

The Student Support Group

The Student Support Group is a group of people who come together to form a co-operative partnership to support students with additional learning needs.

A Student Support Group is available to any student with additional learning needs. This is independent of funding from the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD). Members of the Student Support Group can include:

- parent/s
- class teacher
- principal or nominee
- a parent advocate (if requested)
- the student (where appropriate)
- consultants as agreed by the group may also be invited

All members of the Student Support Group should have particular areas of expertise. As a parent and member of the Student Support Group, you will have valuable knowledge to contribute about your child.

Other members of the group will each have their own perspective and expertise and may offer different ideas about how to plan for your child's school experience. Listen to all ideas with an open mind.

Good communication between all members of the Student Support Group will contribute to a shared understanding of your child's abilities and needs.



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Student Support Group Guidelines

Information about the aims and responsibilities of the group are detailed in the Student Support Group Guidelines published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).



Student Support Group Guidelines

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/default.htm

Responsibilities of the Student Support Group

It is the responsibility of the Student Support Group to:

- identify the student's needs
- determine any adjustments to the curriculum
- develop an Individual Learning Plan
- discuss the plan with teachers and provide support to implement the plan
- provide advice to the principal about the additional education needs of the student and the resources required to meet these needs
- review and evaluate the student's program on a regular basis, such as once per term, and at other times as needed

Individual Learning Plan

One of the first tasks of the Student Support Group is to develop an Individual Learning Plan for your child.

Once the plan is developed, the group should meet regularly to make sure there is a co-ordinated approach to your child's program. There may also be times when the group meets more often. For example, if there are changes in your child's condition or situation.

The Student Support Group will meet to monitor your child's progress against the Individual Learning Plan, make changes as needed, and to plan ahead.

Student Support Group meetings are also an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate your child's progress.

Positive feedback to the Student Support Group lets them know what things are working well and contributes to the group's understanding of your child as a learner.

Schools have a responsibility to support students to behave appropriately.

Your child's health and well-being

The focus of the Student Support Group is not limited to the academic needs of the student. Safety, access, behavioural, medical or personal care needs can be addressed through care plans that support the Individual Learning Plan.

Examples of health care plans include asthma, anaphylaxis or epilepsy care plans. These are often developed in consultation with a doctor or therapist and must be done with written permission from parents. Referrals to Student Support Services Officers, such as speech therapists, also require written permission from parents.

Planning by the Student Support Group provides an opportunity to identify staff skills and training requirements, responsibility for tasks, storage of medication and care supplies, a private area for personal care and anything else required to meet your child's needs. Keep the school up to date with any changes to medication and care plans and make sure you complete any necessary forms.

Student behaviour

Schools have a responsibility to support students to behave appropriately. 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.

Student Support Group meetings

Before the meeting

Being well prepared for Student Support Group meetings means that you can go in feeling confident and self-assured. Everyone participating in the Student Support Group can contribute to the agenda for the meeting. Usually the parent will contact the convenor of the meeting, such as the principal or nominee, with specific items they want to discuss.

If you need support at a Student Support Group meeting, organise an advocate or friend to go with you. Discuss what is on the agenda and what outcomes you are seeking. Let the Student Support Group know before the meeting if you are bringing an advocate or support person with you.

There will be regular items on the agenda such as reviewing the Individual Learning Plan. Planning for events such as school camp should be identified early in the year so there is time to plan for specific tasks. Additional planning may be needed for events such as surgery that may require changes to your child's support needs. Identifying these early will ensure that the Student Support Group can support your child effectively.



Student Support Group Guidelines

Section 4.5 Parent/Guardian/
Carer(s) Advocate

At the meeting

In addition to the teacher, there should be a designated chairperson (usually the principal or nominee) who ensures that accurate minutes of the meeting are taken. The meeting should follow the agenda that has been given to all members of the group. If you have other issues that you want to discuss, you can add these to the agenda at the start of the meeting.

There may be times when you are willing to accept a compromise, but if you feel strongly about something don't be afraid to speak up. Give your reasons and if possible offer some solutions. Remember that as a parent, you have valuable knowledge about your child to contribute to the group.

After the meeting

By the end of the meeting there should be a written summary or plan of agreed actions. This should include the issue, action, person responsible and when the action is to be completed. You can ask that the agreed actions be read back to the group at the end of the meeting. Relevant actions should be incorporated into the Individual Learning Plan.

All members of the group should receive a copy of the minutes from the meeting. It is the responsibility of the Student Support Group to make recommendations to the principal, and it is the principal's decision whether to accept the recommendations. If you disagree with the principal's decision you can raise your concern with the school (see page 23).

Sample Action Plan

Issue	Action	Person responsible	When
Difficulty with communication skills	Referral for speech therapy	Principal	26 February
Classroom accessibility for the following year	Consultation with occupational therapist	Classroom teacher	15 August

Tips for preparing for Student Support Group meetings

- Read the minutes from the previous meeting and make a note of actions that have been done and those that require follow up.
- Review your child's Individual Learning Plan and how it is progressing. Look back through the communication book to refresh your memory.
- Think about all aspects of school life for your child and identify any issues that you want to discuss, for example, safety, equipment, therapy, academic, social or personal care needs.
- Think about the term ahead and identify any special events that require planning, for example, school camp or swimming lessons.
- Make a note of anything that has changed at home that the school might need to know about.
- Prioritise the issues you want to discuss in case there isn't enough time to raise them all.
- Think about what outcomes you want from the discussion.
- Ask that your discussion items be put on the agenda and circulated to all members of the group.
- If you are taking an advocate or support person with you, give them advance notice of the meeting.
- Celebrate achievements and acknowledge what is working well.

Keeping the minutes from previous Student Support Group meetings and copies of Individual Learning Plans can be useful during times of transition, such as moving schools or preparing for the following school year.

Follow up

While you may informally hear from the teacher about how the agreed actions are progressing, the next Student Support Group meeting is when you will formally review progress. It is also an opportunity to discuss why some decisions haven't progressed and how to move these forward.

The Student Support Group should continue to meet regularly, for example, once per term, to review and adjust the Individual Learning Plan. A plan is only as good as the actions that follow. Don't be afraid to ask why something isn't happening.

Keeping records

It's a good idea to keep an ongoing record of what is happening at school. Good record keeping is sometimes a skill we take for granted. If you can, sort and store relevant information during your child's school years so you will have an instant history to refer back to.

Keeping the minutes from previous Student Support Group meetings and copies of Individual Learning Plans can be useful during times of transition, such as moving schools or preparing for the following school year.

Having all of this information together can also make it easier to clarify things in the event of a misunderstanding or miscommunication.