

Choosing a school



Choosing a school for your child with a disability takes time. Children cannot be refused enrolment in a school because of their disability.

What school options are available for children with disability?

The majority of children with disability in Victoria attend a mainstream school.

Mainstream schools include primary and secondary schools and they can be Government, Catholic or Independent schools.

Other options include special schools. Special settings can be standalone schools or separate units that are located at mainstream schools. Some families choose home schooling or distance education.

Schools cannot discriminate against children with disability and the Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Standards for Education mean children cannot be refused enrolment in a school because of their disability.

Government schools may have 'zones' or 'designated local school areas'. These define the physical area the school will accept enrolments from. Schools can let you know about the zones that apply to their school. Children with disability have the right to go to their local government school.

What things should I look for when choosing school?

School environment

Visit different schools to get a sense of the different environments and to see how inclusive they are of students with disability. Most schools have open days once a year but you can also ask to visit the school at other times. You may want to visit a school more than once when you are close to making a final decision.

Look around the school to get a sense of its size, physical environment, and the layout and accessibility of the classrooms, grounds and facilities. If physical access is a concern for your child, discuss this with the principal as early as possible to allow time for any building modifications that might be required.

Meet the principal and staff

Principals strongly influence how their school approaches the inclusion of students with a disability. Make a time to speak to the principal so that you can get a sense of how well the school will be able to meet your child's needs.

The skills and approaches of other school staff will also affect how well a school will work for your child. Some schools have a staff member responsible for supporting students with disability. Ask the principal if there is someone in this role and if you can speak to them.

You should feel comfortable to ask as many questions as you like, such as how many students with a disability they have at the school and how students are included in all school activities.

Questions to ask could include:

- How would the school meet your child's medical, personal care or physical access needs?
- How would the school meet your child's learning needs and what supports they could provide?
- How has the school supported other students with disability?
- What systems does the school have in place for planning, monitoring and adjusting the learning and supports for students with disability?
- What is the school's approach to supporting positive student behaviour, including for students who might need additional support in this area?
- Are there school buses or other supports for travel to and from school?

Be upfront about your child's needs

The aim is to choose a school that will work for your child, hopefully over many years. So it's important to be open and upfront with the principal or other staff about your child's needs, and what you are looking for in a school.

Encourage them to give you open, detailed responses that will help you to make the right decision for your child and family. If the school seems to be a good match for your child, this discussion will also enable the principal to begin planning supports and applying for any additional funding.

Talk to other families

While it can be helpful to talk to other families from the schools you are looking at, keep in mind that children's experiences at the same school can vary and that schools can change over time.

What if my child is not offered a place in our preferred school?

Schools cannot refuse your child's enrolment due to their disability, if your child meets all the school's enrolment criteria.

If your child is not offered a place at your chosen primary or secondary school but the reasons are unclear, first speak to the principal or enrolment officer. Ask them to put in writing the reasons for the decision not to offer your child a place. You can appeal the decision by contacting the school.

Useful links

The Australian Schools Directory

<https://www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au/>

Find my School

<https://www.findmyschool.vic.gov.au/>

Related topics

Starting primary school

<https://www.acd.org.au/starting-primary-school>

Student Support Groups

<https://www.acd.org.au/student-support-groups>