



Down Syndrome  
Victoria

Supporting Victorian families since 1978

# Transition To Primary School



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# Introduction

## Key considerations for your child and family

1. Being a regular member of your community
2. Making choices
3. Developing abilities
4. Being treated with respect and having a valued social role
5. Growing in relationships and having friends
6. Looking to the future – employment and independent living

This booklet is designed to help you work through the decisions you need to make about schooling.

The key is to look at what you want for your child and family.

## Have a vision: what do you want from schooling?

1. Remember that you know your child best.
2. Be prepared to work as a member of a team to get the best outcomes for your child.
3. Be confident that any decision you make will be the right one at that particular time given what you know.
4. Realise that no decision is set in stone, re-evaluate as needed - you can always change schools if circumstances change.
5. The right school is one where you and your family feel accepted.



# Your legal rights

The most important pieces of legislation that you need to be aware of are:

1. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992
2. Disability Standards for Education 2005

Since March 2005, all education and training providers, in every state and territory, have been legally required to ensure that all students are able to access and participate in education and training on the same basis.

The Standards say that education providers must consult and make reasonable adjustments.

# Decision Flowchart

## School system

- Government
- Catholic
- Independent
- Home based

## Working with the school

- An effective partnership
- Communication
  - Individual education plan
  - Advocacy, negotiating

## Family situation

- Siblings
- Work
- Location
- Financial considerations
- Religion

## The First Day

- Prepare your child

## Your child

- Needs
- Strengths

## What to do after you have chosen a school?

- Enrol
- Transition program
  - Engage DSV Education Support Service

## How do you find the right school?

- School visits
- Websites
- Resources
- Other parents
- Support personnel

## What are you looking for?

- What is your vision for your child's future?

# Considerations and Placement

Some of the things to consider when making a decision about which of the systems you will look at are:

- religious beliefs
- philosophy on education - private or public schools, same sex or coeducational
- financial cost
- safe environment
- location
- family

Each family will have their own views and so it is important to find a school that is a good match for your child.

## Possible placements for your child

Irrespective of cognitive ability all children are eligible to attend a mainstream school.

### Mainstream

This is a regular classroom that is open to all students and has a comprehensive curriculum. It caters for differences within the class. The teacher is required to provide work that is at appropriate levels for different groups within the class as well as whole class activities. Mainstream schools have access to regionally based support services including psychologists, speech pathologists and visiting teacher services.

### Special setting

Dependant on a child's level of cognitive functioning, options may include a special school or special developmental school.

### Dual Placement

Dual enrolment comprises attendance at a mainstream school and special school.

### School Systems

There are four schooling system possibilities for your child – government, Catholic, independent and home-based.

The following websites provide further information about each system.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
[education.vic.gov.au](http://education.vic.gov.au)

"Every child from Foundation to Year 12 is guaranteed a place at their local public school." To start Foundation, the first year of primary school, your child needs to turn five by 30 April of that year. Your child must be at school in the year they turn six, which is the compulsory school age.

All schools have their own website.

The principal will arrange a meeting at which an Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ) will be completed. Your child's abilities will be assessed in various areas including Mobility, Fine Motor Skills, Expressive Language, Receptive Language, Behaviour, Safety, Hearing, Vision, Self-Care, Medical and Cognitive Skills. The submission includes an individual learning plan. Children with Down syndrome establish eligibility under the area of cognition. A summary of this questionnaire is then forwarded to the Department of Education and Training and results in your child's school receiving funding to support your child.

## Use of funding

The school Principal signs off on how funding should be allocated for the support of the student. The majority of funding is usually used for the employment of an Education Support Officer to support your child's program in the classroom. Other uses may include paying for outside consultancy such as the Down Syndrome Education Support Service.



## CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION OF VICTORIA [cecv.catholic.edu.au](http://cecv.catholic.edu.au)

You do not need to be a Catholic to attend a Catholic school.

Selection criteria will be displayed on individual school websites.

If you choose a Catholic school then it is important to put your child's name on the waiting list as early as possible.

A similar process of interview, assessment, reports, writing of individual learning plans and submission to obtain funding is followed by Catholic schools.

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA [is.vic.edu.au](http://is.vic.edu.au)

This website provides information about the independent school system.

You can then go to each school's website to find out information about that particular school.

Each school has its own philosophy and enrolment procedures.

You don't need to follow a particular religion to enrol in most independent schools.

If you are thinking of choosing an independent school then it is important to put your child's name on the waiting list as early as possible.

In 2014 the funding arrangements for independent school changed. The funding they previously received has been replaced by increased recurrent funding to each school which includes a loading for students with additional needs.

## HOME SCHOOLING [education.vic.gov.au/school/ parents/needs/pages/ homebased.aspx](http://education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/needs/pages/homebased.aspx)

This DET website has information about home schooling, the legal requirements, registration, the curriculum range, and assessments required as well as a parent information booklet.



# What do I look for in a school?

When you are visiting schools you are doing two things:

- Collecting as much information as you can to get a good idea of whether this school will be able to provide a great education for your child. Go with a list of prepared questions
- Trying to get a feel about whether this school is a positive and welcoming place to be

It is important that you try to talk to the teacher as well as the Principal and the office staff.

Ask if you can arrange a visit to see the school and classroom.

Attitude of the school towards additional needs is the most important factor for you to consider. The best decision is one which is best for ALL the family.

## The key things that you are looking for are:

- School staff with a **positive attitude**
- Staff willing to be part of a team approach
- Staff willing to seek training

# I have chosen a school - what do I do now?

## Enrol

There will be paperwork to fill in, documents to be provided (particularly a letter of diagnosis).

You may need to confirm the place, and potentially pay a deposit.

## Consider extra supports

Meet with the school to consider:

- Funding and support
- Assessments
- Extra supports and equipment
- Transition program

Keep all paperwork in a file so that you can find it easily and refer back to it if needed.

## Transition program

Each school should prepare and implement a transition program. Ensure you are aware of allocated dates and times to attend.



# Getting your child ready for school

## Prior to the school year

1. Show your child the school environment the year before school starts. Take photos of the classroom, playground, office, library, and assembly areas. Then you can look at the photos and talk about what happens in each of these places over the holidays. Visit the playground over the holidays.
2. Use a countdown calendar which the child marks off. Use photos (including the school and new classroom teacher) on the calendar for important occasions.
3. Organize reciprocal visits between pre-school and primary school. Participate in the school transition program.
4. Does your child recognize their written name? If not, mark all possessions with something that they will recognize as their own.
5. Make your child as independent as possible. Let them practise getting dressed/undressed, uniform trials, opening food containers, putting things in and out of their school bag.  
  
Do they know which food is intended for recess and what is for lunch? Think about having two containers.  
  
Pack food that they can open independently.
7. Teach your child to drink from a water fountain. If you give them a juice pack then puncture the plastic wrap on the straw so they can take it out easily. If they have a drink bottle with a screw top, teach them to open and close it.
8. Put a pull ring or 'grip toys' on zips.
9. If you know who is going to teach your child next year get to know them in advance and discuss the start of the year. Give them a one page profile or booklet about your child.

## During the school year

10. Establish regular communication with the class teacher and aide (if applicable). You need to know what is happening so that you can talk to your child about their day. A communication book is a good idea so that you can swap information between school and home and back to school.

Remember that your child's teacher may feel apprehensive and ill equipped to teach a child with Down syndrome. Give them time to adjust and get to know your child as an individual (at least the first half of the first term). Let them know about the DSV Education Support Service.

11. Your child will learn to become independent more easily if you are not there. However, you should volunteer your time as you would for any of your other children.

If your child is happy to go to school, be pleased and remember that the learning process takes time.

Don't overload your child after school as they need to relax and play the same as any other child.

The success of your child's schooling depends on open communication between you, your child's teacher and any other professional involved in your child's education.



# How do I work with the school?

## An effective partnership

An effective partnership starts with good communication, sharing of knowledge, and being able to work towards a common goal.

## Communication

It is really important to have open communication between school and home.

At the beginning of the school year (or before) it is useful for parents to provide the teacher with an information snapshot of their child.

Some parents prepare a one page profile and others prefer to provide a booklet of information.

Whatever you choose make sure that it indicates what the child is good at, what they can already do, how they communicate, and what motivates them.

During the year parents need to know what happened at school so that they can encourage their child to communicate and talk about the day.

Photos, on an iPad or phone, of moments at school or home can assist in prompting memory and developing communication.

A communication book that goes between home and school is often the easiest way to keep up with the daily details. This serves as a two way communication channel.

Talk to the teacher and work out a system that works for everyone.

It is also important to know what is happening in the school. The easiest way to do this is to read the school newsletters, talk to other parents, talk to school staff and the Principal.

## Sharing knowledge

Prepare information about your child that may be useful for the teacher to know including health issues, therapy goals

- Be prepared to answer any questions that they may have
- Share any strategies that you know work well for your child
- Provide information/resources about Down syndrome and the DSV Education Support Service
- Let the school know about any training opportunities

## Working together

- Practise school routines at home
- Set small common goals for school and home
- Establish a homework/reading routine
- Plan strategies together

## Individual Education Plan

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a program designed around each student's educational needs. It is an action plan, a statement of responsibility, and an accountability document.

An IEP should set clear, measurable and achievable goals so that everyone in the group has a sense of direction and focus, to make sure that everyone is working towards the same purpose.

This is often designed as part of the support meeting process.

Parents have a significant contribution to make and should have ongoing opportunities to participate and provide input to the development of the IEP.

An IEP should show:

- The student's current level of educational achievement and skills development
- Long-term learning and developmental goals
- Short-term priority goals
- Teaching strategies and resources to be used.

# Advocacy

There may be times when things are not going as well as you had hoped.

It is best to deal with an issue as soon as possible. Start by going to the person who is closest to the issue. Often this will be the classroom teacher or principal.

You need to be prepared with any written information, know your rights, and your options.

You may take someone to support you if needed.



# School Readiness Checklist

**Following an extended transition program below is a sample of possible goals and priorities for a foundation year student.**

- ✓ To establish a warm working relationship between the student, class teacher and education support personnel
- ✓ For the student to be happy coming to and being at school
- ✓ To establish the student's communication mode/s
- ✓ To be able to communicate their needs
- ✓ To be sensitive to the needs of others
- ✓ For the student to be comfortable in their environment
- ✓ To greet people and respond to being greeted
- ✓ To display appropriate manners
- ✓ To compliantly follow daily classroom and school routines
- ✓ To happily separate from their parent/s
- ✓ To respond to the bell, line up and come in at recess
- ✓ To move between classroom activities

Developing independence is the goal for starting school. A student with Down syndrome may need assistance to learn these skills but it's important not to create dependence.

Staff should remember to use first person language ie. "Child with Down syndrome" NOT "Down syndrome child".



- ✓ To sit and listening quietly
- ✓ To listen to the teacher and respond appropriately
- ✓ To stay in their seat / at table when required
- ✓ To have the student tackle some work independently
- ✓ To comply with requests / instructions
- ✓ For the student to willingly start and complete a task
- ✓ To establish and hold eye contact when talking to people
- ✓ To manage undoing their schoolbag zip
- ✓ To manage undoing their lunchbox, drink bottle, glad wrap
- ✓ To independently eat & drink (only your own) at appropriate times during the day
- ✓ To keep their shoes on
- ✓ To be independent with respect to toileting
- ✓ To be able to dress themselves, and to keep clothes on
- ✓ To interact appropriately with their peers inside and outside
- ✓ To develop responsibility for their own belongings
- ✓ To respect others belongings
- ✓ To respect physical boundaries inside and out
- ✓ To be aware of danger
- ✓ To turn take / share / play cooperatively
- ✓ To follow appropriate behavioral and other rules
- ✓ Same rules, expectations, consequences for ALL children
- ✓ To remember, retain the rules
- ✓ To be able to deal with anger / frustration – where to go, who to tell

# Further information

Here is where you can find more information:

Down Syndrome Victoria:  
[www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au](http://www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au)

'Transition to school' booklet and transition links under Education Support Service.

Association for Children with a Disability:  
[www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)

Booklets and tip sheets online, positive education planning resource, partnership approach.

Raising Children Network  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

Information about choosing schools, enrolling, school options, school support.





## Down Syndrome Victoria

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