

Going to school



One of the biggest decisions you will make as a parent is where your child goes to school

As for kindergarten, it is important to start planning and getting organised for school well in advance.

Give yourself plenty of time to investigate school options for your child before they are due to start.

As well as visiting and enrolling in a school, there are funding applications to be completed for eligible children, school orientation sessions to attend, and preparing your child for the school year ahead.

School starting age

Students must be at least five years of age by 30 April of the year they start primary school. Attendance at school is compulsory for all children from the age of six years.

School options

There are many things to consider when deciding on a school. In addition to your child's specific needs, you may also want to think about travel time, finances, whether you want all your children to go to the same school, and before and after school care.

Government schools

All children of school age in Victoria have the right to go to their local primary school.

Many children with a disability go to government primary schools and there is support available to facilitate this.

Government specialist schools

There are over 90 government specialist schools across Victoria for students with a disability.

Specialist schools have criteria which must be met before you can enrol. Students who live within the school's designated transport area are eligible for travel support to the school.

Independent and Catholic schools

There are many independent and Catholic schools throughout Victoria as well as a small number of specialist independent and Catholic schools.

If you are likely to send your child to an independent school, keep in mind that there may be a long waiting list.

Dual enrolment

Some children enrol at both a local primary school and a nearby specialist school 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 mainstream and specialist schools have to offer.

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.

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.

School options

- Government schools
- Government specialist schools
- Independent and Catholic schools
- Dual enrolment
- Home schooling
- Distance education

Distance education

In Victoria, students from prep to Year 6 can access distance education if they meet the eligibility criteria in one of four categories: Distance, Medical, School referral, and Traveller.

Some students may also be eligible for Assistance for Isolated Children which helps families with a primary or secondary student who is unable to attend an appropriate State school on a daily basis because of geographic isolation or because the student has a disability or special health-related or education need.

Choosing a school

School open days and tours will give you a general feel for a school and some idea of the facilities.

You will get a sense of whether the school is right for your child from the welcome you receive, how staff interact with parents and children, the approach of the principal and the responses to your questions.

Make an appointment with the principal to discuss how the school can support your child. You may also want to talk to the kindergarten teacher about how to share important information about your child with the school.

“Funding is essential to provide the support that my child needs at school, but just as important is a positive approach, which flows from the principal through to all staff and students.”



Support for children with a disability at school

There is a range of support for children with a disability at school.

Student Support Group

A Student Support Group (SSG) is a co-operative partnership between the parent/carer, school representatives and professionals to ensure co-ordinated support for your child's educational needs.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have developed guidelines for Student Support Groups. You should familiarise yourself with the guidelines so that you understand the educational planning processes.

Individual Learning Plan

The Student Support Group should develop an Individual Learning Plan that identifies your child's learning needs.

Members of the group should agree on your child's learning goals and any changes that need to be made to the curriculum.

The Student Support Group should meet regularly to monitor and evaluate your child's Individual Learning Plan.

Student Support Services

In government schools, there is support available from Student Support Services Officers such as guidance officers, psychologists, social workers, visiting teachers (for students with visual, hearing and physical impairments), speech pathologists and curriculum consultants.

Funding for students with a disability

There are specific funding programs for students with a disability in school. The level of funding available varies between government, Catholic and independent schools.

Ask the school what funding is available and how to apply.

It is up to the Student Support Group to plan how these funds are used and to make recommendations to the principal.

Language Support Program

In government schools, the Language Support Program supports schools and teachers to improve the oral language skills of students with a severe language disorder.

It aims to create a link between classroom programs and the intensive speech and language programs provided by speech pathologists.

Commonwealth Special Education Program

The Commonwealth Special Education Program is a one-off grant for children who are unable to attend school due to a severe disability. It is used to supplement the cost of accessing home-based educational programs and assist with strategies to help children get back to school.

Ask for more information

This is only a summary of information about support for children with a disability at school. Ask the schools you are interested in for more information about their eligibility criteria, processes and resources.

For more information

'Welcome to school booklet'
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.education.vic.gov.au

Schools Online - a listing of all Victorian government schools and links to Catholic and Independent schools
www.education.vic.gov.au/schoolsonline

Program for Students with Disabilities
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/disabil/index.htm

Catholic Education Office
www.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au

Association of Independent Schools
www.ais.vic.edu.au

Association for Children with a Disability
Phone 9818 2000 or
1800 654 013 (rural callers)
www.acd.org.au

Association for Children with a Disability

This series of Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets was developed by the Association for Children with a Disability in partnership with the Victorian Government's Office for Children and Early Childhood Development.