ACD

Advocating for children with disability

School fact sheet

Starting secondary school



Secondary school marks the next step in your child's education and their journey towards greater independence.

Building your child's independence

As your child becomes a teenager, it's time to think about new ways of planning and supporting them in all areas of life, including school. This means including them more in decision-making. For example, having a say about what secondary school they will go to, and what will support them best at school.

As your child gets ready for secondary school planning ahead is the best way to make sure your child is well prepared and supported.

Enrolling in secondary school

Start by touring schools with your child and gathering information packs. This can start in Grade 5. Apply for your preferred schools. Schools cannot discriminate against students with disability.

Once your child has received an offer of a place, you can work with the primary and secondary schools to support your child's transition into secondary school.

Your child's Transition Statement

The primary school will put together a Transition Statement, with information about your child's strengths, needs and successful strategies to support their learning and participation at school.

The school should consult with you, to ensure the Statement is correct. Your child may also be invited to complete the 'About Me' section.

In Term 4 the primary school will send your child's Transition Statement to their secondary school. They should also send you a copy.

Transition planning with secondary school

All students with disability can benefit from transition planning, to get supports in place for their orientation and the start of school.

If your child has individual disability funding (Disability Inclusion or PSD funding) the secondary school should set up a transition meeting in Term 3.

It should include you, the principal or their representative, and relevant teaching staff, representatives from the primary school. Other people who support your child, such as allied health therapists, can be invited. Secondary school is a good time to have your child involved so they can ask their own questions and offer suggestions.

If your child does not have individual disability funding, you can request a meeting or another way to plan your child's transition. Contact the secondary school staff responsible for Year 7 transition – usually the Disability Inclusion Coordinator (or equivalent) or Year 7 Coordinator.

It is good to set up your key contact point with the secondary school at the transition meeting.

Orientation Day and transition programs

Orientation Day and transition programs help your child become familiar with the school and can reduce anxiety about what to expect.

These usually involve information packs, family information sessions (including a school tour and meeting relevant staff) and orientation day for students. Orientation Day is in early December.

Transition continues into the first few weeks of secondary school. Many schools have activities in Term 1 to help students and families get to know each other, as well as a Year 7 camp early in the year.

You can request reasonable adjustments to support your child as they start secondary school.

Reasonable adjustments for Orientation Day and transition
Reasonable adjustments that can support your child during the transition to secondary school, include:

- Support before and during Orientation Day, such as a detailed schedule, a social story, a quiet space, a contact person or a buddy on the day
- Additional school visits (sometimes offered as a small group program)
- Support from a buddy from primary school
- Information about the school: a colour-coded school map, and photos of the classrooms, library, canteen, entrances and signs, or detailed timetable for the first week
- Calendar of what's happening during the first few week of Term 1
- A detailed schedule of Year 7 camp, grouped with students they know
- Meeting teachers and setting up equipment on the student-free days at the start of term

Preparing with your child

It's ok for your child to have mixed emotions about starting secondary school. It can help to talk about what will be the same as in primary school and what they can look forward to at secondary school. If your child has an allied health therapist, they may also be able to talk through feelings and practical steps to get ready for secondary school.

Practical things you can do together include:

- Practising the transport route to and from school
- Managing books, folders and devices
- Practicing the locker combination or requesting a lock that works for your child
- Making a list of what to take each day
- Colour coding the timetable and their folders
- Talking about how much information your child wants to share about their disability with friends and teachers
- Talking about who to go to for help

You can work with your child to create an 'About Me' secondary student profile. 'About Me' is a two-page summary of how to support your child at school. You and your child can send it to their new school and keep copies in their bag for emergency relief teachers.

Once school starts
Set up a Student Support Group meeting early in Term 1 to talk about how your child is going. Continue to work on your child's Individual Education Plan, including any behaviour support and reasonable adjustments.

Options for reasonable adjustments in secondary school are different from primary school.

Examples can include:

- Assistive technology – voice recognition software, screen readers and adjustable desks
- Different assessment options – oral assessments instead of written or typed instead of handwritten
- Education support staff to act as a note taker during class
- A summary of when assignments are due
- Extra time to finish class work or projects
- Changing class schedules or locations
- Different ways to access information – adaptive or assistive technology, Auslan, multimedia, braille or illustrated text
- School support services – psychologists, speech pathologists and visiting teachers
- Specialised professional development or training for your child's teachers and other staff as needed
- A social plan for break times

If your child is eligible the secondary school will complete a Disability Inclusion Profile to assess their support needs.

Starting secondary school can be an exciting time for students and families. With good preparation you and your child can approach this time with confidence.

Useful links

Enrolling in school
https://www.vic.gov.au/how-choose-school-and-enrol

Moving from primary to secondary school
https://www.vic.gov.au/moving-primary-secondary-school-information-parents-and-carers

Free **services for families**

- **Support Line**
- **Workshops**
- **Information**
- **Peer support**