

## Early Childhood - Accessing Support

# TRANSITIONING TO PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL

Choosing a school for your child is a big step and you will have a lot of questions. There are no right or wrong choices. At the end of the day, your knowledge of your family circumstances, along with what various schools offer that can meet your child's needs, will help you determine which school suits your child best.

### Inclusive education

All children in Australia have the right to an inclusive education. There are, however, many barriers to the realisation of this right in the lived experience of children with disability and families.

These are the principles that guide inclusive education:

- All children and students who experience disability have the right to access and participate in education.
- All children and students who experience disability have the ability to learn and the right to exercise their voice, choice and control in managing their own educational experiences.
- All children and students who experience disability have the right to develop to their fullest potential and to be active, valued citizens in the community.
- Teachers, early childhood education and care centres, school communities and the parents/carers/advocates of children and students who experience disability have the responsibility for taking action for inclusive behaviour in their education and care setting.
- All children and students who experience disability have the right to an appropriate and adequate allocation of resources to enable their right to access and participate meaningfully in education.
- All children and students who experience disability, their parents/carers/advocates, teachers and members of the early childhood education and care centres and school communities have the right to be safe – physically, emotionally, culturally and socially – and to be treated respectfully.
- All children and students who experience disability, their parents/carers/advocates, teachers and members of the school community have the responsibility to operate within the legal framework provided by government.

## Whole school approach

The provision of a supportive, successful and engaging learning environment for students with disabilities requires careful planning. This should involve members of the school community, including parents/carers, school staff and quite often personnel from other agencies. Successful and positive school experiences for children with disabilities and their families are very much dependent on a number of key factors:

- The knowledge and awareness that teachers and school leaders have about different disabilities and their impact on learning and participation.
- How schools accommodate the learning needs of students with disabilities from a whole of school, classroom teaching and learning perspective.
- Building and sustaining positive and valued partnerships between families and school.

## Some tips that might help developing a partnership with your school include:

- Ask your teacher and/or other school staff to arrange a time for a meeting – it will be better if you have the teacher's whole attention, rather than trying to talk about this in the classroom or at the busy start or end of the day.
- Take along reports and other information about your child from speech pathologists, doctors or psychologists. It can be really helpful to share information from a range of sources.
- Take a support person with you. It can be helpful to have someone else around to take notes and listen objectively to all that is said.
- Write minutes or ask someone else to note down what is said. Aim to have a few actions by the end of the meeting that everyone is clear about.

## What sort of questions should I ask at the school visit?

Many of the questions you will have for the school are common among all prospective parents, but you may also want to ask some of the following:

- Does the school have an inclusion policy?
- How will the school address my child's disability?
- Does the school have experience teaching children with disabilities?
- Will my child be able to physically access all the parts of the school?
- How will programs be modified for my child's needs?

## When visiting the school some things to think about are:

- How welcome do the staff make you and your child feel?
- Do the teachers appear positive? Do they have a 'can-do' attitude?
- Think about the classroom, playground, sports facilities, and toilets. Do they suit your child?
- How long would it take to get to school, and what's the best way to get there?

## What are the options for my child's education?

You will probably have several options, including:

- Specialist schools (or special developmental schools), for children with intellectual disabilities.
- Disability-specific schools, which have special programs for children with specific disabilities.
- Special classes, which can be held within a mainstream school.

### Further information

- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/> has articles on schooling for children with disabilities
- Better health channel includes tip sheets on choosing a school for a child with disability  
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/starting-school-for-children-with-disabilities>

