted enrolment, as approved by DET.

If you don’t want your child to attend either the neighbourhood school, or the same school being attended by a sibling who lives at the same address, you can request an enrolment at any other school in which space is available.

For more information

- Australian Apprenticeship Support Network
- Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities (Chapter 7: Advice for Parents and Carers)
- Family Planning Victoria
- Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)
- National Disability Co-ordination Officer Program
  [www.ndcovictoria.net.au](http://www.ndcovictoria.net.au)
- Parenting Ideas – Michael Grose
- Parentline Victoria
  [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/parentline.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/parentline.aspx)
- Planning a Career With Your Child
- Program for Students with Disabilities: Guidelines for continuation of PSD funding for students turning 19 or older and completing a senior secondary course in 2014
- REACH
  [www.reach.org.au](http://www.reach.org.au)
- School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships
- Steve Biddulph
  [www.stevebiddulph.com](http://www.stevebiddulph.com)
- Student Engagement and Inclusion Guidance
- VCE, VCAL and VET
- VCE - Department of Education and Training (DET)
- VCAL - Department of Education and Training (DET)
The vocational training components of SBATs contribute credit towards a senior secondary training plan and leads to a nationally recognised qualification. It also includes paid work. The program is undertaken under a training contract with an employer, has a formal combining part-time employment, school and training.

The VCAL is a recognised senior qualification and focuses on ‘hands on learning’. Students who do the VCAL are more likely to be interested in gaining a TAFE qualification, doing an apprenticeship, or getting a job after completing Year 12.

The DET Regional Director can restrict enrolment, students of the limitations of facilities. Students are stored. At school he mostly gets around by pushing himself in his wheelchair. The school has organised a roster of three integration aides. Jay went on the music camp and the Year 7 camp last year. It was always assumed by the school that he would go. We have been working together through some issues but overall, the school staff have been very keen to support Jay and he is really happy.”

Government specialist schools

There are over 90 government specialist schools in Victoria. Class sizes at specialist schools are smaller than local neighbourhood schools. Some specialist schools also have therapists on staff.

Specialist schools generally already have an accessible environment and curriculum for their student population and this may mean there are limited subjects on offer.

Students who live within the specialist school's designated transport area are eligible for travel support to that school (usually a school bus).

All students must be eligible for additional resources under the Program for Students with Disabilities to be eligible to enrol in a specialist school.

Students must also meet the specialist's school enrolment criteria. Contact the principal or the DET Regional Office for more information.

Parent of a student at a mainstream secondary school

“We considered a move to special school for Jay’s secondary years, but chose a mainstream secondary school to meet his academic needs, going with the advice of therapists and the paediatrician. Jay wasn’t enrolled until November the year before he started, so it was a challenge to get all the rooms modified by start of the school year. Most of the school was already wheelchair accessible. The school was great at getting the smaller modifications done quickly but the bigger ones have taken some time. Jay is driven to and from school by carers who assist him to get ready in the mornings and provide support after school as well.

The school put a lot of thought into selecting his locker, which is at the end of the row so there is space for him to move and near an alcove where his scooter is stored. At school he mostly gets around by pushing himself in his wheelchair. The school has organised a roster of three integration aides. Jay went on the music camp and the Year 7 camp last year. It was always assumed by the school that he would go. We have been working together through some issues but overall, the school staff have been very keen to support Jay and he is really happy.”

Government secondary school zones

The DET Regional Director can restrict enrolments at particular schools because of the limitations of facilities. Students are enrolled in the following order:

1. Students for whom the school is the designated neighbourhood school.
2. Students with a sibling at the same permanent address who are attending the school at the same time.
3. Where the regional director has restricted the enrolment, students who reside nearest the school.
4. Students seeking enrolment on specific curriculum grounds.
5. All other students in order of closeness of their home to the school.
6. In exceptional circumstances, compassionate grounds.

For more information contact the DET Regional Office.
**Intellectual disability**
In Victoria there are a number of specialist schools for students with an intellectual disability. Where eligibility is established under the Intellectual Disability category of the Program for Students with Disabilities:

- Students with a mild intellectual disability who score an IQ between 50 and 70 on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Specialist School.
- Students with a moderate to profound intellectual disability who score an IQ below 50 on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Special Developmental School (SDS).

Students with a mild to profound intellectual disability who score an IQ of 70 or below on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Specialist School (sometimes referred to as a dual mode school, or Special Developmental School in some regional areas). If you have queries about the enrolment criteria speak to the school principal or the Regional Disabilities Co-ordinator.

**Hearing impairment**
The majority of educational services for secondary students with hearing impairments exist as facilities within local neighbourhood schools. The Victorian Deaf Education Institute has a list of secondary schools and Foundation schools to year 12 schools with deaf facilities as well as links to visiting teacher services.

For more information visit www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/Resources/Pages/Deaf-education-in-Victoria.aspx

**Physical disability and/or significant health impairment**
In Victoria, there are four specialist schools for eligible students who have physical disabilities and/or significant health impairment.

- Belmore School
  www.belmoresc.vic.edu.au
- Glenallen School
  www.glenallen-sch.vic.edu.au
- Glenroy Specialist School
  www.glenroys.vic.edu.au
- Nepean School
  www.nepean.vic.edu.au

**Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**
DET currently resources five ASD specialist schools:

- Bulleen Heights School (F–12)
  www.bulleenheights.vic.edu.au
- Northern School for Autism (Lalor campus)
  www.northernautism.vic.edu.au
- Eastern Ranges School (currently F–8 but will be to F–12 in 2018)
  www.easternrangesschool.vic.edu.au
- Southern Autistic School
  http://southernautistic.vic.edu.au
- Western Autistic School (Laverton campus)
  www.westernautisticschool.vic.edu.au

Some of these schools provide outreach services and support to other schools to ensure that students with ASD benefit from the expertise of these specialised settings.

**Inclusion Support Programs for students with ASD**
Inclusion Support Programs support the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders in local neighbourhood schools by providing the teaching expertise, knowledge and facilities for children with ASD to participate in the school curriculum. These programs works at a whole-school level to create an ‘autism friendly’ environment, as well as providing professional support to staff and targeted intensive support and intervention for individual students.


**Linking to the curriculum**
Independence goals can be linked to the curriculum by being included in the personalised learning and support plan. For example, a learning goal about how to handle money could be practised at the school canteen when a student buys their lunch.

**Balancing support and independence**
Students with a disability may need assistance with certain tasks but it is important that they are active participants in their learning. Adults assisting children with physical and intellectual disabilities need to understand the importance of providing assistance without creating dependence. There is a fine balance between providing enough assistance for the student to experience some success, yet still have some challenge.

Most teenagers are not keen to have an adult by their side when they are in secondary school. Education support staff in secondary schools should work in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and attitudes of teenagers. They might work with your child within a small group or ‘float’ around the classroom. This will depend on individual need.

Secondary school students are also more self conscious about their personal care needs. Adults assisting students with personal care needs should respect their privacy and dignity as well as being sensitive and discreet.

**Building confidence and self-esteem**
Finding ways for your child to do some things on their own or with minimal assistance will help to develop confidence in their own abilities.

Most children feel encouraged when their parents show interest in even the small things they have done. This can help your child develop the confidence to try again with difficult tasks and to try new things that challenge their skills.

Taking the time to talk to your child about their day at school, and acknowledging their achievements, big and small, also helps to build confidence and self-esteem. At this age, teenagers also start to gain confidence from their peers, so building on social skills is important.

It can be hard to step back and look afresh at the evolving needs of a young person with a disability as they move towards independence. Parents need to be able to adapt to the changes in children as they grow into teenagers, even though it presents challenges.

**Career planning**
Most children at the start of their secondary schooling don’t know what they want to do when they leave school. Students should consider study pathways that interest them and which may lead to an area of work they enjoy. As a parent, you have a key role to play in your child’s career planning, and you can have a positive and powerful impact on their career development. To help you provide this support and guidance, you will need current information about the career pathways available to young people.

There are resources available to help you start this conversation with your child. Visit www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/disabilitypathways.aspx for information about Strengthened Pathways Planning for Young People with Disabilities. You can also discuss with the school what support they provide to assist students to make choices about their options beyond school.

All government secondary schools offer the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Each school decides what VCE subjects and Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs it will offer. Government schools are increasingly offering the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Specialist schools generally offer VCAL and VET courses, and some also offer VCE. Ask your school of interest about the programs on offer.
"My preference was a two-part transition, first to a specialist school part-time, and then to a mainstream secondary school part-time.

First, I had to get over my reluctance to send my son to a setting that segregated him from ‘normal’ children. But the specialist setting could provide the intensive physiotherapy and hydrotherapy he needed. I asked myself, what would make him happy?

I took him for a visit to the specialist school and he didn’t seem to notice that the other children had disabilities. He was too busy enjoying the group activities!

I think there are times when we can all benefit from taking the time to reflect on the direction we are going in, and on our motivation. As our children get older, we start to see them develop their wonderfully unique characters. We need to remember to respect their individuality and act accordingly. Sometimes our kids are very good at guiding us along the right path."

**Parent**

“Every Saturday morning for the past year, my son has been walking to the local shops with a care worker. The idea was to learn the route, cross roads safely, practice buying lunch, and for him and the local shopkeepers to get to know each other.

It was all going very well, and I knew that he was ready to have a go by himself. This made me nervous. I knew it was necessary but I wasn’t ready yet. I needed a little while longer to get used to the idea.

One afternoon my son announced, “Mum, I am just going to return these DVDs to the shop. I am going by myself.” I was taken aback but stayed calm. I said, “Okay, be careful crossing the roads, don’t talk to strangers and come right back.” He said, “Mum, I already know that.” My other son asked if he would be alright. I told him there were always risks when young people start doing things on their own, but if they have been practising their skills, then everyone needs the chance to try.

I can’t say that I remained calm, but I held my nerve. He was back in 25 minutes, a little longer than I expected. He was so pleased with his achievement, and it was wonderful for his confidence and self-esteem.

For me, there was pride and anxiety, and a range of emotions, and I knew that it was the start of letting go."

**Parent**

---

**Vision impairment**

There are no specialist schools for students with vision impairment but a range of supports are available to schools, including the Statewide Vision Resource Centre and Visiting Teachers. Contact the DET Regional Office for more information.

**Students with multiple disabilities**

Students with multiple disabilities may be eligible to attend a number of specialist schools.

If your child has multiple disabilities, discuss this with the schools that interest you, and with the professionals who know your child, to guide your decision about the best available option.

---

**Specialist school zones**

Specialist schools also have ‘zones’ for enrolments. The zone is also the boundary for the school’s bus service.

If you prefer a specialist school that is not the designated school for your zone, approach the school to discuss your request. You may still be able to enrol your child into that school, if there are places, and if the principal agrees.

However, your child will not be eligible for the transport support available for that school and you will have to make your own transport arrangements.

---

“Sam had a very positive experience during his primary years. He went to our local kindergarten and then our local government school.

He really enjoyed school, being included in all the facets of school life. He ran the sprints on athletics day, took part in the annual swimming carnivals, performed on stage with all his classmates during the annual school concerts and went on all the school camps. Of course, he did his schoolwork as well but, “That’s boring, Mum!”

I wanted to make sure that this positive experience would continue to be the common denominator throughout his secondary schooling. After looking at all our options, we decided, or rather Sam decided, that he really liked the special school.

As Sam’s parents, we first toured the school, met with the assistant principal and generally got a feel for the school environment. After looking at all our options, we decided, or rather Sam decided, that he really liked the special school.

As Sam’s parents, we first toured the school, met with the assistant principal and generally got a feel for the school environment. After looking at all our options, we decided, or rather Sam decided, that he really liked the special school.

---

**Parent of a student at a specialist secondary school**

“Every Saturday morning for the past year, my son has been walking to the local shops with a care worker. The idea was to learn the route, cross roads safely, practice buying lunch, and for him and the local shopkeepers to get to know each other.

It was all going very well, and I knew that he was ready to have a go by himself. This made me nervous. I knew it was necessary but I wasn’t ready yet. I needed a little while longer to get used to the idea.

One afternoon my son announced, “Mum, I am just going to return these DVDs to the shop. I am going by myself.” I was taken aback but stayed calm. I said, “Okay, be careful crossing the roads, don’t talk to strangers and come right back.” He said, “Mum, I already know that.” My other son asked if he would be alright. I told him there were always risks when young people start doing things on their own, but if they have been practising their skills, then everyone needs the chance to try.

I can’t say that I remained calm, but I held my nerve. He was back in 25 minutes, a little longer than I expected. He was so pleased with his achievement, and it was wonderful for his confidence and self-esteem.

For me, there was pride and anxiety, and a range of emotions, and I knew that it was the start of letting go.”

**Parent**
Dual enrolment
Some children enrol at both a specialist school and a local neighbourhood secondary school (government, independent or Catholic) and spend part of the week at each. This is known as dual enrolment.

Some parents choose dual enrolment so that their child can benefit from the different experiences and resources that local neighbourhood schools and specialist schools have to offer.

There are some additional things to think about when considering dual enrolment, including whether:
- Your child and family will be able to settle into this routine
- There might be issues with equipment your child needs on a daily basis.

Discuss the prospective dual enrolment with the principals of both schools to consider whether:
- Both schools are supportive of the arrangement
- Both schools can work together and communicate effectively with each other and with you, to ensure that things go smoothly
- Both schools can put together a suitable timetable for your child.

Program for Students with Disabilities resources are shared between government secondary schools and specialist schools on a pro rata basis.

Dual enrolments are possible between specialist schools on a pro rata basis.

Specialist schools, but non-government non-government schools and government secondary schools and Catholic) and spend part of the week at each.

Dual enrolments are possible between specialist schools on a pro rata basis.

Satellite Programs
A Satellite Program is a government specialist school program with specialist staff, learning areas and facilities to suit the needs and requirements of students with disabilities, and is located within a local neighbourhood primary or secondary school.

The aim of a Satellite Program is to enable students with disabilities to be part of the everyday life of the school while also recognising and supporting their additional learning needs. Students with disabilities are integrated into regular classrooms where appropriate to maximise learning outcomes with specialist support being provided via specialist school staff.

Contact the DET Regional Office for more information about the location and enrolment criteria for Satellite Programs in government schools.

Community schools
There are a small number of government community schools in Victoria for students and families seeking an alternative. Contact the Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator at the DET Regional Office for more information.

Home schooling
In Victoria, home schooling is a recognised alternative to attending school. Some parents choose home schooling because it provides an individually tailored environment.

Some of the things to think about if you are considering home schooling include the impact on yourself and your family and how you will ensure social and recreational activities for your child. If you choose home schooling, you will assume overall responsibility for the planning, implementation and assessment of your child. You must also register your child with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

Students using the canteen at school are often required to be independent making selections and using money. An education support staff member may support your child to learn these skills until they have the confidence to be independent.

Many students will require clear, step by step instruction and many opportunities to practise in order to achieve these things. Every student’s capacity will differ, but all students should have the opportunity and support to become as independent as possible.

Social skills
Most teenagers seem to pick up social skills from what they see modelled by others. Sometimes teenagers with a disability need explicit teaching of social skills and conversation skills, in the same way that Maths or English is taught explicitly. Role play can be a useful tool and speech pathologists or occupational therapists can often assist with this.

There are opportunities to make friends with students across a range of ages by participating in any available extracurricular activities, such as school productions, choir, or in lunchtime clubs such as chess or drama. A shared interest is usually a good basis to start a friendship. Many secondary schools run specific activities at the start of Year 7, so that new students can get to know each other and start to make friends.

Many parents are concerned about bullying at secondary schools. This is a good time to reinforce the strategies that your child has learnt at primary school to deal with the negative behaviour of others.

Also ensure that your child knows who they can speak to at school if they experience bullying. Ask the school for a copy of its Student Engagement Policy, so you are reassured of the processes and strategies already in place at the school to ensure the safety of all students.
Towards independence

Most children going into their teenage years start to forge their own identity.

Teenagers want to be known as individuals in their own right and may want to try new experiences and establish new friendships separate from their parents and family.

Parents need to adapt to the challenges of guiding and supporting their teenager through different sorts of issues. These can include relationships, drugs and alcohol, adolescence and learning about the world. At the same time, parents need to provide reassurance that they are still there to offer support.

You can encourage a partnership approach to decision-making with your child as they start to explore their capacity to be independent decision-makers. Rather than making all the decisions, as parents do for younger children, your role becomes one of guiding and supporting decision-making, while continuing to be their advocate.

Involving your child in decision-making

Many teenagers are very forthcoming in expressing opinions and making decisions. Others need more guidance, encouragement and structure to engage in decision-making.

Given the right level of support, most teenagers would be able to participate, to some degree, in decisions about their schooling. Being listened to, and participating in decision-making and Student Support Group meetings, helps to build confidence and self-esteem.

Being organised

Education support staff can support your child with the organisational skills needed in secondary schools, for instance, working with a timetable, moving from room to room, managing a locker with a key, and keeping track of books and belongings.

Secondary school students often have a school diary that they can learn to use to keep themselves organised. Your child may find a visual schedule useful. A speech pathologist or occupational therapist may be able to assist with this.

Finding ways for your child to do some things on their own or with minimal assistance will help to develop confidence in their own abilities.

“(...)”

Parent of a student with dual enrolment

Home-Based Educational Support program

The Department of Education and Training (DET) expects that students of school age with severe disabilities will attend school.

Sometimes the severity of the student’s disability and the fragility of their health may prevent them from attending school for a period of time.

The Home-Based Educational Support Program enables students with severe disabilities to access an educational program where they are unable to attend school due to the nature of their disability.

Home-based educational programs must be developed by the student’s local or nominated regular or specialist school in co-operation with the student’s parents.

Contact the DET Regional Office for more information and timelines.

Distance education

In Victoria, students from Foundation to Year 12 can receive distance education if they meet the eligibility criteria in one of four categories: Distance, Medical, School referral, and Traveller. More information about distance education can be found in the Distance Education Centre Victoria (DECV) handbooks [website link].

Students who are unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis due to geographic isolation or because the student has a disability or special health-related or education need may also be eligible for Assistance for Isolated Children from Centrelink.

Select Entry Accelerated Learning

Some government secondary schools offer Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) programs to students capable of working at a faster pace than their peers. Work in core subjects is accelerated for SEAL students, allowing them to complete Years 7 to 10 in three years and do more VCE subjects. Entrance exams are usually held in May of the year before your child’s Year 7 placement.
Independent and Catholic schools

Disability funding is available for students with disabilities at independent or Catholic schools but it is different from funding available in government schools.

Funding cannot be transferred between school sectors. Independent and Catholic schools also have their own enrolment criteria. Contact the school you are interested in for more information.

For more information

A link to a list of all Victorian Government Specialist Schools can be found at the bottom of www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/pages/disabilities.aspx

Assistance for Isolated Children

Association of Independent Schools information regarding programs for students with a disability can be found at www.is.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm

Autism Friendly Learning

Catholic Education Office
www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au

Disability Funding – Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN)

Children’s Mobility Centre

Distance Education Centre Victoria
www.distance.vic.edu.au

Find an Early Childhood Service or School website

Home-Based Educational Support Program

Home Schooling

My School website
www.myschool.edu.au

School statistics

Statewide Vision Resource Centre
www.svrc.vic.edu.au

Victorian Deaf Institute

Victorian Government School Performance Summary

If you have someone supporting you in a meeting, talk to them beforehand about how you would like to proceed if you become emotional. Think about what your own coping strategies are and go with what feels right for you. Be reassured that as a parent advocate you are doing what you believe is best for your child.

Support and advocacy for parents

Sometimes communication issues can arise and you may want to ask a friend or advocate for support. An advocate can be a friend, family member, or a formal advocate.

You are entitled to take an advocate with you to any meeting but to comply with Student Support Group Guidelines the advocate must not be in receipt of a fee.

If you do take an advocate to a meeting, make sure you discuss with them any relevant information beforehand so that you are both well prepared and have a good understanding of the purpose of the meeting and the outcomes you are seeking.

You can also seek information and advice from an advocacy organisation (see page 44).

Tips for advocating for your child

• Be clear about what you want to achieve and what is an acceptable outcome.
• Find out who is responsible for the outcome you seek.
• Don’t always expect conflict, as others may agree with you.
• Be firm and persistent.
• Think about what you want to say and how you will say it.
• Write down the points you want to cover.
• Think about points that others may raise and how you might respond.
• Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion.
• Stay focused on getting the best outcome for your child.
• Be open to other solutions that may be just as effective.
• Negotiate and be open to compromise.
• Keep some notes about what was discussed.
• Follow up on agreed actions.
• If emotions overwhelm you, ask for a few minutes to gather your thoughts.
• Try to stay calm.
• If you need support, ask a friend or advocate to help you.
• Seek further information and advice from an advocacy organisation if you need to.
Advocating for your child

It is common for parents to act as advocates for their children in many situations, even though you might not recognise it as advocacy.

An advocate is someone who can support, assist or represent another person to achieve a positive outcome in a difficult situation or meeting.

Being a parent advocate
As a parent, you have the most experience and personal knowledge about your child. If you have a strong instinct about what could improve your child’s situation, be firm and persistent. Remember that you are your child’s best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

How to advocate for your child
Be clear about what would be an acceptable outcome. Others will find it easier to respond if they understand your perspective and what you are trying to achieve.

Think about what you want to say and how you will say it. Write down the points you want to cover and keep a record of any meetings.

Avoid being pressured into agreeing to something if you feel uncertain. It’s okay to say that you need time to think things through before you respond.

Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion. You need to be in an environment where everyone at the meeting has time and space to actively listen without interruption. You may need to make an appointment for this to happen.

Remember that you are your child’s best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

Remember to keep some notes about any discussion. This will make it easier to follow up on agreed actions. If these are not happening, or the situation changes, you can raise the issue again.

Emotions
It is common to feel strong emotions when advocating for your child. Emotions can overwhelm you when you least want them to. Even if you are not in a situation of conflict, you may find it difficult to contribute to the conversation. Whatever emotion you experience, you can ask for a few moments to gather your thoughts.

Choosing a secondary school

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school, such as your child’s strengths and interests, school facilities and your family’s broader needs.

When choosing a secondary school, think about what is most important to your child and family. It could be a range of things, such as primary school friendship groups, choosing particular subjects, management of complex care needs, finances, choosing the same school as siblings, or the size of the school and number of students.

Think about the broader needs of your family as well as the specific needs of your child. Sometimes there may be limited choice due to distance or living in a remote area.

Your child’s strengths and interests can help guide your decision-making when choosing a secondary school. Some schools are very academic while others may have a strong arts, music or sports focus.

Involve your child in the decision-making process and listen to their feedback. They may tell you that they feel more comfortable in one school than another.

Remember to keep some notes about any discussion. This will make it easier to follow up on agreed actions. If these are not happening, or the situation changes, you can raise the issue again.

Involve your child in the decision-making process and listen to their feedback. They may tell you that they feel more comfortable in one school than another.

School visits
School open days, information evenings and tours will give you a general feel for a school and some idea of the facilities. Most government schools hold these events in April or May each year.

Information evenings are a good place to start, and will give you and your child an overall picture of the school.

A school tour during the day will give you a chance to see the school in action, and you may get a sense of whether the teachers and students seem engaged and happy.
approach the school. Ask them which school they felt most comfortable in and why.

Meet the principal
You will get some sense of whether the school is right for your child from the welcome you both receive, the approach of the principal and staff, and the responses to your questions or requests.

A meeting with the principal will give you some idea of their approach to education, diversity, and including students with a disability. You can also ask specific questions about how the school can meet your child’s needs. This may include discussion about medical needs, physical access or other issues, as well as your child’s academic needs. You might like to ask how the school encourages social inclusion.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) sets out a range of policies for schools in the School Policy and Advisory Guide. These policies cover a wide range of issues to ensure the wellbeing of students and staff and the smooth running of the school. They include emergency procedures, management of medical conditions such as asthma and anaphylaxis, bullying, attendance, and many other things. In addition, schools develop their own policies to address a range of issues and you can ask the school for a copy of these.

Physical environment
Your first impressions of a school will probably be of the physical environment and accessibility, facilities, physical layout and the size of the school. Discuss any specific physical access or safety requirements with the principal as early as possible to allow time for modifications before your child starts.

Approachable staff
You should feel confident that the school staff will keep your child safe and meet their needs. A positive approach from the principal and staff is an important part of making secondary school an enjoyable experience for your child. Staff with a positive approach will tend to:

- focus on abilities
- engage directly with your child, not just through you
- support learning at an individual level and pace
- make time to meet with you and any relevant specialists
- think about creative ways to adapt the environment, curriculum, or activities to ensure inclusion.

By speaking with the principal and staff about their experiences with students with a disability, you can get a feel for how the school might go about including your child. Schools with less experience may also be a good option if they are welcoming, enthusiastic and positive.

Program modification
Ask how the school includes students with a disability across different subject areas, and how all subject teachers can have input to the personalised learning and support plan. While the school may not have all the answers, you should feel reassured that they will explore ways to include your child in all activities, including camps and excursions. Ask how the school will co-ordinate communication and consistency between all of your child’s teachers.

Complex care needs
If your child has complex medical or personal care needs, ask how the school can meet these needs. You will want reassurance that your child will be cared for safely and with dignity, privacy and respect, and that the school will plan well to address these needs.

Taking the matter further
If you are not satisfied with an outcome, you can approach the Community Liaison Officer at the DET Regional Office. If the matter remains unresolved, you can write to the: Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group, C/- Manager, School Operations and Governance Unit, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne VIC 3001. You may also seek advice from an independent agency such as the Victorian Ombudsman or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Suspensions and expulsions
Schools have an obligation to students and staff to provide a safe environment. DET has recently developed further materials around behaviours of concern in a collection of guidelines and recommendations entitled Student Engagement and Inclusion Guidance. This includes information on the development of student engagement policies, promoting positive behaviour and responding to challenging behaviours. It also includes links to information on disciplinary measures which can include suspension and expulsion.

The process for suspensions and expulsions must comply with Ministerial Order 625 - Suspensions and Expulsions, which ensures that the school engage with the parent (or ‘relevant person’) as well as the student.

For more information
Disability Standards for Education
www.cdaedustandards.info
Ombudsman Victoria
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
Parent complaints
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/complainschool.aspx
Student Engagement Policy Guidelines
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

It is specifies follow up and support including provision of Student Absence Learning Plan and Return

Disability Standards for Education
Under Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education (2005). To comply with the standards, an education provider must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to accommodate a student with a disability. An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 set benchmarks for education and training providers with which all Victorian government schools must comply. These include the right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.

Legal advice
For information about issues of discrimination, contact an organisation that specialises in providing legal advice on disability issues (see Advocacy organisations on page 44).
**Tips for raising a concern**

- Get all the facts and be clear about the outcome you are seeking.
- Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed by speaking to the teacher in the first instance.
- Concerns about your child's program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.
- Find out if there are any guidelines for addressing your concern and ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.
- Organise an appropriate time and place for any discussion and put serious concerns in writing to the principal.
- Make sure any changes are documented in a Student Support Group meeting, including who needs the information, how it will be distributed and the timelines.
- Review and adjust changes as needed.
- If there is no positive change, contact the Department of Education and Training (DET) Regional Office and/or an independent agency.

**Moving towards positive change**

When discussing your concern with the teacher, try to be realistic about what, when and how changes can be made. Agree on a timeframe to trial the changes and then review what worked well and what could be improved.

Organise an appropriate time and place for the discussion. For example, ask the teacher to meet at the start of the day if they are available to meet later in the day.

Try to avoid having the discussion in places such as busy corridors. If this happens, ask to move the discussion to a more private place.

If the situation continues, request a Student Support Group meeting to look at other ways to resolve the issue.

**Put your concerns in writing**

It’s always a good idea to put serious concerns in writing to the principal. It’s important to be clear about your knowledge of the situation without jumping to conclusions or making accusations.

Let the principal know that you would like to work through the issue together and ask for a response within a reasonable timeframe. Your letter also becomes part of your record keeping, which may be important if the matter is complex and takes some time to sort out.

**Policies and guidelines**

Once your concern has been raised, a process for dealing with it should be put in place. Find out if there are any policies or guidelines for addressing your concern. Ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.

The principal and Student Support Group should be informed of all serious or ongoing issues. Keep in mind that it can take time to organise a Student Support Group meeting. It can be useful to keep your own record of all discussions and to ask the Student Support Group to note any decisions in the minutes.

"My son’s paediatrician gave me what I felt was good advice. He told me to find a school that had a curriculum that suited my son’s needs. He said it was important to choose a school that focused on teaching the things that I thought it was important that he learn.

I thought it was also essential that the curriculum be taught in a way that was interesting and engaging. Every child is different, has different interests (or motivators) and different strengths and weaknesses.

My child needs lots of repetition to learn a new concept but at the same time, he can get bored.

I needed to know that the teachers were up to date with the latest teaching techniques and had a good repertoire of teaching methods. I needed to know that they would be motivated to motivate my child and that they had lots of creative ideas for teaching new concepts in different and interesting ways."

**Parent**

**Social needs**

Most local neighbourhood secondary schools have large student numbers compared to primary schools, and this can cause some anxiety when thinking about how your child will manage socially amongst older students.

Ask how the school facilitates social interaction. Many secondary schools have lunchtime and extracurricular activities, such as school productions, bands, music, and clubs such as drama or chess. These activities could provide opportunities for your child to meet other children with similar interests, or to develop new interests, and to make new friends.

Some schools have a supervised open room available at lunchtime for students to be involved in board games and other activities. In many secondary schools, the library is open at lunchtime, as well as before and after school, and this may be a place to meet other like-minded students or to have some quiet time.

**Travel**

To get to secondary school, most students must travel a greater distance than primary school. When choosing a school, take into consideration the daily travel time.

Look at the public transport routes available, even if you intend to drive your child to school at first. With support and practice, your child may be able to take public transport in later years.

Some transport support is available from the Department of Education and Training (DET) for eligible students with additional needs attending local neighbourhood schools.

Some students in rural and regional Victoria may be eligible for the Conveyance Allowance from DET. The Mobility Allowance is available from Centrelink when an eligible young person turns 16.
If you have a concern about something at the school, it's best to address the issue as soon as possible.

A good parent-school partnership will allow you to feel comfortable with addressing issues as they arise. Sometimes people avoid raising issues that they think might cause conflict but this can lead to increased anxiety for both parents and students. Don't always expect conflict. Others may agree with you.

Creative solutions can often be found when everyone works together and contributes their knowledge and insight. This works best when there is good communication and a positive attitude from everyone involved. Your concerns should be addressed in a way that respects your child and family's privacy and confidentiality.

Get all the facts
The first step is to get all the facts. Writing these down can help clarify what the issue is. Once you have all the facts, you can then identify whether your concern is about a particular issue or incident, an aspect of your child's program, staff or personnel, or a combination of these.

Speak to the school first
Schools value concerns being raised early so that they have an opportunity to address the issue and stop it from getting worse.

- Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed in the first instance by speaking to the teacher involved, or your key staff contact such as the Inclusion Support or Year Level Co-ordinator.
- Concerns about your child's program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.

Depending on the situation, you may need to use one or all of these approaches.

An extensive school bus network supplies free bus transport to students living in regional Victoria and some outer metropolitan Melbourne suburbs. The network is administered by the Department of Transport. Ask the school if this service applies to them.

Students who attend a specialist school and live within the school's designated transport area are eligible for travel support to that school and this is often a school bus. If you live outside the designated transport area, you will have to consider other travel options.

Pick-up and drop-off times will depend on the number of children being transported and the bus route. Contact the school to find out the likely travel time.

Outside School Hours Care
Outside School Hours Care for Teenagers with Disability is an Australian Government initiative providing teenagers with disability aged 12 to 18 years with outside school hours care, including before school, after school and holiday care. The program focuses on providing stimulating and age-appropriate activities.

For more information
Student Transport

Conveyance Allowance

Mobility Allowance

Outside School Hours Care for Teenagers with Disability

School Focused Youth Service

School Policy and Advisory Guide

There are a limited number of providers in Victoria and Outside School Hours Care is generally not available in secondary schools.

Career planning
It might seem early to be thinking about career planning, but secondary school is an important pathway towards further education and work. Choosing a school that supports the choices and pathways that may be of interest to your child later in life is an important consideration. For more information about career planning see page 41.

Confirmation of enrolment
When you and your child have made a final decision and chosen a secondary school, contact the school to let them know. Final confirmation of enrolment is subject to submitting preference forms for government secondary schools, and the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review for specialist schools. By contacting the school as early as possible, they can start planning for your child's needs. Finally, celebrate! Now you and your child can share in the excitement of looking forward to starting secondary school.
You might wish to discuss this issue at a Student Support Group meeting and agree upon what knowledge is necessary to be shared and with whom. Seek reassurance from the school that they will be sensitive when supporting your child, and treat your child with dignity.

**Keeping records**

It’s a good idea to keep an ongoing record of what is happening at school. If you have collected relevant information during your child’s primary school years you will have an important history to refer back to during this time of transition to secondary school. Having all of this information together can also make it easier to clarify things in the event of a misunderstanding or miscommunication.

**Families as Partners in Learning: Valuing families as partners**

The Department of Education and Training (DET) have developed a resource for teachers which includes details of the importance of family partnerships, examples of best practice and tools and resources designed to support successful family partnerships. It also provides links to information on topics such as challenges to family partnerships and evidence based research on the the benefits of family/school partnerships.


**Program for Students with Disabilities Year 6–7 Review**

Most students in government schools who receive support through the Program for Students with Disabilities, and who are going on to government secondary schools undertake a Year 6–7 Review.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) reviews the educational need for ongoing support for all students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities in Grade 6, or the equivalent age in specialist schools.

Current Grade 6 students, or age equivalent in specialist schools, who are in receipt of Level 5 or Level 6 support are exempt from the Year 6–7 Review.

**Process**

The process for the Year 6–7 Review is similar to applying for the Program for Students with Disabilities. Evidence must be gathered, and the Educational Needs Questionnaire completed.

Students in the categories of Intellectual Disability and Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs should be referred to the DET Assessment Service. This will be arranged by the primary school.

The Student Support Group must meet to complete the process, and it must be submitted online and in hard copy. The primary school is responsible for ensuring the Year 6–7 Review is conducted and submitted.

The secondary school should be invited to attend the Year 6–7 Review Student Support Group meeting. The closing date for Year 6–7 Reviews is generally in May each year, so it’s a good idea to discuss with the primary school the review requirements in Term 1 of Grade 6, to ensure that any appointments with specialists can be arranged in advance.

**Change of category**

Students eligible for Program for Students with Disabilities support in more than one category may require a change of disability category to meet eligibility for a specialist school. In these cases, the DET Regional Disabilities Co-ordinator should be contacted.

---

“Frequent communication via a communication book has worked the best for my youngest son with autism. I get daily updates of his level of participation in activities and information about his behaviour which can vary greatly from day to day.

His teachers and I have found that this regular communication between home and school has helped us identify triggers for challenging behaviours and has lead to improved behaviour, both at home and at school.”

**Parent**
The outcomes of the Year 6–7 Review may be:

- The student continues to be eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities AND
- The level of funding is adjusted according to the Educational Needs Questionnaire OR
- The student is no longer eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities and funding will cease at the end of Grade 6.

If a student no longer meets the eligibility criteria for the Program for Students with Disabilities, a Student Support Group meeting should still be held to identify the student's educational needs and to plan the support that will be required for the student’s transition to secondary school. Schools are required to provide an appropriate educational program from within available resources for students with additional needs who are not eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities. The primary school principal is responsible for notifying parents and the secondary school of the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review. If you want to send your child to a specialist school, your choices will be required for the student’s transition to secondary school of the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review. If you want to send your child to a specialist school, your choices will depend on the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review. Students must be eligible for ongoing funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities and meet the specialist school’s enrolment criteria before they can enrol.

### Appeal process

An appeal process exists for any Program for Students with Disabilities application deemed ineligible. An appeal must be lodged by the principal within 15 days of receipt of the outcome of the application. Speak to the principal for more information.

### Reappraisal

For students currently funded under the Program for Students with Disabilities who require additional resources to access the curriculum, a reappraisal can be submitted at any time. Speak to the principal for more information.

### Parent preparation

There are practical ways to prepare for the Year 6–7 Review, such as requesting specialist or therapist reports during any relevant appointments leading up to the review. You can use these reports provided they are signed and not more than one or two years’ old. Looking at the original Program for Students with Disabilities application may remind you of any ongoing issues that you can discuss with the Student Support Group when filling out the Educational Needs Questionnaire. You may also need to prepare yourself emotionally, as the review focuses on areas where your child is most challenged at school. Remember that the level of funding is determined by your child’s educational needs as stated in the Year 6–7 Review. Keeping this in mind may help if the process becomes challenging.

### For more information

Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School


Assessment Service


Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines


Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities (Chapter 7: Advice for Parents and Carers)


---

“I know that school is often a hot topic amongst parents of children on the spectrum and I have experienced both a special setting and mainstream.

I have to say that while the differences are huge, there are positives and negatives to both. Having a good relationship with the schools, however, has made it much easier to deal with any problems when they arise.”

**Parent**

“It has been a journey not just for our son but for the whole team—the principal, assistant principal and student welfare officer, his teacher, education support staff and myself. My son’s inclusion at a mainstream school would not have been as successful without each person’s valuable contribution.

Issues will always arise because of his autism but by working together and supporting one another we learn that in the end it is all about making his school experience as positive as it can be.”

**Parent**

Formal communication will take place through regular Student Support Group meetings, parent-teacher interviews, school newsletters, school websites, and school reports.

Informal communication can include emails, phone calls or a communication book. A communication book travels between home and school in your child’s bag and can work well as long as both you and the teachers check it regularly.

Talk to your key contact teacher about what type of communication suits you and the teachers. Agree on a communication process to trial, and review how this is going in the Student Support Group meeting. Schools can provide access to language interpreters if needed.

**Parent-teacher interviews**

Parent-teacher interviews are an opportunity to meet your child's teachers, get more detail about the information provided on the student report card, become more involved in your child's learning and provide support where needed.

Parent-teacher interviews also provide an opportunity to have a discussion with some of your child’s teachers who don’t attend the Student Support Group meetings. It’s also an opportunity to arrange longer appointments if necessary.

Developing a positive partnership with the secondary school is the same as for any other relationship—it requires mutual respect, listening skills, empathy and communication.

**Disclosure**

Disclosure is when facts or information are revealed. Your child has a right to privacy and any information about their disability, medical condition or support needs must be treated with the utmost respect.

However, it is important to provide the school with enough information to ensure they are fully prepared and can comprehensively plan for your child’s individual needs. The school should treat this information confidentially.
Developing a positive partnership with the school

Good communication and working together are important foundations to achieving the best possible secondary school experience for your child.

After a long relationship with your child’s primary school, parents need to adjust and establish a way to work well within a secondary school framework.

Adjusting your role

Supporting your child to adjust to their new setting will also include some adjustments for you. Parents usually have less involvement with the secondary school community as children become teenagers and travel to school independently, whether on public transport or on the specialist school bus.

Parents are valued members of secondary school communities and there are ways that you can still contribute and be involved. All schools have School Councils and there may be committees, working bees, or a Parents and Friends Association.

Many schools have social functions and fundraisers that parents can attend. Parents themselves may organise social events as a way to get to know other families. Think about participating in these activities at a level that suits you, your child and family.

You should be made to feel welcome and encouraged to contact the school with queries, however developing a positive partnership with your child’s school requires a joint effort.

Communication

Good communication between school and home is essential for developing and maintaining a positive partnership with your child’s school.

Communication

Good communication between school and home is essential for developing and maintaining a positive partnership with the school. Your child may have several teachers and this can make communication more of a challenge, but it is possible to still communicate effectively. The Home room teacher is often an important central person.

In some schools, the Year Level Coordinator or the Inclusion Support Teacher may be your best contact. It is best to check with the school to find out who they recommend as your key contact.

Enrolment procedure

It’s important to understand school enrolment procedure, and timelines, so that you are well prepared.

Government secondary schools

Only students who are in Grade 6 are eligible to enrol in secondary school the following year.

In the first half of your child’s Grade 6 year, you will be asked to fill in a form to nominate three preferences for the government secondary school you would like your child to attend in Year 7.

This is the only process available for enrolment in Victorian government secondary schools. Government secondary schools do not hold waiting lists, so you cannot register your child’s name for a government secondary school years in advance in the same way that you can with many independent and Catholic schools.

Government specialist schools

If you choose a specialist school, you must also complete the preference form.

Dual enrolment

If you choose dual enrolment, you must complete the enrolment procedures for both schools.

Independent and Catholic schools

If you choose to send your child to an independent or Catholic school, bear in mind that many have long waiting lists. Independent and Catholic schools have their own enrolment criteria and processes. Contact the school for information about enrolment.

Enrolment Application Outcomes

Your child’s primary school will inform you late in Grade 6 (usually around August) which government secondary school has offered a place to your child. Sometimes zoned schools have second round offers, which are made as the schools sort through how many first round acceptances they receive. The secondary school will send enrolment papers and other information to you.

No school should decline to accept your enrolment due to perceived difficulties associated with your child’s disability if you meet all the school’s enrolment criteria. If your child is not offered a place by your nominated school but the reasons are unclear, first speak to the principal or enrolment officer to discuss this. Ask for the decision and reasons for ineligibility in writing.

If you want to challenge the decision, you can seek further support by contacting the relevant DET Regional Office and speaking to the Community Liaison Officer. You may also seek information, support and advocacy from the Association for Children with a Disability or another disability advocacy service.
Transition planning with the Student Support Group

The Student Support Group is the key to planning, implementing and monitoring a positive secondary school experience for your child.

In addition to planning the transition to secondary school for your child, the Student Support Group has a central role in the Year 6–7 Review and ongoing responsibility for the development, planning, implementation and monitoring of your child’s personalised learning and support plan.

A Student Support Group is mandatory for students in the Program for Students with Disabilities, and strongly encouraged for any students with additional needs.

Planning for a smooth transition
A Student Support Group meeting is the ideal means for discussing and planning a smooth transition process for your child.

Ask the primary school to arrange a Student Support Group meeting in Term 3 or 4 of Grade 6 to focus on transition planning and request that relevant people from the secondary school be invited.

You may also like to include other professionals who have been involved with your child, such as therapists or medical professionals if your child has specific requirements.

Find out what the secondary school does to support new Year 7 students with the transition, and ask how your child’s specific needs can be met. This might include an extended orientation program.

A Student Support Group meeting is the ideal means for discussing and planning a smooth transition process for your child.

The Student Support Group meeting is also the ideal place to review the personalised learning and support plan, and other care plans such as a Student Health Support Plan, and to share information so that the secondary school can prepare for the year ahead. The Student Support Group may consider preparing this information in the form of a Transition Statement.

It is also an opportunity for the secondary school to identify staff training requirements, consider access needs, storage of medication, a private area for personal care, planning for the Year 7 camp, and anything else required to meet your child’s needs.

• Arranging the timetable to minimise Year 7 students moving rooms between classes. Some schools have Year 7 teachers move rooms rather than the students.

• Facilitated ‘Getting to know each other’ sessions for the students to encourage socialising.

• School camps are often held early in the year so students can get to know each other.

• A mentoring system where student mentors take part in orientation day and follow up activities when Year 7 students start the school year. Student mentors are usually experienced leaders or student volunteers.

• Year 7 Parent Information Evenings and welcome activities to meet the teachers and other parents.

Transport
Many students transitioning from Grade 6 to Year 7 will spend time in the January school holidays practising the transport route to their new school. If you are going to drive your child to and from school, it may be a good time to establish pick-up and drop-off points during the transition program.

If your child will be attending a specialist school and taking the school bus, you should receive a letter late in Term 4 of Grade 6 with details of school pick-up times.

“We attend the final Student Support Group meeting at the primary school, where we meet the parent and obtain relevant past documentation, with the parent’s permission. We arrange a school visit for the student, where they are accompanied either by the integration aide from primary school or the parent. On orientation day one of our aides is with the student for the whole day. We have an occupational therapist who can look at the school and apply for any works.

We provide an information pack to the student, including a sample timetable, map of the school with specific areas highlighted, a copy of school rules and the first few pages of the diary. We spend time going over these with the student.

We also provide teachers with strategies to get the student started, and we develop a timetable of integration aide support. Every teacher contributes to the Individual Learning Plan for students with additional needs (both funded and unfunded).

I run professional development for teachers about how to modify the curriculum, give them a booklet of examples of modified work and am available to assist them with curriculum modification.

We keep progress journals for each student, which are updated twice a week. I keep in touch with parents regularly and act on any concern raised straight away.”

Inclusion Support Co-ordinator at government mainstream secondary school
Other ideas for schools and families include:

- A range of teachers rather than just one.
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.
- Practising using a key in preparation for having a locker key.
- Practising using a pencil case, workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.
- Getting organised.
- The students have many opportunities to talk about what makes them anxious, and we discuss problem solving. In Term 4 we also do extra secondary school visits for orientation and to meet some of the staff.
- We work very closely with the local secondary school to support our students to have a smooth transition. The feedback we get from the secondary school and from students who come back for a visit is very positive.”

### Education Support Officer at a government mainstream primary school

#### Preparation at primary school

Government primary and secondary schools co-operate to ease students through the transition period. Often, secondary students revisit their old primary school to tell Grade 6 students what secondary school is like.

Primary school teachers also prepare children for the different teaching methods of secondary schools. Many primary schools have a team of teachers working with Grade 5 and 6 students so that they become familiar with working with a range of teachers rather than just one.

Other ideas for schools and families include:

- Getting used to using a diary for school and home activities.
- Developing and using a visual or written timetable for weekly school and home activities.
- Developing and reading social stories, such as ‘Going to Secondary School’ or ‘Catching the Bus’.
- Practising using a key in preparation for having a locker key.
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.

#### Secondary school strategies

Teachers from secondary schools often visit primary schools to take small groups for lessons or to talk about secondary school. Many schools have strategies to support Year 7 students and families, including:

- Developing and reading social stories, such as ‘Going to Secondary School’ or ‘Catching the Bus’.
- Getting organised with a pencil case, workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.
- Practising using a key in preparation for having a locker key.
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.

#### Transition to Secondary School

Let the secondary school staff know that you want to have a Student Support Group meeting in Term 1 of Year 7 to develop the personalised learning and support plan and get feedback on how your child is settling in.

### The Student Support Group in secondary schools

One of the challenges of the Student Support Group at secondary schools is the large number of teachers involved. Ensuring consistency across all the staff involved with your child is very important and they must all understand their responsibilities clearly. This is vital for communication methods, medical and personal care needs and Behaviour Support Plans. Robust communication and co-ordination within the school is essential.

Ask the Student Support Group how they will ensure that all relevant staff, including casual relief teachers, are informed of, and contribute to, the personalised learning and support plan and case management plans.

Members of the Student Support Group should also agree on, and trial, a communication method between parents and school staff, whether by email, communication book, regular catch ups, or a combination of these.

### Personalised learning and support plan

Another early task for the Student Support Group in a new school is to develop the personalised learning and support plan, which is the working document for the planning, provision and evaluation of your child’s education. In Victorian government schools, all students receiving support through the Program for Students with Disabilities should have a personalised learning and support plan; however any student who has additional needs may benefit from having one.

This is a good time to take a step back and reflect on your child’s goals. Your child may want to start being involved in planning and have ideas about goals they want to achieve, and this should be reflected in the plan.

### Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.

### Parent

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home.
Your child’s learning preferences may be clearer, and their strengths more defined. The move to secondary school brings with it new opportunities and directions to consider. Your child’s Grade 6 personalised learning and support plan, care plans, school report and the input of the Student Support Group are all important sources of information to determine entry level skills for secondary school and to set goals for the ongoing personalised learning and support plan. This may help to improve continuity.

**Student Health Support Plan**
Most health care needs for students can be managed by schools using existing resources. A Student Health Support Plan or Anaphylaxis Management Plan is required for any student with an identified health care need, guided by medical advice received by the student’s medical/health practitioner and developed in consultation with the student and their parents.

Detailed advice and disability specific Student Health Support Plan templates for a range of conditions, including epilepsy, asthma, cystic fibrosis, anaphylaxis, and diabetes, are available to schools in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.

**Complex care needs**
Careful thought must be given by the Student Support Group to ensure that there are rigorous plans to cover these needs, including appropriate contingency plans for emergencies.

Roles and responsibilities must be clearly understood by all involved. In government schools, specialised medical training for staff supporting students with complex medical conditions can be provided under the School Care Program delivered by the Royal Children’s Hospital. With careful planning, secondary schools can support the needs of all students.

**Behaviour Support Plan**
Detailed planning by the Student Support Group can identify specific goals and strategies to assist students who have difficulty understanding instructions or managing classroom routines. For example, some students may respond well to social stories or visual reminders about ‘what comes next’. The Student Support Group might develop a Behaviour Support Plan so that everyone is consistent in their approach.

**Keeping records**
A staff member of the Student Support Group is responsible for taking minutes at Student Support Group meetings. Ask that all agreed actions and decisions are recorded and clarify who will be responsible for implementing the agreed actions and distributing minutes.

A simple table in the minutes can assist all members of the Student Support Group to view actions, responsibilities and timelines, and to see what needs to be followed up.

---

Making the transition

The transition from primary to secondary school is an exciting time, and with good preparation both you and your child can approach this time with confidence.

After the familiar surroundings of primary school, the move to secondary school, where there are many more students and teachers, new surroundings and a different approach to timetabling, can be both exciting and daunting for new students and parents.

Secondary schools tend to have a greater geographical spread, with students coming from the local area and suburbs further away. It may take some time to adapt to this new and diverse student population that will include students who are much older than your child.

There are a number of things you can do to prepare yourselves for the transition. The start of Grade 6 is a good time to start planning for the transition with the Student Support Group. Primary and secondary schools use a range of strategies to ease the transition from Grade 6 to Year 7.

**Orientation days**
A school tour is a good way to introduce your child to the secondary school without the busy crowds that can occur at school information evenings. All government schools hold an orientation day on the same day (often the second Tuesday in December). It may include a school tour; meeting fellow students and teachers, and taking part in special lessons and activities.

Extended orientation
An extended orientation provides an opportunity to visit the new school a number of times and to develop some familiarity with the surroundings and teachers.

Teachers at government schools start the school year a few days before students and it might be possible to have another orientation time during this period.

This is an opportunity for your child to bring their books, meet their Home room teacher, locate their locker, Home room, bathrooms, and to become familiar with the environment.
A range of resources and programs exist to support students with a disability at government secondary schools.

Once the Student Support Group has a good understanding of your child’s strengths and needs through the development of the personalised learning and support plan, you can then look at additional resources to support the plan.

The Student Support Group will make recommendations about supports and the principal will make the final decision.

**Student Welfare Co-ordinator**

All government secondary schools employ Student Welfare Co-ordinators who are responsible for helping students handle issues such as truancy, bullying, drug use, family conflict and depression. They work with other welfare professionals and agencies to address student needs.

**Secondary School Nursing Program (SSNP)**

The goal of the Secondary School Nursing Program is to reduce risks to young people and promote better health in the school community. Approximately two thirds of government secondary schools participate in the SSNP with the program targeted to Victoria’s most disadvantaged schools.

**Student Support Services Program**

Student Support Services Officers are a group of professionals employed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to support all students and schools.

They aim to enhance a school’s ability to improve student outcomes and provide continuity of care to all students, and may assist in the development of personalised learning and support plans and appropriate supports.

Student Support Services Officers can include:

- psychologists
- social workers
- visiting teachers (for students with visual, hearing or physical impairments)
- speech pathologists

---

**Equipment Grants for Students with Vision Impairment**

Equipment Grants are available to assist Victorian government schools to purchase major items of essential, specialised equipment for students with vision impairment who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the Program for Students with Disabilities.

**Schoolcare Program**

The Schoolcare Program is provided by DET in partnership with the Royal Children’s Hospital to provide Victorian government school staff with specialised training to support students with complex medical needs. Referrals to the Schoolcare Program are made by the school.

**Conveyance Allowance**

Students with severe multiple disabilities may be eligible for Conveyance Allowance to assist with travel costs to and from school. Schools must submit conveyance claims electronically to DET each semester.

**Accessible Buildings Program**

If major building modifications are required to ensure a student’s access to the school environment, the school can apply to DET for disability specific modifications such as ramps and toilet facilities. This should occur as early as possible in the previous year to ensure the modifications can be completed by the time your child starts secondary school.

**For more information**

- Autism Friendly Learning
- Conveyance Allowance
- Electronic Communications Devices Scheme
- Language Support Program
- Medical and Accessibility Support
- Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines
- Secondary School Nursing Program
- Student Support Services Officers
- Student Welfare Co-ordinator
Student Support Services Officers provide services to students across a number of schools. Referrals to Student Support Services Officers should be made as soon as your child’s needs are identified. In government secondary schools, your child can be referred by the principal. Some government specialist schools have their own therapists on staff.

**Autism Friendly Learning**

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has recently initiated a number of reforms designed to improve educational support for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) attending government schools. The Autism Friendly Learning site provides links to a variety of information about ASD, school supports and specific issues such as transitions.

**Program for Students with Disabilities**

The Program for Students with Disabilities provides additional resources to government schools to support the schools’ delivery of educational programs for eligible students. Many students with a disability in secondary school have already been receiving support in primary school from the Program for Students with Disabilities and had the Year 6–7 Review.

Other students may have emerging needs or a recent diagnosis. Schools can submit new Program for Students with Disabilities applications for existing students within the Annual Round each year. Schools may make Post-Annual Round applications for students transferring from other school systems, or with deteriorating medical or behavioural conditions who may need additional resources.

Principals can identify students who may be eligible for support under the Program for Students with Disabilities and the Student Support Group works together to make the application. The eligibility criteria and application process are detailed in the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines. If the application is successful, decisions can then be made about additional resources to support the personalised learning and support plan. Support can include specialist staff, teacher professional development, specialised equipment/materials, and education support staff.

**Specialist staff**

Some secondary schools choose to invest their Program for Students with Disabilities resources to employ specialist staff, such as inclusion support co-ordinator to support students with disabilities in their school. Some specialist schools also have therapists on staff.

If your child needs professional support that is not offered by the Student Support Services Officers (such as occupational therapy) or if there is limited availability, you can discuss with the Student Support Group the possibility of purchasing additional professional support from Program for Students with Disabilities resources. This recommendation should be forwarded to the principal for consideration.

**Professional development**

Schools usually develop a professional development calendar available to all staff. There are opportunities for schools to develop a relevant professional development approach to assist your child to access the curriculum. The principal may want to provide this to a number of staff to ensure a whole of school approach to your child.

The school’s Program for Students with Disabilities resources can be used to fund disability specific professional development or consultancy for teachers and other school staff. You can also educate school staff using the skills and knowledge you have acquired from supporting your child every day.

**Specialist equipment**

If your child needs specialist equipment, this should be discussed with the Student Support Group who will then make recommendations to the principal.

If the principal agrees with the recommendations made by the Student Support Group, the equipment may be purchased using Program for Students with Disabilities funding.

**Education support staff (sometimes known as special needs or teacher aides)**

The resources allocated to the school to support your child through the Program for Students with Disabilities are not specifically intended for education support staff. This is just one of the support options available. The Student Support Group should carefully consider the best way the school can meet all of your child’s needs and specifically when, and for what activities, education support staff would most benefit your child.

Education support staff are employed by the school to facilitate support for a student with additional needs. Education support staff work under the direction of the teacher and may perform a variety of duties including:

- support with class work, including academic subjects, art and sport
- assistance with personal care
- supervision if there are safety concerns
- attending therapy sessions with your child so that therapy can be applied in the classroom if appropriate
- preparation of teaching materials such as social stories
- support of other students in the classroom to free up the teacher to work more closely with students with disabilities.

The aim of assistance from education support staff is to help increase independence and the student should be given every opportunity to be an active learner.

Education support staff in secondary schools must be sensitive to the fact that most teenagers are not keen on having an adult by their side. In many secondary schools, the education support staff ‘float’ around the room, providing assistance to the student as needed.

**Language Support Program**

The Language Support Program provides schools with resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with language disorders. The Language Support Program is a framework for teaching oral language to students requiring additional support.

Professional development is provided to teachers to develop skills and strategies to support students in the classroom. These strategies are implemented in the classroom and teachers are also given a detailed list of resources. In addition, students with a speech or language disorder may be referred to a Department of Education and Training (DET) speech pathologist.

**Medical Intervention Support program**

Medical Intervention Support funding is available to schools to contribute to the salary costs associated with employing suitably trained education support staff to assist students who require regular, complex medical support at school. This support may include mechanical ventilation, oxygen, tracheostomy care, suctioning, tube feeding, and ostomy management.

The education support staff member must have undergone specific training to support the student’s medical needs. This training may be provided through local health service providers, disability support organisations or the Schoolcare Program.

Medical Intervention Support is in addition to Program for Students with Disabilities funding. The school is responsible for applying for the Medical Intervention Support program.

**Electronic Communication Devices Scheme**

This scheme provides a subsidy for the purchase of electronic communication devices and training through the Statewide Equipment Program (SWEP).
Student Support Services Officers provide services to students across a number of schools. Referrals to Student Support Services Officers should be made as soon as your child’s needs are identified. In government secondary schools, your child can be referred by the principal. Some government specialist schools have their own therapists on staff.

**Autism Friendly Learning**
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has recently initiated a number of reforms designed to improve educational support for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) attending government schools. The Autism Friendly Learning site provides links to a variety of information about ASD, school supports and specific issues such as transitions.

**Program for Students with Disabilities**
The Program for Students with Disabilities provides additional resources to government schools to support the schools’ delivery of educational programs for eligible students. Many students with a disability in secondary school have already been receiving support in primary school from the Program for Students with Disabilities and had the Year 6–7 Review.

Other students may have emerging needs or a recent diagnosis. Schools can submit a new Program for Students with Disabilities application for existing students within the Annual Round each year. Schools may make Post-Annual Round applications for students transferring from other school systems, or with deteriorating medical or behavioural conditions who may need additional resources.

Principals can identify students who may be eligible for support under the Program for Students with Disabilities and the Student Support Group works together to make the application. The eligibility criteria and application process are detailed in the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines. If the application is successful, decisions can then be made about additional resources to support the personalised learning and support plan. Support can include specialist staff, teacher professional development, specialised equipment/materials, and education support staff.

**Specialist staff**
Some secondary schools choose to invest their Program for Students with Disabilities resources to employ specialist staff, such as inclusion support co-ordinator to support students with disabilities in their school. Some specialist schools also have therapists on staff.

If your child needs professional support that is not offered by the Student Support Services Officers (such as occupational therapy) or if there is limited availability, you can discuss with the Student Support Group the possibility of purchasing additional professional support from Program for Students with Disabilities resources. This recommendation should be forwarded to the principal for consideration.

**Professional development**
Schools usually develop a professional development calendar available to all staff. There are opportunities for schools to develop a relevant professional development approach to assist your child to access the curriculum. The principal may want to provide this to a number of staff to ensure a whole of school approach to your child.

The school’s Program for Students with Disabilities resources can be used to fund disability specific professional development or consultancy for teachers and other school staff. You can also educate school staff using the skills and knowledge you have acquired from supporting your child every day.

**Specialist equipment**
If your child needs specialist equipment, this should be discussed with the Student Support Group who will then make recommendations to the principal.

If the principal agrees with the recommendations made by the Student Support Group, the equipment may be purchased using Program for Students with Disabilities funding.

**Education support staff (sometimes known as special needs or teacher aides)**
The resources allocated to the school to support your child through the Program for Students with Disabilities are not specifically intended for education support staff. This is just one of the support options available. The Student Support Group should carefully consider the best way the school can meet all of your child’s needs and specifically when, and for what activities, education support staff would most benefit your child.

Education support staff are employed by the school to facilitate support for a student with additional needs. Education support staff work under the direction of the teacher and may perform a variety of duties including:

- support with class work, including academic subjects, art and sport
- assistance with personal care
- supervision if there are safety concerns
- attending therapy sessions with your child so that therapy can be applied in the classroom if appropriate
- preparation of teaching materials such as social stories
- support of other students in the classroom to free up the teacher to work more closely with students with disabilities.

The aim of assistance from education support staff is to help increase independence and the student should be given every opportunity to be an active learner.

Education support staff in secondary schools must be sensitive to the fact that most teenagers are not keen on having an adult by their side. In many secondary schools, the education support staff “float” around the room, providing assistance to the student as needed.

**Language Support Program**
The Language Support Program provides schools with resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with language disorders. The Language Support Program is a framework for teaching oral language to students requiring additional support.

Professional development is provided to teachers to develop skills and strategies to support students in the classroom. These strategies are implemented in the classroom and teachers are also given a detailed list of resources. In addition, students with a speech or language disorder may be referred to a Department of Education and Training (DET) speech pathologist.

**Medical Intervention Support program**
Medical Intervention Support funding is available to schools to contribute to the salary costs associated with employing suitably trained education support staff to assist students who require regular, complex medical support at school. This support may include mechanical ventilation, oxygen, tracheostomy care, suctioning, tube feeding, and ostomy management.

The education support staff member must have undergone specific training to support the student’s medical needs. This training may be provided through local health service providers, disability support organisations or the Schoolcare Program.

Medical Intervention Support is in addition to Program for Students with Disabilities funding. The school is responsible for applying for the Medical Intervention Support program.

**Electronic Communication Devices Scheme**
This scheme provides a subsidy for the purchase of electronic communication devices and training through the Statewide Equipment Program (SWEP).
A range of resources and programs exist to support students with a disability at government secondary schools.

Once the Student Support Group has a good understanding of your child’s strengths and needs through the development of the personalised learning and support plan, you can then look at additional resources to support the plan.

The Student Support Group will make recommendations about supports and the principal will make the final decision.

**Student Welfare Co-ordinator**

All government secondary schools employ Student Welfare Co-ordinators who are responsible for helping students handle issues such as truancy, bullying, drug use, family conflict and depression. They work with other welfare professionals and agencies to address student needs.

**Secondary School Nursing Program (SSNP)**

The goal of the Secondary School Nursing Program is to reduce risks to young people and promote better health in the school community. Approximately two thirds of government secondary schools participate in the SSNP with the program targeted to Victoria’s most disadvantaged schools.

**Student Support Services Program**

Student Support Services Officers are a group of professionals employed by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to support all students and schools.

They aim to enhance a school’s ability to improve student outcomes and provide continuity of care to all students, and may assist in the development of personal learning and support plans and appropriate supports.

Student Support Services Officers can include:
- psychologists
- social workers
- visiting teachers (for students with visual, hearing or physical impairments)
- speech pathologists

---

**Equipment Grants for Students with Vision Impairment**

Equipment Grants are available to assist Victorian government schools to purchase major items of essential, specialised equipment for students with vision impairment who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the Program for Students with Disabilities.

**Schoolcare Program**

The Schoolcare Program is provided by DET in partnership with the Royal Children’s Hospital to provide Victorian government school staff with specialised training to support students with complex medical needs. Referrals to the Schoolcare Program are made by the school.

**Conveyance Allowance**

Students with severe multiple disabilities may be eligible for Conveyance Allowance to assist with travel costs to and from school. Schools must submit conveyance claims electronically to DET each semester.

**Accessible Buildings Program**

If major building modifications are required to ensure a student’s access to the school environment, the school can apply to DET for disability specific modifications such as ramps and toilet facilities. This should occur as early as possible in the previous year to ensure the modifications can be completed by the time your child starts secondary school.

---

**For more information**

- Autism Friendly Learning
- Conveyance Allowance
- Electronic Communications Devices Scheme
- Language Support Program
- Medical and Accessibility Support
- Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines
- Secondary School Nursing Program
- Student Support Services Officers
- Student Welfare Co-ordinator
Your child's learning preferences may be clearer, and their strengths more defined. The move to secondary school brings with it new opportunities and directions to consider. Your child's Grade 6 personalised learning and support plan, care plans, school report and the input of the Student Support Group are all important sources of information to determine entry level skills for secondary school and to set goals for the ongoing personalised learning and support plan. This may help to improve continuity.

**Student Health Support Plan**
Most health care needs for students can be managed by schools using existing resources. A Student Health Support Plan or Anaphylaxis Management Plan is required for any student with an identified health care need, guided by medical advice received by the student's medical/health practitioner and developed in consultation with the student and their parents.

Detailed advice and disability specific Student Health Support Plan templates for a range of conditions, including epilepsy, asthma, cystic fibrosis, anaphylaxis, and diabetes, are available to schools in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.

**Complex care needs**
Careful thought must be given by the Student Support Group to ensure that there are rigorous plans to cover these needs, including appropriate contingency plans for emergencies.

Roles and responsibilities must be clearly understood by all involved. In government schools, specialised medical training for staff supporting students with complex medical conditions can be provided under the School Care Program delivered by the Royal Children's Hospital. With careful planning, secondary schools can support the needs of all students.

**Behaviour Support Plan**
Detailed planning by the Student Support Group can identify specific goals and strategies to assist students who have difficulty understanding instructions or managing classroom routines. For example, some students may respond well to social stories or visual reminders about 'what comes next'. The Student Support Group might develop a Behaviour Support Plan so that everyone is consistent in their approach.

**Keeping records**
A staff member of the Student Support Group is responsible for taking minutes at Student Support Group meetings. Ask that all agreed actions and decisions are recorded and clarify who will be responsible for implementing the agreed actions and distributing minutes.

A simple table in the minutes can assist all members of the Student Support Group to view actions, responsibilities and timelines, and to see what needs to be followed up.

---

**Making the transition**

The transition from primary to secondary school is an exciting time, and with good preparation both you and your child can approach this time with confidence.

After the familiar surroundings of primary school, the move to secondary school, where there are many more students and teachers, new surroundings and a different approach to timetabling, can be both exciting and daunting for new students and parents.

Secondary schools tend to have a greater geographical spread, with students coming from the local area and suburbs further away. It may take some time to adapt to this new and diverse student population that will include students who are much older than your child.

There are a number of things you can do to prepare yourselves for the transition. The start of Grade 6 is a good time to start planning for the transition with the Student Support Group. Primary and secondary schools use a range of strategies to ease the transition from Grade 6 to Year 7.

**Orientation days**
A school tour is a good way to introduce your child to the secondary school without the busy crowds that can occur at school information evenings. All government schools hold an orientation day on the same day (often the second Tuesday in December). It may include a school tour, meeting fellow students and teachers, and taking part in special lessons and activities.

There are a number of things you can do to prepare yourselves for the transition. The start of Grade 6 is a good time to start planning for the transition with the Student Support Group.

**Extended orientation**
An extended orientation provides an opportunity to visit the new school a number of times and to develop some familiarity with the surroundings and teachers.

Teachers at government schools start the school year a few days before students and it might be possible to have another orientation time during this period.

This is an opportunity for your child to bring their books, meet their Home room teacher, locate their locker, Home room, bathrooms, and to become familiar with the environment.
Preparation at primary school

Government primary and secondary schools co-operate to ease students through the transition period. Often, secondary students revisit their old primary school to tell Grade 6 students what secondary school is like.

Primary school teachers also prepare children for the different teaching methods of secondary schools. Many primary schools have a team of teachers working with Grade 5 and 6 students so that they become familiar with working with a range of teachers rather than just one.

Other ideas for schools and families include:

- Getting used to using a diary for school and home activities
- Developing and using a visual or written timetable for weekly school and home activities
- Developing and reading social stories, such as ‘Going to Secondary School’ or ‘Catching the Bus’
- Getting organised with a pencil case, workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home
- Practising using a key in preparation for having a locker key
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.

Secondary school strategies

Teachers from secondary schools often visit primary schools to take small groups for lessons or to talk about secondary school. Many schools have strategies to support Year 7 students and families, including:

- Starting Year 7 students the day before other students to allow some settling in time without the hustle and bustle of a full school
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.
- Getting organised with a pencil case, workbooks and folders, as well as a desk or work area at home
- Practising using a key in preparation for having a locker key
- Visiting the school over the January holidays, if possible, to walk around the grounds.

The Student Support Group in secondary schools

One of the challenges of the Student Support Group at secondary schools is the large number of teachers involved. Ensuring consistency across all the staff involved with your child is very important and they must all understand their responsibilities clearly. This is vital for communication methods, medical and personal care needs and Behaviour Support Plans. Robust communication and co-ordination within the school is essential.

Ask the Student Support Group how they will ensure that all relevant staff, including casual relief teachers, are informed of, and contribute to, the personalised learning and support plan and care management plans.

Let the secondary school staff know that you want to have a Student Support Group meeting in Term 1 of Year 7 to develop the personalised learning and support plan and get feedback on how your child is settling in.

Personalised learning and support plan

Another early task for the Student Support Group in a new school is to develop the personalised learning and support plan, which is the working document for the planning, provision and evaluation of your child’s education. In Victorian government schools, all students receiving support through the Program for Students with Disabilities should have a personalised learning and support plan, however any student who has additional needs may benefit from having one.

This is a good time to take a step back and reflect on your child’s goals. Your child may want to start being involved in planning and have ideas about goals they want to achieve, and this should be reflected in the plan.

Education Support Officer at a government mainstream primary school

“Sam attended two transition days in Term 4 of his last year at primary school and really enjoyed them. According to his teacher, Sam couldn’t stop raving about his new school to all his class when he returned to school.

Sam often says, “Mum, I love school!” He is managing his work and the new routines of secondary school life! He catches the bus to and from school every day and really enjoys the trip. He even insists on me not walking him to the bus. I suppose it’s just not cool anymore to be seen with your mum!

Sam gets home from school, unpacks his bag, gives me all his school notices and reminds me of things that are happening, “Mum, I’ve got swimming tomorrow,” or “…basketball on Friday.” We are very proud of how well Sam has made this transition.

When we went to a school performance recently and heard Sam singing, I saw first-hand how comfortable he was and how well he had settled in. I know we have made the right decision, or should I say, Sam made a great choice!”

Parent
Transition planning with the Student Support Group

The Student Support Group is the key to planning, implementing and monitoring a positive secondary school experience for your child.

In addition to planning the transition to secondary school for your child, the Student Support Group has a central role in the Year 6–7 Review and ongoing responsibility for the development, planning, implementation and monitoring of your child's personalised learning and support plan.

A Student Support Group is mandatory for students in the Program for Students with Disabilities, and strongly encouraged for any students with additional needs.

Planning for a smooth transition
A Student Support Group meeting is the ideal means for discussing and planning a smooth transition process for your child.

Ask the primary school to arrange a Student Support Group meeting in Term 3 or 4 of Grade 6 to focus on transition planning and request that relevant people from the secondary school be invited.

You may also like to include other professionals who have been involved with your child, such as therapists or medical professionals if your child has specific requirements.

Find out what the secondary school does to support new Year 7 students with the transition, and ask how your child's specific needs can be met. This might include an extended orientation program.

The Student Support Group meeting is also the ideal place to review the personalised learning and support plan, and to share information so that the secondary school can prepare for the year ahead. The Student Support Group may consider preparing this information in the form of a Transition Statement.

A Student Support Group meeting is the ideal means for discussing and planning a smooth transition process for your child.

- Arranging the timetable to minimise Year 7 students moving rooms between classes. Some schools have Year 7 teachers move rooms rather than the students.
- Facilitated ‘Getting to know each other’ sessions for the students to encourage socialising.
- School camps are often held early in the year so students can get to know each other.
- A mentoring system where student mentors take part in orientation day and follow up activities when Year 7 students start the school year. Student mentors are usually experienced leaders or student volunteers.
- Year 7 Parent Information Evenings and welcome activities to meet the teachers and other parents.

Transport
Many students transitioning from Grade 6 to Year 7 will spend time in the January school holidays practising the transport route to their new school. If you are going to drive your child to and from school, it may be a good time to establish pick-up and drop-off points during the transition program.

If your child will be attending a specialist school and taking the school bus, you should receive a letter late in Term 4 of Grade 6 with details of school pick-up times.

"We attend the final Student Support Group meeting at the primary school, where we meet the parent and obtain relevant past documentation, with the parent’s permission. We arrange a school visit for the student, where they are accompanied either by the integration aide from primary school or the parent.

On orientation day one of our aides is with the student for the whole day. We have an occupational therapist who can look at the school and apply for any works.

We provide an information pack to the student, including a sample timetable, map of the school with specific areas highlighted, a copy of school rules and the first few pages of the diary. We spend time going over these with the student.

We also provide teachers with strategies to get the student started, and we develop a timetable of integration aide support. Every teacher contributes to the Individual Learning Plan for students with additional needs (both funded and unfunded).

I run professional development for teachers about how to modify the curriculum, give them a booklet of examples of modified work and am available to assist them with curriculum modification.

We keep progress journals for each student, which are updated twice a week. I keep in touch with parents regularly and act on any concern raised straight away."

Inclusion Support Co-ordinator at government mainstream secondary school
It's important to understand school enrolment procedure, and timelines, so that you are well prepared.

**Government secondary schools**

Only students who are in Grade 6 are eligible to enrol in secondary school the following year.

In the first half of your child's Grade 6 year, you will be asked to fill in a form to nominate three preferences for the government secondary school you would like your child to attend in Year 7.

This is the only process available for enrolment in Victorian government secondary schools.

Government secondary schools do not hold waiting lists, so you cannot register your child's name for a government secondary school years in advance in the same way that you can with many independent and Catholic schools.

**Government specialist schools**

If you choose a specialist school, you must also complete the preference form.

**Dual enrolment**

If you choose dual enrolment, you must complete the enrolment procedures for both schools.

**Independent and Catholic schools**

If you choose to send your child to an independent or Catholic school, bear in mind that many have long waiting lists. Independent and Catholic schools have their own enrolment criteria and processes. Contact the school for information about enrolment.

---

Good communication and working together are important foundations to achieving the best possible secondary school experience for your child.

After a long relationship with your child's primary school, parents need to adjust and establish a way to work well within a secondary school framework.

**Adjusting your role**

Supporting your child to adjust to their new setting will also include some adjustments for you. Parents usually have less involvement with the secondary school community as children become teenagers and travel to school independently, whether on public transport or on the specialist school bus.

Parents are valued members of secondary school communities and there are ways that you can still contribute and be involved.

All schools have School Councils and there may be committees, working bees, or a Parents and Friends Association.

Many schools have social functions and fundraisers that parents can attend. Parents themselves may organise social events as a way to get to know other families. Think about participating in these activities at a level that suits you, your child and family.

You should be made to feel welcome and encouraged to contact the school with queries, however developing a positive partnership with your child's school requires a joint effort.

**Good communication between school and home**

Good communication between school and home is essential for developing and maintaining a positive partnership with your child's school.

**Communication**

Good communication between school and home is essential for developing and maintaining a positive partnership with the school. Your child may have several teachers and this can make communication more of a challenge, but it is possible to still communicate effectively. The Home room teacher is often an important central person.

In some schools, the Year Level Co-ordinator or the Inclusion Support Teacher may be your best contact. It is best to check with the school to find out who they recommend as your key contact.

---

No school should decline to accept your enrolment due to perceived difficulties associated with your child’s disability if you meet all the school’s enrolment criteria. If your child is not offered a place by your nominated school but the reasons are unclear, first speak to the principal or enrolment officer to discuss this. Ask for the decision and reasons for ineligibility in writing.

If you want to challenge the decision, you can seek further support by contacting the relevant DET Regional Office and speaking to the Community Liaison Officer. You may also seek information, support and advocacy from the Association for Children with a Disability or another disability advocacy service.
Outcome of the Year 6–7 Review

The outcomes of the Year 6–7 Review may be:

- The student continues to be eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities AND
- The level of funding is adjusted according to the Educational Needs Questionnaire OR
- The student is no longer eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities and funding will cease at the end of Grade 6.

If a student no longer meets the eligibility criteria for the Program for Students with Disabilities, a Student Support Group meeting should still be held to identify the student’s educational needs and to plan the support that will be required for the student’s transition to secondary school. Schools are required to provide an appropriate educational program from within available resources for students with additional needs who are not eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities. The primary school principal is responsible for notifying parents and the secondary school of the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review. If you want to send your child to a specialist school, your choices will depend on the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review. Students must be eligible for ongoing funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities and meet the specialist school’s enrolment criteria before they can enrol.

Appeal process

An appeal process exists for any Program for Students with Disabilities application deemed ineligible. An appeal must be lodged by the principal within 15 days of receipt of the outcome of the application. Speak to the principal for more information.

Reappraisal

For students currently funded under the Program for Students with Disabilities who require additional resources to access the curriculum, a reappraisal can be submitted at any time. Speak to the principal for more information.

Parent preparation

There are practical ways to prepare for the Year 6–7 Review, such as requesting specialist or therapist reports during any relevant appointments leading up to the review. You can use these reports provided they are signed and not more than one or two years’ old. Looking at the original Program for Students with Disabilities application may remind you of any ongoing issues that you can discuss with the Student Support Group when filling out the Educational Needs Questionnaire. You may also need to prepare yourself emotionally, as the review focuses on areas where your child is most challenged at school. Remember that the level of funding is determined by your child’s educational needs as stated in the Year 6–7 Review. Keeping this in mind may help if the process becomes challenging.

For more information

Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School

Assessment Service

Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines

Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities (Chapter 7: Advice for Parents and Carers)

“I know that school is often a hot topic amongst parents of children on the spectrum and I have experienced both a special setting and mainstream.

I have to say that while the differences are huge, there are positives and negatives to both. Having a good relationship with the schools, however, has made it much easier to deal with any problems when they arise.”

Parent

“It has been a journey not just for our son but for the whole team—the principal, assistant principal and student welfare officer, his teacher, education support staff and myself. My son’s inclusion at a mainstream school would not have been as successful without each person’s valuable contribution.

Issues will always arise because of his autism but by working together and supporting one another we learn that in the end it is all about making his school experience as positive as it can be.”

Parent

Formal communication will take place through regular Student Support Group meetings, parent-teacher interviews, school newsletters, school websites, and school reports.

Informal communication can include emails, phone calls or a communication book. A communication book travels between home and school in your child’s bag and can work well as long as both you and the teachers check it regularly.

Talk to your key contact teacher about what type of communication suits you and the teachers. Agree on a communication process to trial, and review how this is going in the Student Support Group meeting. Schools can provide access to language interpreters if needed.

Parent-teacher interviews

Parent-teacher interviews are an opportunity to meet your child’s teachers, get more detail about the information provided on the student report card, become more involved in your child’s learning and provide support where needed.

Parent-teacher interviews also provide an opportunity to have a discussion with some of your child’s teachers who don’t attend the Student Support Group meetings. It’s also an opportunity to arrange longer appointments if necessary.

Developing a positive partnership with the secondary school is the same as for any other relationship—it requires mutual respect, listening skills, empathy and communication.

Disclosure

Disclosure is when facts or information are revealed. Your child has a right to privacy and any information about their disability, medical condition or support needs must be treated with the utmost respect.

However, it is important to provide the school with enough information to ensure they are fully prepared and can comprehensively plan for your child’s individual needs. The school should treat this information confidentially.
You might wish to discuss this issue at a Student Support Group meeting and agree upon what knowledge is necessary to be shared and with whom. Seek reassurance from the school that they will be sensitive when supporting your child, and treat your child with dignity.

**Keeping records**

It’s a good idea to keep an ongoing record of what is happening at school. If you have collected relevant information during your child’s primary school years you will have an important history to refer back to during this time of transition to secondary school. Having all of this information together can also make it easier to clarify things in the event of a misunderstanding or miscommunication.

**Families as Partners in Learning: Valuing families as partners**

The Department of Education and Training (DET) have developed a resource for teachers which includes details of the importance of family partnerships, examples of best practice and tools and resources designed to support successful family partnerships. It also provides links to information on topics such as challenges to family partnerships and evidence based research on the the benefits of family/school partnerships.


---

**For more information**

Early Teens School and Education on the Raising Children Network website
[raisingchildren.net.au/school_education/pre-teens_school.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/school_education/pre-teens_school.html)

Parenting Ideas—Michael Grose

Student Reports

---

**Program for Students with Disabilities Year 6–7 Review**

Most students in government schools who receive support through the Program for Students with Disabilities, and who are going on to government secondary schools undertake a Year 6–7 Review.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) reviews the educational need for ongoing support for all students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities in Grade 6, or the equivalent age in specialist schools.

Current Grade 6 students, or age equivalent in specialist schools, who are in receipt of Level 5 or Level 6 support are exempt from the Year 6–7 Review.

**Process**

The process for the Year 6–7 Review is similar to applying for the Program for Students with Disabilities. Evidence must be gathered, and the Educational Needs Questionnaire completed.

Students in the categories of Intellectual Disability and Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs should be referred to the DET Assessment Service. This will be arranged by the primary school.

The Student Support Group must meet to complete the process, and it must be submitted online and in hard copy. The primary school is responsible for ensuring the Year 6–7 Review is conducted and submitted.

The secondary school should be invited to attend the Year 6–7 Review Student Support Group meeting. The closing date for Year 6–7 Reviews is generally in May each year, so it’s a good idea to discuss with the primary school the review requirements in Term 1 of Grade 6, to ensure that any appointments with specialists can be arranged in advance.

**Change of category**

Students eligible for Program for Students with Disabilities support in more than one category may require a change of disability category to meet eligibility for a specialist school. In these cases, the DET Regional Disabilities Co-ordinator should be contacted.

---

“Frequent communication via a communication book has worked the best for my youngest son with autism. I get daily updates of his level of participation in activities and information about his behaviour which can vary greatly from day to day.

His teachers and I have found that this regular communication between home and school has helped us identify triggers for challenging behaviours and has lead to improved behaviour, both at home and at school.”

Parent
If you have a concern about something at the school, it’s best to address the issue as soon as possible.

A good parent-school partnership will allow you to feel comfortable with addressing issues as they arise. Sometimes people avoid raising issues that they think might cause conflict but this can lead to increased anxiety for both parents and students. Don’t always expect conflict. Others may agree with you. Creative solutions can often be found when everyone works together and contributes their knowledge and insight. This works best when there is good communication and a positive attitude from everyone involved. Your concerns should be addressed in a way that respects your child and family’s privacy and confidentiality.

Get all the facts
The first step is to get all the facts. Writing these down can help clarify what the issue is. Once you have all the facts, you can then identify whether your concern is about a particular issue or incident, an aspect of your child’s program, staff or personnel, or a combination of these.

Speak to the school first
Schools value concerns being raised early so that they have an opportunity to address the issue and stop it from getting worse.

• Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed in the first instance by speaking to the teacher involved, or your key staff contact such as the Inclusion Support or Year Level Co-ordinator.
• Concerns about your child’s program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
• Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.

Depending on the situation, you may need to use one or all of these approaches.
Tips for raising a concern

- Get all the facts and be clear about the outcome you are seeking.
- Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed by speaking to the teacher in the first instance.
- Concerns about your child’s program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.
- Find out if there are any guidelines for addressing your concern and ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.
- Organise an appropriate time and place for any discussion and put serious concerns in writing to the principal.
- Make sure any changes are documented in a Student Support Group meeting, including who needs the information, how it will be distributed and the timelines.
- Review and adjust changes as needed.
- If there is no positive change, contact the Department of Education and Training (DET) Regional Office and/or an independent agency.

The principal and Student Support Group should be informed of all serious or ongoing issues. Keep in mind that it can take time to organise a Student Support Group meeting. It can be useful to keep your own record of all discussions and to ask the Student Support Group to note any decisions in the minutes.

Moving towards positive change

When discussing your concern with the teacher, try to be realistic about what, when and how changes can be made. Agree on a timeframe to trial the changes and then review what worked well and what could be improved.

Organise an appropriate time and place for the discussion. For example, ask the teacher to meet at the start of the day if they are available to meet later in the day.

Try to avoid having the discussion in places such as busy corridors. If this happens, ask to move the discussion to a more private place.

If the situation continues, request a Student Support Group meeting to look at other ways to resolve the issue.

Put your concerns in writing

It’s always a good idea to put serious concerns in writing to the principal. It’s important to be clear about your knowledge of the situation without jumping to conclusions or making accusations.

Let the principal know that you would like to work through the issue together and ask for a response within a reasonable timeframe. Your letter also becomes part of your record keeping, which may be important if the matter is complex and takes some time to sort out.

Policies and guidelines

Once your concern has been raised, a process for dealing with it should be put in place. Find out if there are any policies or guidelines for addressing your concern. Ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.

“...”

Parent

Social needs

Most local neighbourhood secondary schools have large student numbers compared to primary schools, and this can cause some anxiety when thinking about how your child will manage socially amongst older students.

Ask how the school facilitates social interaction. Many secondary schools have lunchtime and extracurricular activities, such as school productions, bands, music, and clubs such as drama or chess. These activities could provide opportunities for your child to meet other children with similar interests, or to develop new interests, and to make new friends.

Some schools have a supervised open room available at lunchtime for students to be involved in board games and other activities. In many secondary schools, the library is open at lunchtime, as well as before and after school, and this may be a place to meet other like-minded students or to have some quiet time.

Travel

To get to secondary school, most students must travel a greater distance than primary school. When choosing a school, take into consideration the daily travel time.

Look at the public transport routes available, even if you intend to drive your child to school at first. With support and practice, your child may be able to take public transport in later years.

Some transport support is available from the Department of Education and Training (DET) for eligible students with additional needs attending local neighbourhood schools.

Some students in rural and regional Victoria may be eligible for the Conveyance Allowance from DET. The Mobility Allowance is available from Centrelink when an eligible young person turns 16.
General things to look for include the grounds and facilities, displays of work, and how the staff interact with students and parents.

Once you have narrowed down the options, take your child for a visit to the school, on a school tour or to an open day. Ask them which school they felt most comfortable in and why.

**Meet the principal**

You will get some sense of whether the school is right for your child from the welcome you both receive, the approach of the principal and staff, and the responses to your questions or requests.

A meeting with the principal will give you some idea of their approach to education, diversity, and including students with a disability. You can also ask specific questions about how the school can meet your child’s needs. This may include discussion about medical needs, physical access or other issues, as well as your child’s academic needs. You might like to ask how the school encourages social inclusion.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) sets out a range of policies for schools in the School Policy and Advisory Guide. These policies cover a wide range of issues to ensure the wellbeing of students and staff and the smooth running of the school. They include emergency procedures, management of medical conditions such as asthma and anaphylaxis, bullying, attendance, and many other things.

In addition, schools develop their own policies to address a range of issues and you can ask the school for a copy of these.

**Physical environment**

Your first impressions of a school will probably be of the physical environment and accessibility, facilities, physical layout and the size of the school. Discuss any specific physical access or safety requirements with the principal as early as possible to allow time for modifications before your child starts.

**Approachable staff**

You should feel confident that the school staff will keep your child safe and meet their needs. A positive approach from the principal and staff is an important part of making secondary school an enjoyable experience for your child. Staff with a positive approach will tend to:

- focus on abilities
- engage directly with your child, not just through you
- support learning at an individual level and pace
- make time to meet with you and any relevant specialists
- think about creative ways to adapt the environment, curriculum, or activities to ensure inclusion.

By speaking with the principal and staff about their experiences with students with a disability you can get a feel for how the school might go about including your child. Schools with less experience may also be a good option if they are welcoming, enthusiastic and positive.

**Program modification**

Ask how the school includes students with a disability across different subject areas, and how all subject teachers can have input to the personalised learning and support plan. While the school may not have all the answers, you should feel reassured that they will explore ways to include your child in all activities, including camps and excursions. Ask how the school will co-ordinate communication and consistency between all of your child’s teachers.

**Complex care needs**

If your child has complex medical or personal care needs, ask how the school can meet these needs. You will want reassurance that your child will be cared for safely and with dignity, privacy and respect, and that the school will plan well to address these needs.

**Taking the matter further**

If you are not satisfied with an outcome, you can approach the Community Liaison Officer at the DET Regional Office. If the matter remains unresolved, you can write to the: Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group, C/- Manager, School Operations and Governance Unit, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne VIC 3001. You may also seek advice from an independent agency such as the Victorian Ombudsman or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

**Suspensions and expulsions**

Schools have an obligation to students and staff to provide a safe environment. DET has recently developed further materials around behaviours of concern in a collection of guidelines and recommendations entitled Student Engagement and Inclusion Guidance. This includes information on the development of student engagement policies, promoting positive behaviour and responding to challenging behaviours. It also includes links to information on disciplinary measures which can include suspension and expulsion.

The process for suspensions and expulsions must comply with Ministerial Order 625 - Suspensions and Expulsions, which ensures that the school engage with the parent (or ‘relevant person’) as well as the student.

**Disability Standards for Education**

Under Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education (2005). To comply with the standards, an education provider must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to accommodate a student with a disability. An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 set benchmarks for education and training providers with which all Victorian government schools must comply. These include the right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.

**Legal advice**

For information about issues of discrimination, contact an organisation that specialises in providing legal advice on disability issues (see Advocacy organisations on page 44).
It is common for parents to act as advocates for their children in many situations, even though you might not recognise it as advocacy. An advocate is someone who can support, assist or represent another person to achieve a positive outcome in a difficult situation or meeting.

**Being a parent advocate**
As a parent, you have the most experience and personal knowledge about your child. If you have a strong instinct about what could improve your child’s situation, be firm and persistent. Remember that you are your child’s best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

**How to advocate for your child**
Be clear about what would be an acceptable outcome. Others will find it easier to respond if they understand your perspective and what you are trying to achieve.

Think about what you want to say and how you will say it. Write down the points you want to cover and keep a record of any meetings.

Avoid being pressured into agreeing to something if you feel uncertain. It’s okay to say that you need time to think things through before you respond.

Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion. You need to be in an environment where everyone at the meeting has time and space to actively listen without interruption. You may need to make an appointment for this to happen.

Remember that you are your child’s best advocate and you do not have to apologise for standing up for your child.

Remember to keep some notes about any discussion. This will make it easier to follow up on agreed actions. If these are not happening, or the situation changes, you can raise the issue again.

**Emotions**
It is common to feel strong emotions when advocating for your child. Emotions can overwhelm you when you least want them to. Even if you are not in a situation of conflict, you may find it difficult to contribute to the conversation. Whatever emotion you experience, you can ask for a few moments to gather your thoughts.

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school, such as your child’s strengths and interests, school facilities and your family’s broader needs.

When choosing a secondary school, think about what is most important to your child and family. It could be a range of things, such as primary school friendship groups, choosing particular subjects, management of complex care needs, finances, choosing the same school as siblings, or the size of the school and number of students.

Think about the broader needs of your family as well as the specific needs of your child. Sometimes there may be limited choice due to distance or living in a remote area.

Your child’s strengths and interests can help guide your decision-making when choosing a secondary school. Some schools are very academic while others may have a strong arts, music or sports focus.

Involving your child in the decision-making process and listen to their feedback. They may tell you that they feel more comfortable in one school than another. Trust your own instincts. You need to feel comfortable that the school you choose will be responsive to your child and family.

While it is reassuring to choose a school that turns out to be great for your child, there are always alternatives if circumstances change over time.

**School visits**
School open days, information evenings and tours will give you a general feel for a school and some idea of the facilities. Most government schools hold these events in April or May each year.

Information evenings are a good place to start, and will give you and your child an overall picture of the school.

A school tour during the day will give you a chance to see the school in action, and you may get a sense of whether the teachers and students seem engaged and happy.
Independent and Catholic schools

Disability funding is available for students with disabilities at independent or Catholic schools but it is different from funding available in government schools.

Funding cannot be transferred between school sectors. Independent and Catholic schools also have their own enrolment criteria. Contact the school you are interested in for more information.

For more information

A link to a list of all Victorian Government Specialist Schools can be found at the bottom of www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/pages/disabilities.aspx

Assistance for Isolated Children

Association of Independent Schools information regarding programs for students with a disability can be found at www.is.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm

Autism Friendly Learning

Catholic Education Office
www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au

Disability Funding – Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN)

Children’s Mobility Centre

Distance Education Centre Victoria
www.distance.vic.edu.au

Find an Early Childhood Service or School website

Home-Based Educational Support Program

Home Schooling

My School website
www.myschool.edu.au

School statistics

Statewide Vision Resource Centre
www.svrc.vic.edu.au

Victorian Deaf Institute

Victorian Government School Performance Summary

If you have someone supporting you in a meeting, talk to them beforehand about how you would like to proceed if you become emotional. Think about what your own coping strategies are and go with what feels right for you. Be reassured that as a parent advocate you are doing what you believe is best for your child.

Support and advocacy for parents

Sometimes communication issues can arise and you may want to ask a friend or advocate for support. An advocate can be a friend, family member, or a formal advocate.

You are entitled to take an advocate with you to any meeting but to comply with Student Support Group Guidelines the advocate must not be in receipt of a fee.

If you do take an advocate to a meeting, make sure you discuss with them any relevant information beforehand so that you are both well prepared and have a good understanding of the purpose of the meeting and the outcomes you are seeking.

You can also seek information and advice from an advocacy organisation (see page 44).

Tips for advocating for your child

• Be clear about what you want to achieve and what is an acceptable outcome.
• Find out who is responsible for the outcome you seek.
• Don’t always expect conflict, as others may agree with you.
• Be firm and persistent.
• Think about what you want to say and how you will say it.
• Write down the points you want to cover.
• Think about points that others may raise and how you might respond.
• Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion.
• Stay focused on getting the best outcome for your child.
• Be open to other solutions that may be just as effective.
• Negotiate and be open to compromise.
• Keep some notes about what was discussed.
• Follow up on agreed actions.
• If emotions overwhelm you, ask for a few minutes to gather your thoughts.
• Try to stay calm.
• If you need support, ask a friend or advocate to help you.
• Seek further information and advice from an advocacy organisation if you need to.
Towards independence

Most children going into their teenage years start to forge their own identity.

Teenagers want to be known as individuals in their own right and may want to try new experiences and establish new friendships separate from their parents and family.

Parents need to adapt to the challenges of guiding and supporting their teenager through different sorts of issues. These can include relationships, drugs and alcohol, adolescence and learning about the world. At the same time, parents need to provide reassurance that they are still there to offer support.

You can encourage a partnership approach to decision-making with your child as they start to explore their capacity to be independent decision-makers. Rather than making all the decisions, as parents do for younger children, your role becomes one of guiding and supporting decision-making, while continuing to be their advocate.

Involving your child in decision-making

Many teenagers are very forthcoming in expressing opinions and making decisions. Others need more guidance, encouragement and structure to engage in decision-making.

Given the right level of support, most teenagers would be able to participate, to some degree, in decisions about their schooling. Being listened to, and participating in decision-making and Student Support Group meetings, helps to build confidence and self-esteem.

Finding ways for your child to do some things on their own or with minimal assistance will help to develop confidence in their own abilities.

Being organised

Education support staff can support your child with the organisational skills needed in secondary schools, for instance, working with a timetable, moving from room to room, managing a locker with a key, and keeping track of books and belongings.

Secondary school students often have a school diary that they can learn to use to keep themselves organised. Your child may find a visual schedule useful. A speech pathologist or occupational therapist may be able to assist with this.

“I’ve found what I believe is a good way to attempt to meet Anwar’s complex needs. For three days a week he attends a specialist school for students with complex physical and medical needs where they have a high ratio of teachers, aides and therapists compared to a regular specialist school. The school has its own hydrotherapy pool, a full time school nurse and many of the teachers have experience and qualifications teaching children with severe disabilities.

Due to the number of students with severe communication difficulties, social interactions between peers are less than what would be seen in a regular specialist school. When I told people that I thought my son would benefit from attending a mainstream high school on a part time basis, there were many raised eyebrows. There are some communication issues because there are so many people involved but it’s not insurmountable. I have found a secondary school with an excellent attitude to inclusion and where the teachers have had previous experience educating children with a variety of needs.”

Parent of a student with dual enrolment

Home-Based Educational Support program

The Department of Education and Training (DET) expects that students of school age with severe disabilities will attend school.

Sometimes the severity of the student’s disability and the fragility of their health may prevent them from attending school for a period of time.

The Home-Based Educational Support Program enables students with severe disabilities to access an educational program where they are unable to attend school due to the nature of their disability.

Home-based educational programs must be developed by the student’s local or nominated regular or specialist school in co-operation with the student’s parents. Contact the DET Regional Office for more information and timelines.

Distance education

In Victoria, students from Foundation to Year 12 can receive distance education if they meet the eligibility criteria in one of four categories: Distance, Medical, School referral, and Traveller. More information about distance education can be found in the Distance Education Centre Victoria (DECV) handbooks at www.distance.vic.edu.au/enrolments/full-time-part-time-students/.

Students who are unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis due to geographic isolation or because the student has a disability or special health-related or education need may also be eligible for Assistance for Isolated Children from Centrelink.

Select Entry Accelerated Learning

Some government secondary schools offer Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) programs to students capable of working at a faster pace than their peers. Work in core subjects is accelerated for SEAL students, allowing them to complete Years 7 to 10 in three years and do more VCE subjects. Entrance exams are usually held in May of the year before your child’s Year 7 placement.
Dual enrolment
Some children enrol at both a specialist school and a local neighbourhood secondary school (government, independent or Catholic) and spend part of the week at each. This is known as dual enrolment.

Some parents choose dual enrolment so that their child can benefit from the different experiences and resources that local neighbourhood schools and specialist schools have to offer.

There are some additional things to think about when considering dual enrolment, including whether:

• Your child and family will be able to settle into this routine
• There might be issues with equipment your child needs on a daily basis.

Discuss the prospective dual enrolment with the principals of both schools to consider whether:

• Both schools are supportive of the arrangement
• Both schools can work together and communicate effectively with each other, and with you, to ensure that things go smoothly
• Both schools can put together a suitable timetable for your child.

Program for Students with Disabilities resources are shared between government secondary schools and specialist schools on a pro rata basis. Dual enrolments are possible between non-government schools and government specialist schools, but non-government schools access disability funding based on different eligibility criteria.

Satellite Programs
A Satellite Program is a government specialist school program with specialist staff, learning areas and facilities to suit the needs and requirements of students with disabilities, and is located within a local neighbourhood primary or secondary school.

The aim of a Satellite Program is to enable students with disabilities to be part of the everyday life of the school while also recognising and supporting their additional learning needs. Students with disabilities are integrated into regular classrooms where appropriate to maximise learning outcomes with specialist support being provided via specialist school staff.

Contact the DET Regional Office for more information about the location and enrolment criteria for Satellite Programs in government schools.

Community schools
There are a number of small government community schools in Victoria for students and families seeking an alternative. Contact the Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator at the DET Regional Office for more information.

Home schooling
In Victoria, home schooling is a recognised alternative to attending school. Some parents choose home schooling because it provides an individually tailored environment. Some of the things to think about if you are considering home schooling include the impact on yourself and your family and how you will ensure social and recreational activities for your child. If you choose home schooling, you will assume overall responsibility for the planning, implementation and assessment of your child. You must also register your child with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

Students using the canteen at school are often required to be independent making selections and using money. An education support staff member may support your child to learn these skills until they have the confidence to be independent.

Many students will require clear, step by step instruction and many opportunities to practise in order to achieve these things. Every student’s capacity will differ, but all students should have the opportunity and support to become as independent as possible.

Social skills
Most teenagers seem to pick up social skills from what they see modelled by others. Sometimes teenagers with a disability need explicit teaching of social skills and conversation skills, in the same way that Maths or English is taught explicitly. Role play can be a useful tool and speech therapists or occupational therapists can often assist with this.

There are opportunities to make friends with students across a range of ages by participating in any available extracurricular activities, such as school productions, choir, or in lunchtime clubs such as chess or drama. A shared interest is usually a good basis to start a friendship. Many secondary schools run specific activities at the start of Year 7, so that new students can get to know each other and start to make friends.

Many parents are concerned about bullying at secondary schools. This is a good time to reinforce the strategies that your child has learnt at primary school to deal with the negative behaviour of others.

Also ensure that your child knows who they can speak to at school if they experience bullying. Ask the school for a copy of its Student Engagement Policy, so you are reassured of the processes and strategies already in place at the school to ensure the safety of all students.

“...
Vision impairment

There are no specialist schools for students with vision impairment but a range of supports are available to schools, including the Statewide Vision Resource Centre and Visiting Teachers. Contact the DET Regional Office for more information.

Students with multiple disabilities

Students with multiple disabilities may be eligible to attend a number of specialist schools.

If your child has multiple disabilities, discuss this with the schools that interest you, and with the professionals who know your child, to guide your decision about the best available option.

Specialist school zones

Specialist schools also have ‘zones’ for enrolments. The zone is also the boundary for the school’s bus service.

If you prefer a specialist school that is not the designated school for your zone, approach the school to discuss your request. You may still be able to enrol your child into that school, if there are places, and if the principal agrees.

However, your child will not be eligible for the transport support available for that school and you will have to make your own transport arrangements.

“Sam had a very positive experience during his primary years. He went to our local kindergarten and then our local government school.

He really enjoyed school, being included in all the facets of school life. He ran the sprints on athletics day, took part in the annual swimming carnivals, performed on stage with all his classmates during the annual school concerts and went on all the school camps. Of course, he did his schoolwork as well but, “That’s boring, Mum!”

I wanted to make sure that this positive experience would continue to be the common denominator throughout his secondary schooling. After looking at all our options, we decided, or rather Sam decided, that he really liked the special school.

As Sam’s parents, we first toured the school, met with the assistant principal and generally got a feel for the school environment. He just felt good! Next, we made another appointment so we could take Sam through with us and see what he thought.

As his parents, we walked around the school, saw some classes in session and Sam was blown away when he recognised some of the students from one of his weekend sporting groups. When I asked him what he thought of the school, he said, “Perfect Mum!”

Parent of a student at a specialist secondary school
Intellectual disability

In Victoria there are a number of specialist schools for students with an intellectual disability. Where eligibility is established under the Intellectual Disability category of the Program for Students with Disabilities:

• Students with a mild intellectual disability who score an IQ between 50 and 70 on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Specialist School.
• Students with a moderate to profound intellectual disability who score an IQ below 50 on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Special Developmental School (SDS).

Students with a mild to profound intellectual disability who score an IQ of 70 or below on psychological testing are eligible to enrol in a Specialist School (sometimes referred to as a dual mode school, or Special Developmental School in some regional areas).

If you have queries about the enrolment criteria speak to the school principal or the Regional Disabilities Co-ordinator.

Hearing impairment

The majority of educational services for secondary students with hearing impairments exist as facilities within local neighbourhood schools. The Victorian Deaf Education Institute has a list of secondary schools and Foundation people for children with deaf facilities as well as links to visiting teacher services.

For more information visit www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/Resources/Pages/Deaf-education-in-Victoria.aspx

Physical disability and/or significant health impairment

In Victoria, there are four specialist schools for eligible students who have physical disabilities and/or significant health impairment.

• Belmore School www.belmoresc.vic.edu.au
• Glenallen School www.glenallen-sch.vic.edu.au
• Glenroy Specialist School www.glenroys.vic.edu.au
• Nepean School www.nepean.vic.edu.au

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

DET currently resources five ASD specialist schools:

• Bulleen Heights School (F−12) www.bulleenheights.vic.edu.au
• Northern School for Autism (Lalor campus) www.northernautism.vic.edu.au
• Eastern Ranges School (currently F−8 but will be to F−12 in 2018) www.easternrangesschool.vic.edu.au
• Southern Autistic School http://southernaustistic.vic.edu.au
• Western Autistic School (Laverton campus) www.westernautisticschool.vic.edu.au

Some of these schools provide outreach services and support to other schools to ensure that students with ASD benefit from the expertise of these specialised settings.

Inclusion Support Programs for students with ASD

Inclusion Support Programs support the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders in local neighbourhood schools by providing the teaching expertise, knowledge and facilities for children with ASD to participate in the school curriculum. These programs works at a whole-school level to create an ‘autism friendly’ environment, as well as providing professional support to staff and targeted intensive support and intervention for individual students.


Linking to the curriculum

Independence goals can be linked to the curriculum by being included in the personalised learning and support plan. For example, a learning goal about how to handle money could be practised at the school canteen when a student buys their lunch.

Balancing support and independence

Students with a disability may need assistance with certain tasks but it is important that they are active participants in their learning.

Adults assisting children with physical and intellectual disabilities need to understand the importance of providing assistance without creating dependence. There is a fine balance between providing enough assistance for the student to experience some success, yet still have some challenge.

Most teenagers are not keen to have an adult by their side when they are in secondary school. Education support staff in secondary schools should work in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and attitudes of teenagers. They might work with your child within a small group or ‘float’ around the classroom. This will depend on individual need.

Secondary school students are also more self-conscious about their personal care needs. Adults assisting students with personal care needs should respect their privacy and dignity as well as being sensitive and discreet.

Building confidence and self-esteem

Finding ways for your child to do some things on their own or with minimal assistance will help to develop confidence in their own abilities.

Most children feel encouraged when their parents show interest in even the small things they have done. This can help your child develop the confidence to try again with difficult tasks and to try new things that challenge their skills.

Taking the time to talk to your child about their day at school, and acknowledging their achievements, big and small, also helps to build confidence and self-esteem. At this age, teenagers also start to gain confidence from their peers, so building on social skills is important.

It can be hard to step back and look afresh at the evolving needs of a young person with a disability as they move towards independence. Parents need to be able to adapt to the changes in children as they grow into teenagers, even though it presents challenges.

Career planning

Most children at the start of their secondary schooling don’t know what they want to do when they leave school. Students should consider study pathways that interest them and which may lead to an area of work they enjoy. As a parent, you have a key role to play in your child’s career planning, and you can have a positive and powerful impact on their career development. To help you provide this support and guidance, you will need current information about the career pathways available to young people.

There are resources available to help you start this conversation with your child. Visit www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/disabilitypathways.aspx for information about Strengthened Pathways Planning for Young People with Disabilities. You can also discuss with the school what support they provide to assist students to make choices about their options beyond school.

All government secondary schools offer the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Each school decides what VCE subjects and Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs it will offer. Government schools are increasing offering the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Specialist schools generally offer VCAL and VET courses, and some also offer VCE. Ask your school of interest about the programs on offer.
**Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)**

The VCE can be started in Year 10 but is usually completed during Years 11 and 12. It is awarded to students who successfully complete their secondary education. It is recognised internationally and provides pathways to further study at university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and the world of work.

**Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)**

The VCAL is an applied learning option for senior secondary students offering practical work-related experience as well as literacy and numeracy skills. It provides opportunities to build personal skills that are important for life and work.

The VCAL is a recognised senior qualification and focuses on ‘hands on learning’. Students who do the VCAL are more likely to be interested in gaining a TAFE qualification, doing an apprenticeship, or getting a job after completing Year 12.

**Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

VET programs are vocational training programs that students can undertake while they are still at school. They offer training in specific industries for example, hospitality, horticulture, information technology and automotive. Students receive a nationally recognised training qualification as well as their VCE or VCAL.

VET programs are designed to be motivating and engaging for many young people and prepare young people for further education and employment.

**Continuation of Program for Students with Disabilities, PSD funding for students turning 19 or older**

Students supported by the Program for Students with Disabilities who are aged 19 years or older and are completing an approved VCE/VCAL/VET course in that year may be eligible for continuation of Program for Students with Disabilities funds. The school is required to make a request for continuation of funding.

**School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs)**

SBATs are available to secondary school students from 15 years old who are permanent residents of Australia. SBATs offer students enrolled in the VCE or VCAL the option of combining part-time employment, school and training.

The program is undertaken under a training contract with an employer, has a formal training plan and leads to a nationally recognised qualification. It also includes paid work. The vocational training components of SBATs contribute credit towards a senior secondary certificate.

**Government secondary school zones**

The DET Regional Director can restrict enrolments at particular schools because of the limitations of facilities. Students are enrolled in the following priority order:

1. Students for whom the school is the designated neighbourhood school.
2. Students with a sibling at the same permanent address who are attending the school at the same time.
3. Where the regional director has restricted the enrolment, students who reside nearest the school.
4. Students seeking enrolment on specific curriculum grounds.
5. All other students in order of closeness of their home to the school.
6. In exceptional circumstances, compassionate grounds.

**Government specialist schools**

There are over 90 government specialist schools in Victoria. Class sizes at specialist schools are smaller than local neighbourhood schools. Some specialist schools also have therapists on staff.

Specialist schools generally already have an accessible environment and curriculum for their student population and this may mean there are limited subjects on offer.

Students who live within the specialist school’s designated transport area are eligible for travel support to that school (usually a school bus).

All students must be eligible for additional resources under the Program for Students with Disabilities to be eligible to enrol in a specialist school.

Students must also meet the specialist’s school enrolment criteria. Contact the principal or the DET Regional Office for more information.

**Parent of a student at a mainstream secondary school**

“We considered a move to special school for Jay’s secondary years, but chose a mainstream secondary school to meet his academic needs, going with the advice of therapists and the paediatrician. Jay wasn’t enrolled until November the year before he started, so it was a challenge to get all the rooms modified by start of the school year. Most of the school was already wheelchair accessible. The school was great at getting the smaller modifications done quickly but the bigger ones have taken some time. Jay is driven to and from school by carers who assist him to get ready in the mornings and provide support after school as well.

The school put a lot of thought into selecting his locker, which is at the end of the row so there is space for him to move and near an alcove where his scooter is stored. At school he mostly gets around by pushing himself in his wheelchair. The school has organised a roster of three integration aides. Jay went on the music camp and the Year 7 camp last year. It was always assumed by the school that he would go. We have been working together through some issues but overall, the school staff have been very keen to support Jay and he is really happy.”
If your child is already in a school that offers Foundation to Year 12, you may be quite happy for your child to continue their schooling where they are, or you may consider other options.

Your primary school community is a good starting place to find out about local and other secondary schools.

Friends, neighbours, and your disability support networks may also be good sources of information.

You can look at individual school websites, annual reports, and the Department of Education and Training (DET) website ‘Find an Early Childhood Service or School’ at www.education.vic.gov.au/findaservice

Most secondary schools are bigger and have more students, teachers and staff than primary schools. Many have diverse student populations from a range of cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, with a range of needs and abilities.

Large government secondary schools often have a broad range of subjects on the curriculum, and some have the capacity for a stronger focus on a particular area such as music or art.

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school and every child and family is different. The school you choose should meet the individual needs of your child and family.

Government secondary schools
All students have the right to a place in the designated neighbourhood secondary school and there is support to facilitate this for students with a disability. In most instances, the designated neighbourhood school is the one nearest to a student’s permanent residential address, except when schools have restricted enrolment, as approved by DET.

If you don’t want your child to attend either the neighbourhood school, or the same school being attended by a sibling who lives at the same address, you can request an enrolment at any other school in which space is available.
Grade 6 - Term 3

• If you submitted preference forms for government secondary schools, you will be advised by the primary school which government secondary school has offered a place to your child.

• Your child’s primary school should convene a Student Support Group meeting with relevant staff from the secondary school to plan for the transition and other needs.

• Your child’s primary school may consider preparing a transition statement, a summary of important information about your child that can be given to the secondary school to assist them in planning appropriate supports for your child.

• Your primary school should be notified of the outcome of the Year 6–7 Review.

Grade 6 - Term 4

• Enrol your child into secondary school.

• Plan and prepare for orientation day.

• Request an extended orientation for your child and meet teachers.

• Request a Student Support Group meeting for Term 1 of Year 7.

• The primary school should work with your child on the transition program activities.

• The primary school may consider additional strategies to prepare your child for transition, such as social stories, if this is known to be helpful.

• Practice the transport route during the school holidays if your child will be taking public transport.

• Together with your child, consider other strategies to prepare for secondary school, such as becoming familiar with the school timetable and map of classrooms.

Year 7 - Term 1

• If attending a local neighbourhood school, consider asking for your child to attend school for a short time the day before other Year 7 students start, to bring books, locate their locker, bathrooms, Home room, and to meet teachers.

• Confirm the date for the Student Support Group meeting to be held in Term 1.

• Participate in the Student Support Group meeting to develop a personalised learning and support plan and monitor how your child is settling in.
Transition Planning Guide

This planning guide is a quick reference to the tasks and activities that you and the Student Support Group will need to keep in mind before your child starts secondary school.

Grade 5 and before

- Start talking to friends, neighbours and other networks about school options.
- Go to secondary school information evenings, open days, tours and meet with principals.
- Look at school websites and find out about different schools.

Grade 6 - Term 1

- Revisit the schools you are interested in and meet with principals again if necessary.
- Once you have narrowed down your choices, take your child for a visit to the school.
- Make a final decision on your preferred secondary school.
- Your child's primary school will commence the Year 6–7 Review for students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities (students on Levels 5 and 6 are exempt from the Year 6–7 Review). Find out if any specialist appointments or assessments need to be booked for the Year 6–7 Review. Although the Year 6–7 Review is not required for students on Levels 5 and 6, detailed transition planning should still occur.
- Commence transition discussions at the Student Support Group meeting.

Grade 6 - Term 2

- Fill in the preference form provided by the primary school (for enrolment into local neighbourhood secondary schools).
- Your child's primary school will complete the Year 6–7 Review for students on Levels 1–4 of the Program for Students with Disabilities. Relevant staff from the secondary school should be invited to the Application Student Support Group meeting.
- New applications for the Program for Students with Disabilities must be submitted in July.
Planning for the transition
Supporting students with a disability at secondary school involves detailed planning by the Student Support Group, a quality personalised learning and support plan and appropriate supports.

In this booklet we refer to the programs and guidelines used by the Department of Education and Training (DET) for students with disabilities in government schools. This includes the Student Support Group Guidelines and the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines. These are available online or you can ask the school for a copy.

If your child has a recent diagnosis, the school may be eligible for additional resources under the Program for Students with Disabilities. For more information, see the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines and our Positive Education Planning booklet.

Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School resource
This resource assists schools to support students with additional needs to transition from primary to secondary school.

For more information visit www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/transtosecondary.aspx

Developing a positive partnership with your child’s school is the foundation of a successful school experience for your child and family. The best outcomes are possible when parents and schools work together.

While the information in this booklet focuses on transition planning for children with a disability in Victorian government primary schools, the planning principles will be similar if your child is going to an independent or Catholic school. With good communication and skills in advocating for your child, you will be able to address any issues as they arise. A list of advocacy organisations is included on page 44 and a list of web resources is included on page 47.

For more information about the transition to secondary school for children with a disability, contact ACD on 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) or mail@acd.org.au

“I believe our decisions regarding our children’s schooling are influenced by a number of things, such as our personal philosophies and values, life experiences and the information we have at the time.

Choosing a secondary school has been a challenge. What eventually made it easier was just to focus on a couple of key criteria, which for us included a suitable curriculum and a transport option that didn’t require too much driving.

After much soul searching, I chose a school that I was confident could meet my child and family’s needs. It’s been hard sometimes not to be swayed by what other people think and to wonder whether I’ve made the right decision.

I have come to the conclusion that, as parents, we just have to understand that we make our choices based on a number of different reasons and life situations. All of us just want the best for our children and we go about achieving that in different ways.”

Parent
The transition to adulthood

Transitions are a good time to reflect on how far your child and family has come, to think about achievements and any obstacles you have overcome, and to plan for your hopes and dreams for the future. It’s also a time to look forward and to start thinking about how you will adjust your thinking and planning for your child, and for yourself, as the parent of a young person becoming a teenager.

Going to secondary school is a big step for all students. It is a move into the teenage years, with less reliance on parents and increased independence. The teenage years represent a transition from childhood to adulthood, and with this comes many changes—to physical development, emotions, behaviour and attitudes.

All young people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and secondary school plays an important role in their development. Parents constantly adapt to the developmental changes that occur from the time their children are babies, then toddlers, through to kindergarten, then as primary school children. One of the biggest challenges for parents is adapting when their child becomes a young person at secondary school, with oncoming adolescence and the emergence of independence.

While this time can be challenging, by teaching your child to develop skills that build independence you can increase their self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities. This can help your child as they adjust to life at secondary school with a new learning environment and larger numbers of students and teachers.

As your child gets older, your role as a parent will become one of guiding and supporting them with their own decision-making, while still acting as their advocate.

Web resources

Australian Curriculum in Victoria (AusVELS) (replaces Victorian Essential Learning Standards - VELS)
www.ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au

To source information regarding application of AusVELS for students with disabilities, search using the term ‘diversity’ or ‘diversity of learners’

Autism Resources - Department of Education and Training (DET)

Bully Stoppers - Department of Education and Training (DET) resource for students, parents, teachers and principals

Behaviour Support Plans

Complex Medical Needs: School Policy and Advisory Guide

Department of Education and Training (DET)
www.education.vic.gov.au

Department of Education and Training (DET) Handbook and Guidelines
• Program for Students with Disabilities
• Student Support Group Guidelines
• Language Support Program
• Enhanced Transition from Kindergarten to School

Disability Act 2006

Disability Standards for Education
www.ddaedustandards.info

Language Support Program

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy service delivery in schools

Continued over page...
Going to secondary school is an exciting time for children and families, and it marks the next step in your child’s education.

This booklet has been written for families of students making the transition from primary school to secondary school. It builds on a previous information resource published by ACD called ‘Positive Education Planning: Supporting children with a disability in Victorian government primary schools’.

There are many things to consider when choosing a secondary school. Every child and family is different and the school you choose should meet your individual needs. Like all families, it’s a good idea to start planning for secondary school when your child is in Grade 4 or 5. Start thinking about secondary school as early as possible, to allow yourself plenty of time to explore and weigh up your options.

Visiting schools, attending open days and meeting with principals, considering the specific needs of your child and family, and involving your child in the process can assist you in making this important decision.

Transition Planning Guide
The Transition Planning Guide on pages 4 and 5 is designed to help you plan for the transition from Grade 5 to Year 7. It includes key dates and timelines for moving through each step of the transition process. Notes pages are also included at the back of the booklet that you can use to record important information.
Every child can participate, learn and achieve. Families expect that their child will receive the best quality education and school experience their chosen school can offer.

ACD is active in promoting effective parent-school partnerships and positive education outcomes for children with a disability. The best outcomes are achieved when students, parents and schools work together.
Contents

Introduction ......................................................... 1
Transition Planning Guide ................................. 4
Secondary school options ................................. 6
Choosing a secondary school ............................. 13
Program for Students with Disabilities Year 6–7 Review ............ 17
Enrolment procedure ........................................... 19
Transition planning with the Student Support Group .............. 20
Supports for students with a disability at government secondary schools 23
Making the transition ........................................... 27
Developing a positive partnership with the school ............... 30
Raising a concern .................................................. 33
Advocating for your child ....................................... 36
Towards independence ......................................... 38
Advocacy organisations ....................................... 44
Department of Education & Training (DET) ................. 46
Web resources ..................................................... 47
Notes ............................................................ 48
Parent feedback .................................................... 51

Your feedback
We welcome your feedback on this booklet and any other aspect of our service. Send to:
Association for Children with a Disability (ACD), Suite 2, 98 Morang Road Hawthorn VIC 3122
Phone 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) Fax 03 9818 2300
Email mail@acd.org.au Web acd.org.au

Notes
Parent feedback

Your feedback will help us provide information that is relevant and of interest to families of children with a disability. After completing the survey please tear off this page and post to Association for Children with a Disability, Reply Paid 84584, Hawthorn VIC 3122. You can also email feedback to mail@acd.org.au or fax it to 03 9818 2300.

Did the Transition to Secondary School booklet provide you with the information you were looking for?  Yes  No

What other information would you like to see included?

Was the information easy to find?  Yes  No

Could the layout or design be improved to make it easier to read?  Yes  No

If yes, how?

Is the size of this booklet right for this type of information?  Yes  No

Does the booklet have the right balance of pictures and text?  Yes  No

How did you receive this booklet?

Do you use the internet to find information?  Yes  No
ACD is the leading advocacy and information service for children with any type of a disability and their families living in Victoria.

We provide pre-service training and professional development on family centred practice and raise awareness of disability from a family perspective.

Our contribution to improvements in policy and service system delivery is driven by our deep understanding of what children and families need to have a good life.

It’s what we are passionate about because we know from personal experience how disability changes lives. Raising a child with a disability brings rewards and achievements and but also many challenges.

Language interpreters
If you need a language interpreter to access our service, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50. Tell the operator your preferred language and that you want to speak to the Association for Children with a Disability on 03 9818 2000. This is a free service.

ACD Membership
Becoming a member of ACD helps create a better life for children with a disability and their families.

ACD members include parents, siblings, family members of children with a disability, young people with a disability, professionals who work with families, students and supporters.

We encourage you to join ACD and other disability-specific groups. Our combined aim is to work together on issues extending across all disabilities.

ACD membership benefits:
• 4 editions per year of ACD’s member magazine NoticeBoard
• Free information resources for families
• Discounts on ACD workshops and events

ACD membership is:
• FREE for families for the first 12 months, then $16.50 (GST Inc) per year.
• $16.50 (GST Inc) per year for students and interested persons.
• $55 (GST Inc) per year for community organisations and professionals.

We have over 2,000 members and welcome new members and supporters.

In addition to membership, we also welcome donations. All donations over $2 are tax deductible.

For more information contact the ACD office on 03 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers), by email mail@acd.org.au or visit acd.org.au