

Supports for students with a disability

There are resources and programs to support students with a disability at school.

Once the Student Support Group has a good understanding of your child's strengths and needs through the development of the Individual Learning 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. Supports can include Student Support Services Officers, the Program for Students with Disabilities, Language Support Program and the Schoolcare Program.

Student Support Services Officers

Student Support Services Officers (SSSOs) are a group of professionals employed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to provide support to students and schools.

SSSOs aim to enhance a school's ability to improve student outcomes and provide continuity of care to all students, and assist in the development of Individual Learning Plans and appropriate supports. Student Support Services Officers can include:

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



The Student Support Group will make recommendations about the supports required to implement your child's Individual Learning Plan and the principal will make the final decision.

Students Support Services Officers provide services to students at a number of schools and their services are often in high demand.

Referrals to Student Support Services Officers can, and should, be made as soon as your child's needs are identified. In mainstream government primary schools, your child may be referred by the principal. Some government specialist schools have their own therapists on staff.

Program for Students with Disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) is available to schools to support the education of eligible students who have a moderate to severe disability.

Principals can help identify eligible students 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 Handbook, which is available from the school or the DEECD website (see page 30).

If your application is successful decisions can then be made about resources to support the Individual Learning Plan. Support can include specialist staff, professional development, education support staff, specialised equipment and building modifications.

The level of funding allocated to the school to support your child through the Program for Students with Disabilities is not restricted to education support staff hours. This is just one of the supports available.

The Student Support Group should carefully consider the best way the school can meet all of your child's needs and specifically when education support staff would most benefit your child, and for what activities.

Specialist staff

Specialist staff can be a staff member at the school, a Student Support Services Officer, Integration Co-ordinator or someone employed using funds from the Program for Students with Disabilities.

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 that professional support as part of the Program for Students with Disabilities and providing this recommendation to the principal.

If a number of children at the school need occupational therapy, it may be possible for an occupational therapist to see all the children on the same day and to negotiate a reduced fee, or two or three children could be seen together in a group session if they have similar needs.

Professional development

The Program for Students with Disabilities allocation can be used to fund targeted professional development for teachers and other school staff. For example, it could be used to educate staff about alternative communication methods or training about care procedures. You can also play a role in educating school staff using the skills you have acquired from caring for your child every day.

Education support staff (previously known as School Support Officers or integration aides)

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

- support with class work, including reading, writing, maths, 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, for example to learn how to use aids or equipment, or to support speech therapy goals
- preparation of teaching materials such as social stories



Program for Students with Disabilities Handbook

Section 4.3 Resources provided to the school

The Student Support Group should carefully consider the best way the school can meet all of your child's needs and specifically when education support staff would most benefit your child, and for what activities.

Education support staff can work with a student individually or in a small group where the children have similar skills. Increasing independence is a goal for all children at school. As your child progresses, they may be more able to do some work on their own or with minimal supervision.

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.

Grants are available to assist schools with the purchase of major items of essential specialised equipment for students with a mild visual impairment who are not eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities but for whom specialised items of equipment are essential for them to access the curriculum. For more information contact the DEECD office in your region (see page 31).

Building modifications

If building modifications are required, the school can apply to the Regional Facilities Branch of DEECD for funding modifications such as ramps and toilet facilities. These should commence as soon as possible as they may take some time.

Language Support Program

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 to support students in the classroom. This includes an understanding of the components and development of oral language, a screening procedure to identify students with a language disorder and teaching strategies to address the difficulties identified.

These strategies are implemented in the classroom and teachers are also given a detailed list of resources. Students who are considered to have a 'severe language disorder' may be referred to a speech pathologist.

Schoolcare Program

The Schoolcare Program is a joint project between DEECD and the Royal Children's Hospital that provides additional support to school staff who teach students with complex medical needs.

Examples of referrals to the Schoolcare Program might include students who need tracheostomy care, tube feeding or students who are incontinent.

The aim of the Schoolcare program is to make sure the complex medical care needs of a student are met in an appropriate environment. Talk to the principal if you think your child could benefit from this program. Referrals to the Schoolcare Program are made by the principal.

Supports should only be considered after the Student Support Group is satisfied that all of your child's needs have been identified, an Individual Learning Plan has been developed, and there has been detailed planning to establish the most appropriate level and type of support to ensure your child has the best school experience possible.