



# Supporting Diverse Learning in Catholic Schools – NSW/ACT

*A Guide by Parents for Parents*



## Foreword

***Supporting Diverse Learning in Catholic Schools – A Guide by Parents for Parents*** has been developed following my experiences with my son, Stephen, who has a disability and completed Year 12 in 2019 in a mainstream school.

All students, just like Stephen, should be able to have a quality Catholic education just like any other child if this is the desire of their parents and carers.

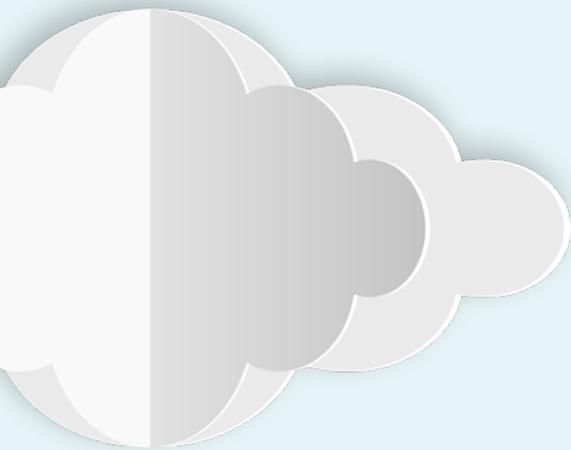
My experiences led me to discover that resources for parents of children with a disability were extremely limited and any information available depended on the school your child attended. I realised that my role in supporting the school and sharing details regarding how Stephen thought and reacted at different times was so beneficial to the school. This enabled them to better support and understand Stephen.

Reflecting over our journey I have often thought, 'I really wish someone had advised me to talk to the school about what is happening with Stephen.' My work with the Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) Special Needs Working Party has resulted in the development of this project.

I hope and pray that parents and carers of children with diverse learning needs will find this resource supportive as they navigate the school system and are encouraged to be the best advocate they can be for their child.

***Remember, the school cannot fix a problem unless you talk to the school about it.***

Cheryl Murphy  
Chair – CCSP Special Needs Working Party  
Deputy Chair – CCSP



*God.*

*We are confident that you hear us. Keep us resolute in our appreciation of each person's dignity.*

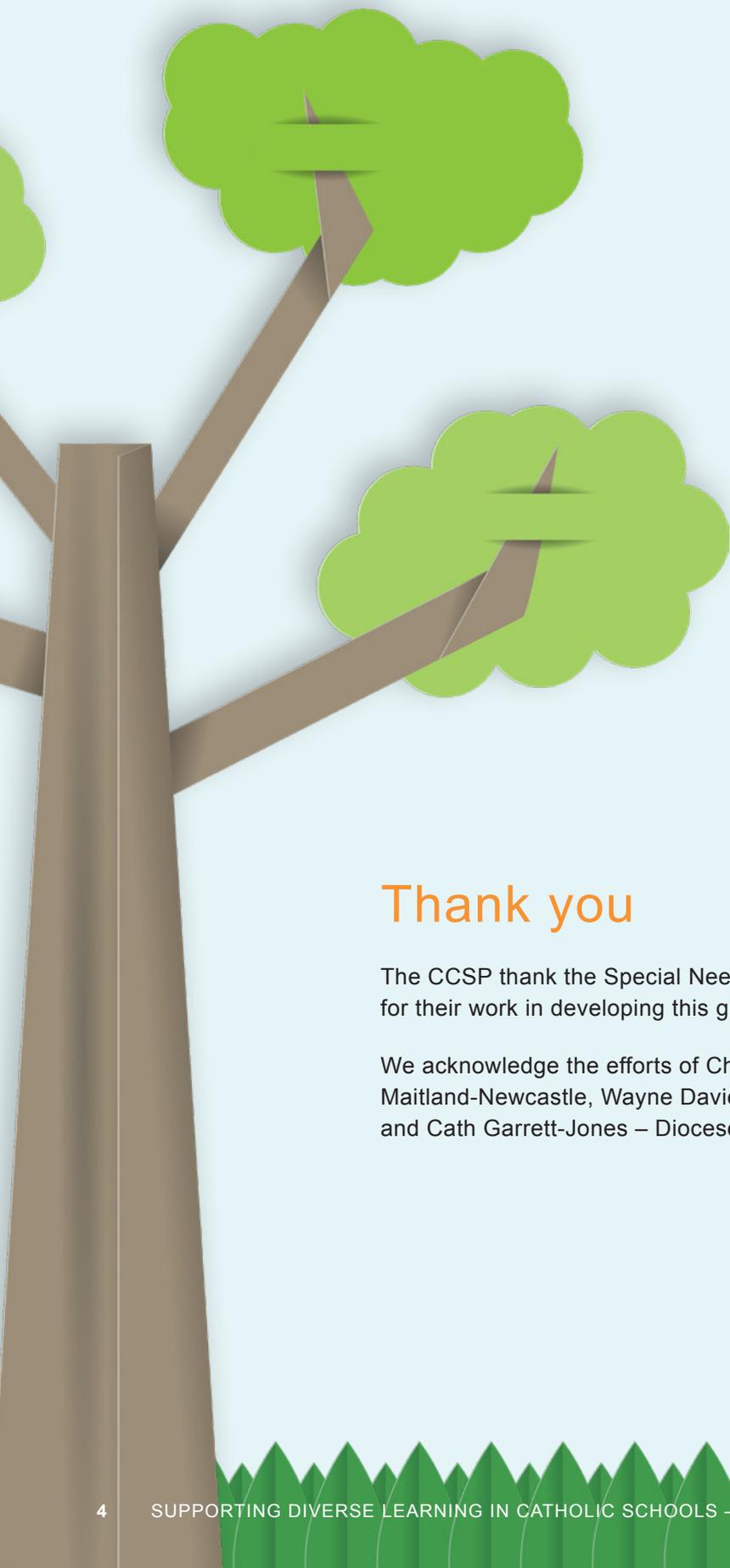
*We ask this of Jesus born of woman and the Spirit who makes no distinctions.*

*Amen.*

*"Act Love Walk" Ann L Gilroy rsj, Colleen O'Sullivan rsj,  
Anne-Marie Gallagher rsj, Judith Sippel rsj*

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional custodians – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, past, present, and emerging who long before us lived, loved and raised their children on this land.

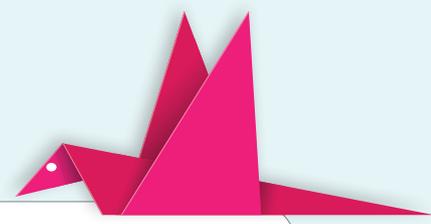
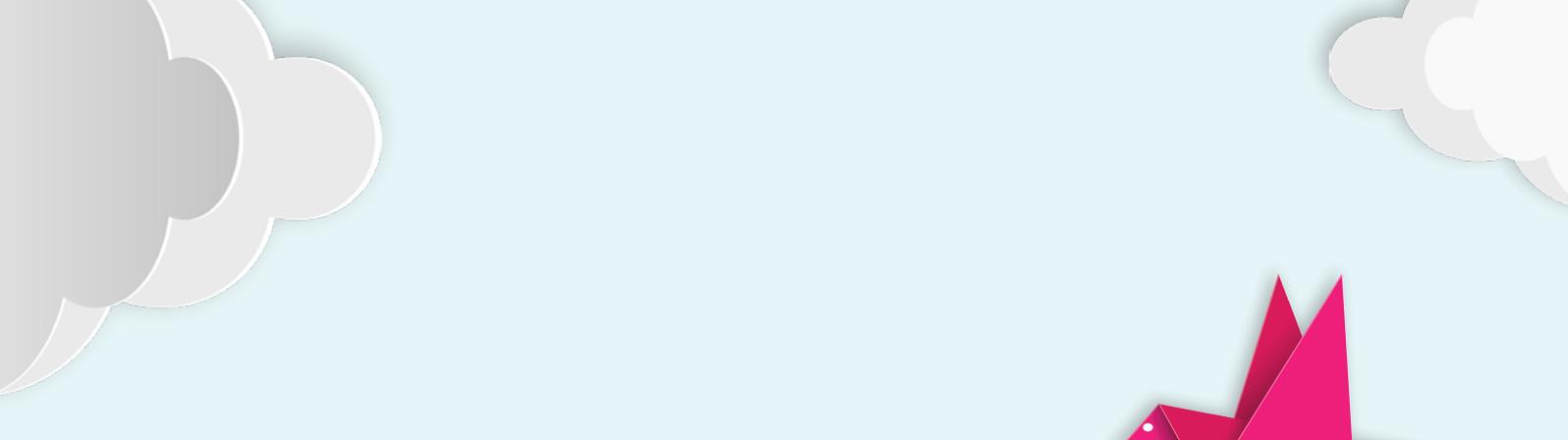
We also acknowledge all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in our community and acknowledge their physical and spiritual connection to the land.



## Thank you

The CCSP thank the Special Needs Working Party for their work in developing this guide.

We acknowledge the efforts of Cheryl Murphy – Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, Wayne Davie – Diocese of Parramatta and Cath Garrett-Jones – Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle



### **A note on language**

*Please note that we use the term **parent** throughout this guide for simplicity. We acknowledge and respect that you may be a parent, carer, guardian, kin or other family member or mentor of a child. Likewise, we use the term **child**, in place of son or daughter, interchangeably within this guide.*

### **A note on COVID-19**

*This resource has been prepared in a landscape free from COVID-19.*

*Please be mindful that health directives may impact some of the strategies and suggestions outlined in this guide.*

*You will need to ensure you are aware of and adhere to restrictions imposed by State and Federal governments in the management of COVID-19 and support schools and health professionals who will also be adhering to restrictions.*

### **A note on protecting our children and keeping them safe**

*All Catholic entities, ministries and organisations across Australia have implemented the **National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS)**. The 10 standards constitute a framework to drive cultural and behavioural change and promote accountability and transparency regarding the actions of the Catholic Church, its leaders, ministries and entities.*

*More information can be found at: <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/>*

### **A note on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and your child at school**

*Some children and young people may access funding through the NDIS for services and support to assist them reach their goals. If your child is in receipt of NDIS funding, it will be important to have conversations with the school to discuss the role of allied health professionals and their provision of support and services during school time and any policies and protocols that are in place that may impact delivery of these services and supports.*



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## Introduction

All people are unique, special and made in the image of God. Our Catholic schools are places that understand, respect and value the dignity of each child and their family and work to create a sense of belonging for all.

Catholic social teaching calls us to focus on key values that are grounded in our strong desire to protect and promote the dignity of every person. As communities, we are called to walk in unity and do what is needed to support our brothers and sisters.

The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) Special Needs Working Party has prepared this material to support and accompany families with children and young people who are living with diverse learning needs. It is our hope this information will be a source of encouragement and comfort to parents and carers who are 'part of the village it takes to raise a child'.<sup>2</sup>

Many of our children and young people have diverse learning needs ranging from those that are visible to those that are not so visible yet have an impact on an individual's learning.

All children and young people with diverse learning needs are valued in their school communities and together, through the development of a close and cooperative partnership between the school and family, we can realise our aim of improving outcomes for all our children.

As parents and carers of a child with diverse learning needs, you want to prepare your child for school. This guide offers advice from parents and carers who have 'been there and done that' in the hope it offers you some useful information and ideas to think about as you begin the school journey.

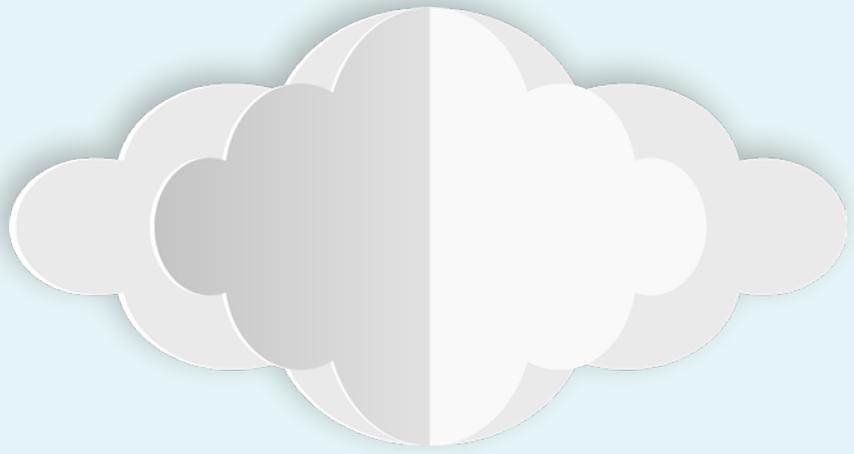


***...we have to create the material and spiritual conditions for their full development; to give them a solid basis on which to build their lives; to guarantee their safety and their education to be everything they can be...***

***– Pope Francis, Rio de Janeiro, WYD 2013***

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<sup>2</sup> African proverb



## Your Child's Right to an Education

Students with disability have a range of abilities and needs. The Disability Standards for Education (DSE) 2005 describes the legislative requirements of schools to support students with disability.

The Standards set out how education is to be made accessible to students with disability through the provision of reasonable adjustments so that they can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. Schools need to ensure these students have an equitable education.

Parents can access more information on the **Disability Standards for Education (2005)** at the following web address: <https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>

**Your Right to an Education: A Guide for educators and people with disability booklet** (developed by the National Disability Coordination Office Program) and other resources can be accessed here <https://www.adcet.edu.au/ndco/>





## Spiritual Development

The Spirit of God fills the whole world. Each person, irrespective of her or his abilities and disabilities, is created in the image and likeness of God who breathes the breath of divine life into each one. Human beings are essentially spiritual beings. Spirituality is intrinsic to our human nature.

God is love. God is already present within us, loving us and inviting us to return that love. To choose to love God is faith.

Faith is a free choice, a choice to: live in relationship with God and others; grow in awareness of God's presence in creation, in human life, in ourselves and in others; listen to the voice of God echoing throughout our world; live like Jesus; change, becoming more and more a sign of God's love in the world. To choose faith is to embrace our spiritual nature and commit to nurture it.

Many people who seek God – whatever their age and circumstance, their abilities and disabilities – seek the support of a faith community. The Spirit of God which fills the seeker's heart resonates with the Spirit of God who breathes life into the life, mission and worship of a faith community or church. When people experience God in the Church community, they are drawn to get to know the community and become familiar with its way of life. Ultimately, they may ask to become a member of the community through the process of Christian Initiation. Through celebrating the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and receiving first communion, individuals are immersed into the life of God and become full, active, responsible members of Christ's body, which we call the Church.

Preparation for Christian Initiation is fundamentally a journey of falling in love with God and of learning to live as a disciple of Jesus and a member of the Church community. Families, schools and parishes, that is to say the Church community, is charged with the responsibility of: revealing the love of God so that individuals might get to know God more deeply; sharing their experience so individuals learn how to open their minds and hearts to the Spirit of God; living as a community of disciples so individuals learn how to live as a Catholic Christian person, attuned to the presence and voice of God and committed to courageously living as Christ.

The 'program' for Christian Initiation, particularly when supporting the initiation journey of God's chosen people who live with a disability, is the life, mission and worship of the Catholic community. The task of the Catholic community is to introduce the person seeking initiation to that life and help them reflect on their experience of it, in ways that are appropriate to the individual. Any 'teaching' or 'catechesis' emerges in response to questions the seeker asks when reflecting on their experience of Catholic life. Any other 'program' is redundant.

To put it simply: if a person who lives with a disability is known to the community, loves God/ Jesus, feels safe and at home in the community and wants to be Initiated, then do it! Baptise! Confirm! Feed her/him with the bread of life!

God is love. God is already present. The task of the community is to draw attention to that and celebrate it. Such is the way of spiritual development as revealed in the life of Jesus.

# Preparing the School for Your Child

*You are the first educators of your children*

As parents and carers of a child with diverse learning needs, you will want to prepare your child for school. This guide offers advice from parents and carers who have 'been there and done that' in the hope it offers you some useful information and ideas to think about as you begin the school journey.

Make early contact with your local school at least 12–24 months before you are looking to enrol your child and ask for an appointment with the Principal and Learning Support Teacher (LST) to begin planning your child's transition to school. This is important so you know what information and/or reports you are required to have ready for the enrolment application. The school will work with you in planning to ensure they are able to meet your child's needs.

It is important for families to share as much information as possible regarding their child's areas of strength, interests and support needs at this early stage for a smooth, happy and comfortable transition to big school. In addition, research the school's website and talk with other parents who belong to the school community and gain as much information about the school as you can. Talk to your health care professionals – make sure this is the right setting for your child.

During the planning process, the following things may be considered:

- **Reasonable adjustments**<sup>3</sup> or resources they may need for your child to begin school
- External supports that help to connect your family, **health and education professionals**<sup>4</sup>
- Reports or advice that might need to be shared with the school – for example, medical reports and how recent the reports are required to be

If you are getting your child ready to start primary school you will need to talk to your child's preschool teacher, early childhood educator or any health professionals you are working with. Make an appointment with the school and discuss your child's needs with them too. Together, they will be able to help assess your child's developmental needs. Those people working with you and your child will also be able to provide reports in preparation for school. You may talk about 'school readiness'. This includes recognition and observation of skills and behaviours, including emotional maturity, social skills, language and cognitive skills, their level of independence as well as physical health and coordination.

## Why is Planning Important?

Early planning has many benefits and can ensure:

- ▶ There are no surprises for you or your child when school begins.
- ▶ The school has all the information they need to support your child's learning.
- ▶ Interruptions to your child's learning are minimised.
- ▶ Your child's starting school experience is as positive as it can be.

<sup>3</sup> <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/diversity-in-learning/special-education/adjustments>

<sup>4</sup> Includes teachers, principals, allied health professionals, specialists, GP's.

## Things to Consider in Your Planning

- ▶ Make a list of what you think the needs and possible behaviours of your child are before you see your health professional and school. Try to list them into sections or groups, for example – in the classroom, play on the floor, bathroom, recess and lunch, sport activities, assemblies (see Appendix 1).
- ▶ It is especially important that you talk to your child's health professionals and discuss ways to ensure their reports reflect your child's needs and the necessary adjustments that are required to be considered by the school.
- ▶ Speak to your health professionals to determine if they can visit the school and meet with the schools **Learning Support Teachers (LST's)**<sup>5</sup> and/or classroom teacher and/or Principal.
- ▶ Speak to the school to determine what policies and protocols are in place for allied health professionals working with children within the school. This is important to ensure appropriate space and supervision is available. Parents must also discuss seeking exemption to have children attend therapies outside of school but during school times.

## Planning Meetings at the School

This is a meeting that plans for your child's transition to school. (Different dioceses may use specific names or terms to describe these meetings.)

### WHO ATTENDS?

Contact the school prior to the meeting to identify who will be attending the meeting. The meeting will *usually* include:

- ▶ You and other family members or your support personnel/advocate if you choose to have one with you. Make sure you let the school know who will be coming with you
- ▶ School leadership e.g. Principal or Assistant Principal
- ▶ Learning Support Teacher (LST)
- ▶ Your child's new classroom teacher – if that is known.
- ▶ Allied Health Professionals (such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists) may attend if involved with the child.

### WHAT IS DISCUSSED IN THE PLANNING MEETING?

- ▶ Reports or recommendations from your child's early childhood educator or any other education professionals that are appropriate
- ▶ Reports or recommendations from medical professionals or any specialised services such as an Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist etc.
- ▶ Your child's abilities, strengths and needs and any achievable goals that are deemed appropriate.
- ▶ Any other programs or strategies that have helped your child
- ▶ What your child will need at school, such as any adjustments or extra help
- ▶ The school's orientation program and the possibility of arranging extra visits if they are required
- ▶ Identifying staff members who will coordinate the transition process for your child.
- ▶ The development of a plan detailing who will take responsibility for which action and when they need to complete it. This can be useful to keep track of tasks.

<sup>5</sup> A specialist teacher in primary schools who supports the needs of children with diverse learning needs as well as staff who teach them.

## Sharing Information About Your Child with the School

You should share any information that you think is important. The teachers will be keen to learn as much as they can about your child from you and may ask some questions that help them get to know you and your child better. Together, you may want to talk about:

- ▶ Your child's **interests, strengths or any hobbies** they have.
- ▶ Any **fears or anxieties** about starting school or any general fears such as loud noises etc.
- ▶ What the school needs to be aware of in a **health emergency** – does your child have a medical action plan prepared by their health professional? If so, make sure the school is supplied with the most current plan and you continue to provide the most updated plan if it is changed by your health professionals.
- ▶ How you feel your child's disability affects **their learning**.
- ▶ How you feel their disability may impact them taking part in **school activities**.
- ▶ If there are any strategies you feel will assist them **transition** into school.
- ▶ The details of any **programs** that may have been used in the past year and were beneficial for your child.
- ▶ Any tips to assist your child manage their **daily self-care**.
- ▶ Any strategies that may assist your child increase their **independence** and ability to manage their **self-care**.
- ▶ Your planned **travel arrangements** for school drop off and collection and any special requirements. Ensure you notify the school and your child of any changes to this routine.
- ▶ Share any information regarding your child's ability to manage **toilet breaks** independently. To support your child's independence there may be a need to adjust or modify your child's school uniform e.g. Velcro added to pants instead of a zipper, Velcro fastened shoes etc.
- ▶ Does your child need any additional assistance during **lunch breaks**? Can they manage a lunch box? Do they need a quiet space to eat lunch/recess? Make sure you advise the school of any dietary issues, allergies or food sensitivities your child may have.
- ▶ Does your child have any special requirements that can assist them to fully participate in **school sports**?
- ▶ If your child is anxious or heightened, your child may need **behavioural adjustments**. Talk to your child's teacher about a possible 'cool down' space and how your child can access this space. As your child ages, the school may implement a system that allows your child to use a pass or card to access this space. Ensure the school agrees to this and **all staff are aware of the routine**, where the child goes and who they go with.
- ▶ The best ways to **settle your child** and help them calm down or respond to instructions – does your child use sensory equipment – fidget spinners or squeeze balls are good ways to help children who need something to settle their fidgeting and assist them to concentrate in class.



### Appendix 1

***Getting ready for school...this is how I think my child will respond...***

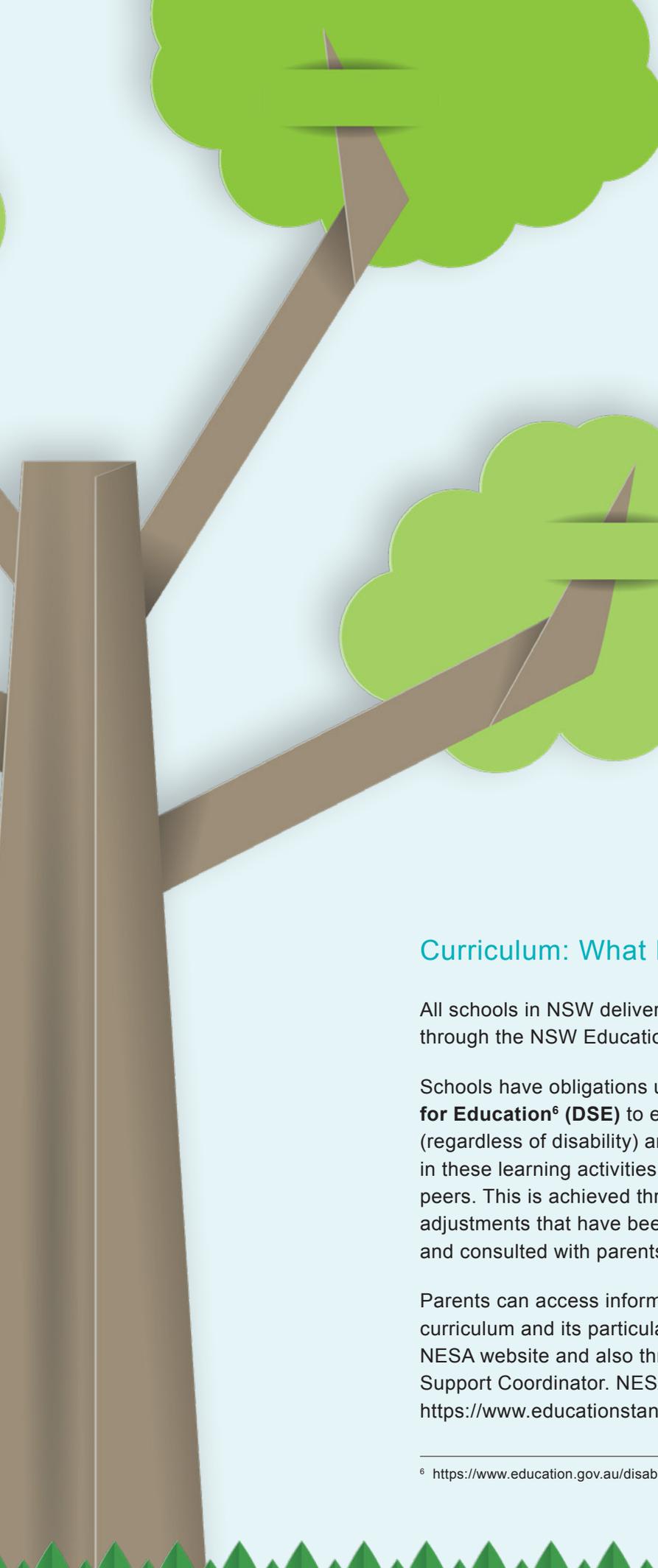
May help you in your communication with the school.



## Building a partnership between home and school

The importance of building a positive relationship with the school where mutual support and respect is fostered is critical to ensuring any issues that arise can be dealt with effectively and efficiently. It is very important that you have a good working relationship with your child's school. The school will balance the needs of your child's requirements with their additional learning needs and the learning needs of the other children in the class to create a positive learning environment for all children.

- ▶ Research the school's website and talk with other parents who belong to the school community and gain as much information about the school as you can. Talk to your healthcare professionals – make sure this is the right setting for your child.
- ▶ Make early contact with your local school at least 12 months before they are attending and ask for an appointment with the Principal and Learning Support Teacher (LST) so you know what report(s) and information you are required to have ready for them. This can have an impact on your NDIS planning and funding needs for reports.
- ▶ ADF families should check if there is a Defence School Mentor (DSM) employed at your child's school who can assist with the transition process.
- ▶ Make sure you read all the school's information before attending the meeting. Most schools have parent handbooks that contain all relevant information and school policies for you to read through.
- ▶ Prepare for meetings with the school just like you would your health professional. Be mindful of the time they are allocating you and ask if they would like to talk to your child's health professionals.
- ▶ Make a list of things you want to bring up at the meeting in order of importance.
- ▶ If you have concerns about your child's progress, make sure you know who to contact and what the best times and methods of contacting are.
- ▶ Make sure you have all medical reports the school needs and they are up to date.
- ▶ It is important for parents and carers and/or their support personnel to fully understand their child's disabilities and the correct medical terminology.
- ▶ Develop a plan for the first day of school with your teacher, e.g. is it possible to arrive at school early, so your child is settled before everyone else starts attending?
- ▶ Ask for transition visits, these can be very important to ensure a smooth transition for child and parent.
- ▶ Enquire about a peer 'buddy' or mentor for your child.



## Curriculum: What Happens at School?

All schools in NSW deliver curriculum for all students through the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Schools have obligations under the **Disability Standards for Education<sup>6</sup> (DSE)** to ensure that all students (regardless of disability) are able to access and engage in these learning activities on the same basis as their peers. This is achieved through implementing reasonable adjustments that have been collaboratively determined and consulted with parents.

Parents can access information about the K–12 curriculum and its particular requirements through the NESA website and also through their school Learning Support Coordinator. NESA website:  
<https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au>

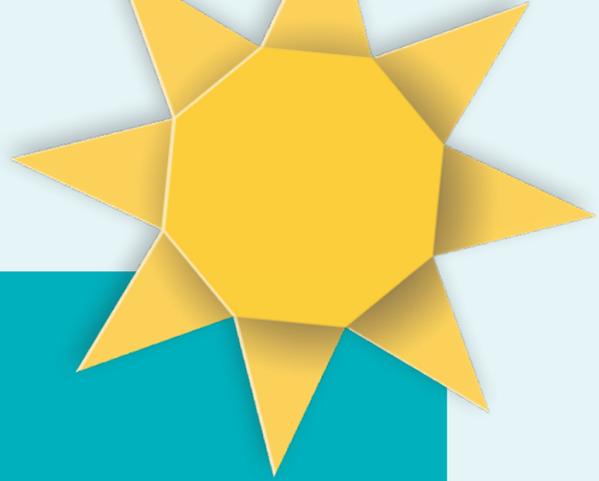
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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>

# Preparing Your Child for School

As the parent or carer, you 'set the tone' for your child. You can do this by speaking positively about the new school and the experience. Here is a chance to build some resilience and show your confidence in your child and their ability to work through this change. It may require acknowledgment that some days will be tough while others will be smooth, but you have confidence they will settle.

- ▶ Practise putting uniform items on and off and modify (within school allowances) any items which create sensory or access issues. Use Velcro fastenings and larger buttons, and consider fabric type such as wool and check if there is an acceptable alternative etc. Make sure you leave enough time to modify school uniforms if necessary.
- ▶ Practise morning and afternoon routines.
- ▶ Prepare and plan for any school excursions (i.e. changes to routine) – practise using a toiletry bag, dirty washing bag, think about medication use and talk to your child's teacher about their requirements for packaging and documentation with instructions for administration. Do 'camp at home' practice. Be honest with the school about your child's needs.
- ▶ Be positive – talk to your child about the exciting and fun experiences they will have at their new school.
- ▶ Reassure them it's OK if they feel a little unsure or overwhelmed and remind them there are lots of people who want to care for and look after them at school.
- ▶ For children commencing Kindergarten, look for books about Kindergarten and school to read together. Your local library may be able to help you out here.
- ▶ Encourage your child to dress themselves so they can practise tasks like taking their jumper on and off.
- ▶ Visit the Kindergarten classroom or travel past it on your route home. Talk about the experiences they will have at school that you know will interest them such as art, sports, music, number work etc.
- ▶ Talk to your child and establish a goodbye routine together.
- ▶ Organise holiday play dates (if possible) with friends who have children at the school and who may have a child starting Kindergarten.
- ▶ Create a routine around sleep – at this age, children need 10 to 12 hours sleep each night. Practise sticking to bedtime and wake up schedules in the weeks leading up to the start of Kinder.
- ▶ Consider school shopping together or looking at items online with your child. Be mindful of fastenings on shoes, textures and materials of clothing items and the size and weight of their school bag.
- ▶ Make sure your child can manage lunch boxes and drink bottles as independently as possible,
- ▶ Have picnics with school lunches – practise opening and closing food packages, what happens with waste? Ensure you pack lunches that can be safely kept in their lunch box without the need for a refrigerator.
- ▶ Set aside some time to talk about any worries. Monitor your child's response to conversations about school.



## Tips for getting organised

- ▶ Read over the family information the school provided to ensure everything is prepared.
- ▶ Try to avoid non-essential disruptions in the morning as you are getting ready for the day. Changes to your routine may unsettle your child.
- ▶ Plan and organise the night before. Make sure uniforms are ready, shoes and socks nearby, lunches packed, any notes signed and prepared, bag packed with a raincoat.
- ▶ Make sure ALL belongings, even each sock, both shoes and lunch boxes and drink bottles are labelled.
- ▶ Use countdown and time checks during the morning – using a kitchen timer can help.
- ▶ Have recess and lunch at the same time as the school in the holidays to prepare before school starts.
- ▶ Prepare your child recess and lunch and offer it to them in their lunch box so they can practise opening, closing and unwrapping their food for each break.
- ▶ Package recess separately to lunch to avoid them eating it all in the first break.
- ▶ If possible, make sure that your child can go to and use the toilet themselves and wash their hands. Speak to your child's teacher if they need assistance.
- ▶ Practise taking shoes and socks off and putting them on. Purchase shoes they can manage such as those with Velcro fastenings – check with the school uniform policy or staff to ensure appropriate footwear is purchased.
- ▶ Speak to the Principal if your child needs to have a variation to the uniform such as a cotton jumper rather than a woollen jumper because of sensory needs.
- ▶ Create a social story for your child prior to starting school and try to find out roughly what will happen during the school day, the school may be able to help you with this.
- ▶ Make sure that all your health professionals are on board regarding the start of the school year –talk to them about their role in preparing your child and talking about going to school.
- ▶ Consider using visuals (Appendix 6) with your child to create a visual timetable to help your child know what they need to do to prepare for school or any other activity.



# Positive Experiences at Primary School (Kindergarten to Year 6)

## The First Day

The first day at any new school, for children or young people of any age, can be an exciting time. It can also be a time of fear and anxiety that can be heightened by the unfamiliarity of the school setting. This can be particularly challenging for children and young people who are living with diverse learning needs.

Families also can be fearful and anxious for their child, seeking a smooth transition, to settle in quickly, adapt to the new environment and routines, and make friends and develop connections within the school community.

What can families do to support their child's transition into a new school?

- ▶ Talk to your child about what to expect on the first day and when you will pick them up.
- ▶ Follow the school's instructions about what to bring (e.g. sun hat, spare clothes).
- ▶ Prepare the night before, lay out clothing and help them to pack their bag.
- ▶ Encourage your child to follow your morning routine and remind them of next steps.
- ▶ Discuss with the teacher the best approach to settle your child on the first day.
- ▶ If you are having trouble separating from your child, ask the teacher or educators to help you.

- ▶ Make sure you say goodbye – disappearing quietly can cause greater distress and mistrust.
- ▶ Ensure you or their carer is on time at the end of the school day to pick up your child.
- ▶ Be enthusiastic and positive.
- ▶ At the end of the day talk to your child about what happened during the day. Ask general questions such as 'what did you enjoy doing?' or 'what made you smile?'. Try not to 'drill' them too much – they are likely to be tired and drained.

## Managing the Mornings

Make sure your morning routine sets your child up for a great day. Your child's morning can dictate how the rest of the day progresses. The most important approach to starting your child's day is to remain calm and supportive. You could use a chart with pictures (visuals) outlining the different steps for getting ready.

- ▶ Use visuals (see Appendix 6) and schedule planners to maintain routines and prompt your child to complete the tasks they need to do before heading off to school.
- ▶ Give age appropriate responsibilities. Your child may be able to empty the kitchen rubbish or compost, feed pets or wash their breakfast dishes.



- ▶ Use fridge planners or charts to list the schedule of tasks to complete. Help them to organise their school bag using a 'packing list'.
- ▶ Prepare for school the night before by polishing shoes (this might be a nightly task on a job list), organising uniform pieces, pack lunches, sign any notes and return them to their bag, make sure any library books are returned in their library bag, set aside any items that might be needed for after school activities such as dance gear, sports equipment, water bottles etc.

## School Time

- ▶ Read the school newsletter, any electronic communications and the school website and deal with any notes that come home in your child's bag. If you are not able to access the communications using technology – contact the school and ask for a copy to be sent home so you can link in with the school and parish community.
- ▶ If you are feeling anxious about your child's new school, talk to the Principal. Share your concerns and suggest ways they may be able to assist you to feel reassured.
- ▶ Consider talking to your child's teacher and school about awareness education for other students.

## If 'the wheels fall off'

- ▶ Have a look at Appendix 2 for some tips to initiate conversations with your child's teacher.
- ▶ Maintain positive relationships with teachers – ensure you only conduct appropriate conversations around your child.
- ▶ Keep channels of communication functional – how does the school want you to communicate?
- ▶ Remember – if it bothers you...it likely bothers your teacher.
- ▶ Communicate with the school if you notice lunch is (regularly) not eaten, your child's demeanour changes or they begin to develop school refusal behaviour. The school counsellor may assist here.
- ▶ Make sure you are aware of the school's policy on mobile phone use and support it.
- ▶ Be aware of the school's daily timetable – is your child avoiding anything particularly such as sport? If this is the case, contact your child's teacher.
- ▶ Share with the school any areas of strength, interest or expertise to be used as a way to connect with the child e.g. a football team.



- ▶ Set up regular sessions for communication and feedback about your child's transition and progress with the school staff involved. Communication between you and the school about your child's progress is important and enables you to engage with your child's learning and progress, see examples of work and develop a positive relationship with your child's teachers. There are formal and informal occasions for this, both face-to-face and in writing.
- ▶ Share all your concerns with the school staff. It is important you are honest to make sure the needs of your child can be discussed and the best possible setting for your child is identified.
- ▶ Use technology to make connections if you can't meet at the school. Ask if it is possible to set up virtual meetings to help develop rapport and connections.
- ▶ See if you can set up a meet and greet with other parents and classmates prior to starting school – the Parish may be able to help with this.
- ▶ Find out if the school has a 'Parent Buddy' program that allows you to make contact with a parent from the same class grade as your child so you are able to learn about routines and general information about the school and wider community.

## After School Routines

- ▶ Make sure time is allowed for your child to 'cool down' after school.
- ▶ Prepare any items needed for after school activities the night before
- ▶ Be careful not to over-schedule your child – they need time to just 'be'.
- ▶ Talk to your child's after school activity coach, leader, teacher and offer them guidance on the best way to engage with your child.



### Appendix 3

**Getting ready for after school activities...this is how I think my child will respond...** May help you in your communication with the school.



# Success at Secondary School (Years 7 to 12)

## The First Day

### YEARS 7 TO 10

- ▶ Preparation is the key to ensuring the first day runs as smoothly as possible. Ask for your child's timetable so they are aware of exactly what is going to happen.
- ▶ Check with your child's school to determine the routine for the first few days of a new school year and talk to your child about any variation in the timetable.
- ▶ Talk to your child's Learning Support Coordinator (LSC)<sup>7</sup> to ensure they are supported to manage this variation in the timetable if it is required.
- ▶ Ask the LSC whether it is possible to appoint a 'buddy' to accompany your child through the day if needed.
- ▶ Ensure your child knows where to go and who to ask to speak with if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ They should have already met their roll call/pastoral care teacher. Determine if this is the person who can be asked to check in with your child through the day.

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<sup>7</sup> A specialist teacher in secondary schools who supports the needs of young people with diverse learning needs as well as staff who teach them.



## Choosing subjects

- ▶ Parents and students should talk to the LSC regarding subject selections in Years 9–12 as early as possible. This is important to ensure parents and students are aware of and understand the processes involved in course selection as they move through high school.
- ▶ The requirements of courses as stipulated by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) require careful planning and consideration so early planning is essential
- ▶ NESA also provides advice to schools regarding curriculum options for students with disability. Parents can access this information through the NESA website and also through their school Learning Support Coordinator. NESA website: <https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au>
- ▶ As the number of students who may be continuing to Year 11 decrease make sure that your child is aware of who amongst their peers is continuing.



## The First Day

### YEARS 11 AND 12

- ▶ This can be a stressful period in your child's schooling. If they are commencing Stage 6 at a new school, contact the new school while they are in Year 10 to organise transition visits for your child.
- ▶ Speak to your child's school Principal about options to complete Stage 6 are available at the school. Regular meetings will help to keep a check on your child's progress.
- ▶ NESA also provides advice to schools regarding different curriculum options for students with disability. Parents can access this information through the NESA website and also through their school Learning Support Coordinator. NESA website: <https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au>
- ▶ Ensure your child knows where to go and who to ask to speak with if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ Your child may experience additional stress as they become more responsible for their own learning and are seen by other students as role models – increasing expectations for the student.
- ▶ Talk to your child about the increased expectations regarding uniform, behaviour, and study. Ensure they know who to talk to at school if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ Make sure your child knows what the school's expectations are when they have timetabled free periods.
- ▶ Exam special provisions: Discuss with the school their requirements for reports that the school will need to apply to NESA for disability provisions.
- ▶ Ask for a timetable of any excursions or extra visits at the start of the year.
- ▶ Encourage your child to talk to the school's Careers Adviser. They will be able to gather information about options for post-school pathways and any forums or networks that might be available.
- ▶ Year 12 students often participate in ceremonies, formal occasions and end of year graduations and activities. Talk with your child, allied health professionals and the school about what is going to happen so your teenager is not overwhelmed.
- ▶ Organisation is the key and your teenager may need more help than they did in Year 10.
- ▶ Your child may need additional help to develop good study timetables and clear assessment schedules. These will assist your child to plan and stay organised.
- ▶ Talk to your allied health professionals about the extra stress that will occur with the Trial and HSC exams and work out a plan with the school if your teenager is overwhelmed with anxiety on the day.
- ▶ Talk with your child's school about misadventure and illness documentation requirements so you are prepared if an application is needed.
- ▶ As the number of students who may be continuing to Year 11 decrease make sure that your child is aware of who amongst their peers is continuing.
- ▶ Be aware that as your child commences Stage 6, they may experience increased fatigue as a result of the increased pressure to perform at high levels in all subjects.
- ▶ Don't hesitate or wait until scheduled Parent/Teacher/Student Conferences to make contact with the school and arrange for a meeting with the Learning Support Coordinator and/or teachers if you are aware there are concerns or issues with the progress your child is making.



## Managing the Mornings

- ▶ A good routine is critical. It can be even more important than during the primary school years as you will be aiming to develop greater independence in your child.
- ▶ Try practising the **morning routine** through the holidays in the lead-up to school, to embed and reinforce the routine in your child's morning.
- ▶ Work with your child to encourage them to use their timetable to pack their school bag the night before with the books and equipment they will need.
- ▶ Ensure your child has the correct uniform prepared for each day depending on the timetable. Be aware that many schools run a two-week timetable or A & B weeks.
- ▶ A whiteboard in the bedroom is a great tool in high school as you can have **the school timetable** and the morning routine displayed on it. You may also need to set up a timetable **of assessment tasks**.
- ▶ Consider setting an alarm set on their phone for them to wake them and begin their day.

### **OK – YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY**

## School Time

- ▶ Ask the school to **identify the best person** to contact and the best way to do this (including times of the day), if you have concerns.
- ▶ Ask for regular meetings to check on your child's progress.
- ▶ It is very important that you work with your school and health professionals to determine the best way for your child to have a voice in planning discussions at secondary school.
- ▶ Building on their skills each year can help them to have greater independence and confidence in ensuring they are able to have their needs heard and met.
- ▶ Make sure that you have up-to-date reports to give to the school, especially if there are concerns going to secondary school.
- ▶ Make sure that you have discussed a timeout strategy with the school and this is clearly understood by your child when they begin Year 7.
- ▶ Be aware of the school's daily timetable – is your child avoiding anything particularly such as sport? If this is the case, contact your child's teacher.

## After School Routines

- ▶ Make sure time is allowed for your child's to 'cool down' process their day, de-stress and unwind after school.
- ▶ Make sure you set up good routines. Consider setting up a timetable that provides for free time, allocates time for after school activities and homework.
- ▶ Prepare any items needed for after school activities the night before
- ▶ Be careful not to over schedule your child – they need time to just to 'be'.
- ▶ Talk to your child's after school activity coach, leader, teacher and offer them guidance on the best way to engage with your child.
- ▶ Be mindful that as they grow and develop, they may experience increasing tiredness. Talk to your health care professional about changes in your child's routine or patterns of behaviour as your become aware of these and if they concern you.



## Backpacks and Packing

- ▶ Add a copy of the timetable to a whiteboard in their bedroom and encourage your child to pack their bag the evening before.
- ▶ Encourage your child to check off the books/resources they will need for the lessons the following day and that these are packed into their bag.

## Canteen Use

- ▶ Talk to your school contact about canteen use and the process your child will need to follow to order lunch or purchase snacks during lunch and recess.
- ▶ Talk with your child about accessing the canteen and develop a method with your school's contact person for your child to attend the canteen and purchase snacks.

## Communicating with the School

- ▶ During the early planning and transition stages, it is very important to ensure you have established a clear communication pathway and are aware of appropriate email addresses, phone numbers **and the best times to contact** staff.
- ▶ Share all your concerns with the school staff. It is important you are honest to make sure the needs of your child can be discussed and the best possible setting for your child is identified.
- ▶ Ensure you have a list of staff to be able to contact should the contact staff member be unavailable or away from school.
- ▶ If you find the pathway is not working well, contact the school and speak with the principal.

## Disability Provisions<sup>8</sup>

- ▶ Disability provisions in the HSC are practical arrangements designed to help students who couldn't otherwise make a fair attempt to show what they know in an exam room. More information can be found at: <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/disability-provisions>

## Exam Preparation

- ▶ Speak to your child's support coordinator about any exam support they may be able to offer. If your child experiences anxiety – talk to your child's health professionals too so strategies can be implemented early to support them.
- ▶ Begin conversations early about any special provisions that may be available for your child as they prepare for exams, particularly HSC exams.
- ▶ Seek advice from the school regarding NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Illness and Misadventure guidelines and the HSC.
- ▶ Exam disability provisions: Discuss with the school their requirements for reports that the school will need to apply to NESA for disability provisions.
- ▶ Talk to your allied health professionals about the extra stress that will occur with the Trial and HSC exams and work out a plan with the school if your teenager is overwhelmed with anxiety on the day.
- ▶ Talk with your child's school about misadventure and illness documentation requirements so you are prepared if an application is needed.

<sup>8</sup> NESA website: <https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/disability-provisions>

## Excursions

- ▶ Early preparation and planning for any school excursions (i.e. changes to routine) – practise using a toiletry bag, dirty washing bag, think about medication use and talk to your child’s teacher about their requirements for packaging and documentation with instructions for administration, “camp at home” practise – be honest with the school about your child’s needs.

## Homework

- ▶ Create a space in your home that allows your child to complete tasks set for homework. The space needs appropriate lighting, desk space and a comfortable chair that encourages them to complete homework.
- ▶ Encourage your child to take a break once they arrive home from school or afternoon activities and enjoy some quiet time to recharge, reflect and spend time with their family before they commence homework or home study.
- ▶ Consider using a whiteboard in their study space to display their school timetable and a homework/home study timetable (that includes after school activities). This can be used to record and assist family members to keep track of individuals activities and school tasks.
- ▶ Identify the process your child’s school uses, such as an Assessment Handbook, to communicate homework or assignments that are required to be completed. Check to see if your child’s school uses technology or an app to set and keep track of homework tasks and assignments.
- ▶ Seek the school’s help if your child becomes overwhelmed with tasks set to be completed at home. Work with your child and the school to negotiate task priority and completion dates if they are struggling getting all work completed.

## Mobile Phones

- ▶ Obtain a copy of the school’s policy or guidelines on student mobile phone use and support your child to understand them.
- ▶ Talk with your child about a prepared response should another student ask to borrow their phone. Encourage your child to respond by telling students they are unable to share their phone and suggest the student approach the office if they need to make a call.
- ▶ Talk to your health professionals and the school’s Learning Support Staff about phone use and ensure your child has a clear understanding and you support **and agree to the school’s** protocols.

## Post-school Options

- ▶ Encourage your child to talk to the schools Careers Adviser. They will be able to gather information about options for post-school pathways and any forums or networks that might be available.

## Schoolwork Organisation

- ▶ Obtain a clear list of stationery requirements for the following year. Gather all prerequisites and cover books (if required to do so – some subjects, such as Science, ask for a plastic cover as a minimum) and ensure they are clearly labelled.
- ▶ Find out if the school has a BYOD (bring your own device) scheme or you are required to provide IT for your child. Seek guidance on the specifications and talk to the school if you have any concerns providing this resource.
- ▶ Set up a space at home for your child to store all their schoolwork, books and folders, as not all books will be required each day.

- ▶ Obtain a copy of your child's school assessment handbook or access the school's app so you are aware when assessment tasks are due.

## Social Development and Friendship Skills

- ▶ Discuss with the school any support programs such as Peer Support or a Buddy program that might be available for your child when they first commence at the school.
- ▶ Find out if the school has any clubs or extra curricula activities that might provide your child a mechanism to develop friendships with others.
- ▶ Approach the school and discuss with your child's teacher or Learning Support Coordinator or Principal any issue where your child is actively excluded and seek advice regarding the strategies the school is adopting to manage this.
- ▶ Consider supporting your child to join a club or activity outside of school to expand their friendship circle. It may be Scouts, a music class, cultural group, a sporting group, Youth group etc.
- ▶ Check in with your parish to see if they have a Youth group or other youth-based activities.

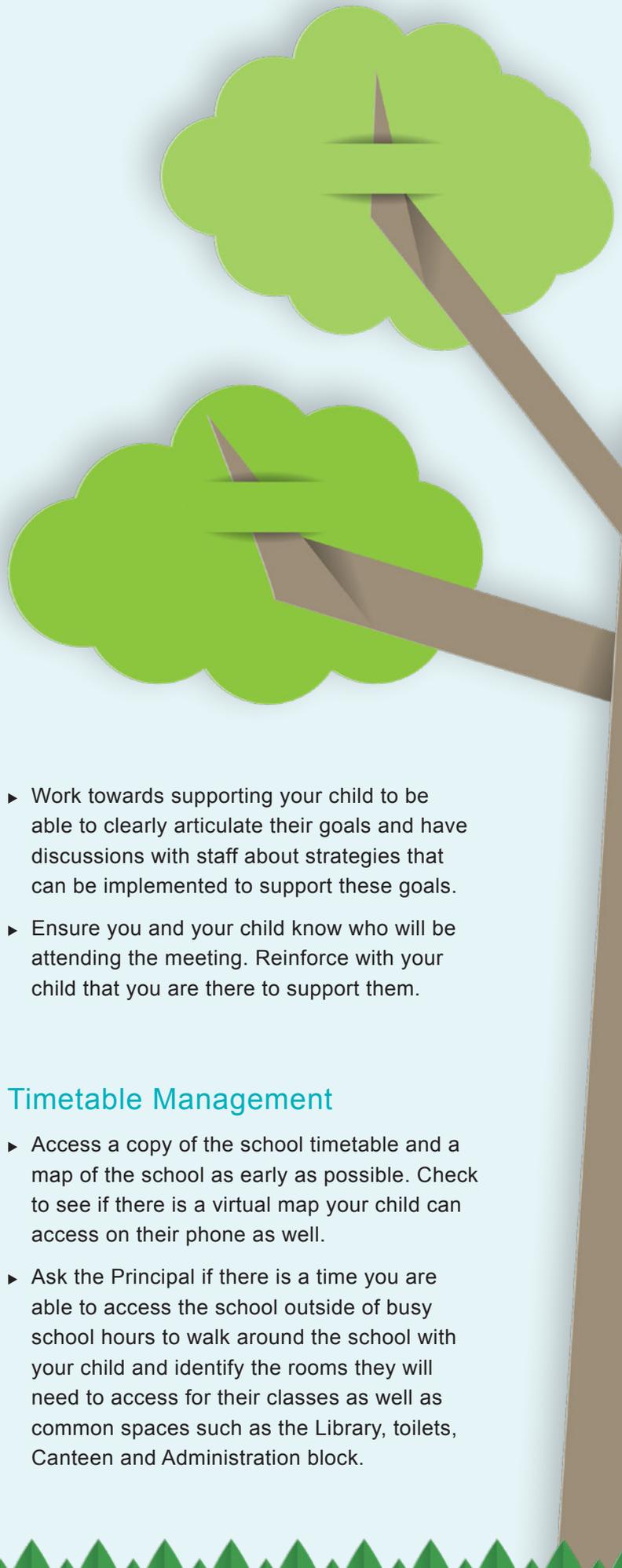
## Student Voice

- ▶ Dependent on the abilities of your child, increasing their participation in meetings at school to ensure they are having their needs and feelings heard is important.
- ▶ Include your child in meetings to assist them to increase their levels of independence and build confidence in their ability to advocate for themselves.
- ▶ Encourage your child to talk about their experiences, what they are finding difficult and how they would like to be helped.

- ▶ Work towards supporting your child to be able to clearly articulate their goals and have discussions with staff about strategies that can be implemented to support these goals.
- ▶ Ensure you and your child know who will be attending the meeting. Reinforce with your child that you are there to support them.

## Timetable Management

- ▶ Access a copy of the school timetable and a map of the school as early as possible. Check to see if there is a virtual map your child can access on their phone as well.
- ▶ Ask the Principal if there is a time you are able to access the school outside of busy school hours to walk around the school with your child and identify the rooms they will need to access for their classes as well as common spaces such as the Library, toilets, Canteen and Administration block.



- ▶ Enquire about the Canteen and lunch ordering process. Make sure you have talked through this process with your child.
- ▶ Determine and discuss with your child places they can safely use if they are seeking a quiet, calm space. Check the library opening hours and talk to your child about this.
- ▶ Set up a timetable at home that includes blocks of time for tasks or activities at home such as bedroom tidying, pet care and feeding, home chores, outdoor activities etc...and practise transitioning between these tasks.
- ▶ Ask the school if a Buddy can be appointed to accompany your child around the school to make sure they are able to get to each timetabled class.
- ▶ Load a copy of their timetable onto their phone, have several copies at home as well as a space in their bag. Keep a copy yourself in your phone or wallet that includes the times each lesson and lunch, recess breaks start and end.
- ▶ Make sure you have reassured staff you welcome their calls or communication to ensure a positive partnership develops.

## Travel Plans

- ▶ Accompany your child through school holidays and practise the bus/train/travel routes so they are familiar with the process. As much as possible, try to do this at the times your child will be using this transport.
- ▶ If your child is eligible for funded assisted transport – ensure this is discussed with the principal of the school and be aware of the parking space for pick up and drop offs.
- ▶ Enquire at the school to determine if there is the possibility of a ‘travel buddy’ – a student who also uses that transport service being appointed to support your child while in transit.
- ▶ Consider ‘role playing’ possible travel plan changes so your child is able to problem solve and manage a change in routine e.g.: if the bus or transport fails to arrive.
- ▶ Practise using a mobile phone to ensure your child is able to connect with key people to seek assistance if they have disruptions to their travel.

## Uniforms

- ▶ Ensure you have all the requirements for each subject – particularly specialist subjects where you may need aprons, PE gear, safety glasses etc.
- ▶ Make sure you label the timetable to note which uniform (academic or sport) is worn each day.
- ▶ Make sure all parts of the uniform items are labelled with your child’s name – even shoes and socks.

# References

Some information included in this guide has been adapted from the following sources:

## **Act Love Walk**

Ann L Gilroy rsj, Colleen O’Sullivan rsj, Anne-Marie Gallagher rsj, Judith Sippel rsj  
2014

Published by Trustees of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, North Sydney, NSW Australia

## **Australian Government Learning Potential**

Is your child ready for big school?

Last modified 19 April 2020

Viewed: 16.10.2020

<https://www.learningpotential.gov.au/articles/is-your-child-ready-for-big-school>

## **Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW)**

Personalised Learning Plans – Appendix 5

## **Catholic Schools Office Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle**

Student Support Unit

My Child’s Team – Appendix 4

<https://www.mn.catholic.edu.au>



## **Victorian State Government Education and Training**

Tips for starting Kindergarten

Victoria, Australia

Updated 10 September 2019

Viewed 16.10.2020

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-care-kindergarten/Pages/tips-starting-kindergarten.aspx>

## **Victoria State Government Education and Training**

Transition to primary school for children with a disability

Victoria Australia

Updated 2 December 2019

Viewed 16.10.2020

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/transsupport.aspx>

## Useful Websites

Catholic School Parents Australia: <https://cspa.schoolzineplus.com/for-parents-primary>

Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW): <https://www.csnsw.catholic.edu.au/>

Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW): <https://www.csnsw.catholic.edu.au/early-years/>

Council of Catholic School Parents NSW and ACT: <http://www.ccsp.catholic.edu.au/>

Disability Discrimination Act 1992: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00125>

National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS): <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/safe-church/national-catholic-safeguarding-standards/>



## Appendix 1: Getting Ready for School

This is how I think my child will respond...

When my child arrives at school

---

When my child's class is lining up or getting ready to go into their classroom

---

When there is a different teacher

---

When the normal morning routine changes

---

When it is raining, very hot or very windy

---

When my child is sitting at a desk

---

When my child is sitting on the floor

---

When my child needs to use the bathroom

---

When my child needs to eat recess or lunch

---

When my child has playtime

---

When my child's class is going to assembly or Church

---

When it is time for PE or sport

---

When my child's class is going on an excursion

---

## Appendix 2: Conversation Starters for Challenging Topics

**Issue:** Your child comes home and says, 'The teachers hate me.'

**Conversation starter:** Hello (Teacher's name), I wanted to let you know that I am concerned that (child's name) has come home and told me they feel that you dislike them. I know that would not be true. Can you please help me reassure them?

**Issue:** Your child comes home and says, 'I never get picked to go first or be a helper.'

**Conversation starter:** 'Is there a system in place for all children to have a go at being first (or leaders of the line etc.) (Child) is feeling they are being overlooked and I want to reassure them.'

**Issue:** Your child says that they always finish their work last and never get to have a turn using the computer.

**Conversation starter:** (Teacher's name), I love your reward system for the children when they finish their work first. Is there any way (child's name) could he be given a reward choice to access computer time?

**Issue:** Your child says the teacher never listens to me and just sends him/her out of class.

**Conversation starter:** (Child's name) has said they are being sent out of class a lot at the moment. Could you advise me what is happening so together we can address the cause? Can you also share with me the best way for (child's name) to advise you of the circumstances that caused them to behave in this way?

**Issue:** Your child says the teacher always listens to other students and believes them not me.

**Conversation starter:** (Teacher's name), could you please help me understand the process if there is a situation where there is a student and (my child) and they both have different ideas of what has happened, so we can work with (my child) to better understand the process.

**Issue:** Your child says they are always picked last by students.

**Conversation starter:** (Child's name) is feeling they are always picked last by students and this is making them feel sad. Is there any help or suggestion you can share with me to reassure my child?

**Issue:** Your child says they are never selected to be involved in the liturgy.

**Conversation starter:** Could you please advise me what my child and I can work on so that they may be considered for a role in an upcoming liturgy?



## Appendix 3: Getting Ready for After School Activities

This is how I think my child will respond...

When my child arrives at the activity

---

When my child's group or team is getting ready to start activities

---

When there is a different leader, coach or teacher.

---

When the normal activity routine changes

---

When it is raining, very hot or very windy

---

When my child is sitting on the floor

---

When my child needs to use the bathroom

---

When my child needs to eat

---

When my child feels sick or unwell

---

When they are anxious or overwhelmed

---

## Appendix 4: My Child's Team

Adapted from DoMN SSU resource

School

Resource Person	Name	Phone No.	Email Address
Classroom Teacher			
Learning Support Teacher (LST)			
Principal			
Student Coordinator			
Student Support Officer			
Speech Therapist			
Psychologist			
Other(s)			

## Appendix 5: Personalised Learning Plans<sup>9</sup>

Once the additional learning needs of your child have been identified by your school then adjustments can be made to their learning. The personalised learning plan is a key part of the Catholic education program for students who require ongoing adjustments to learning.

The personalised planning process ensures collaboration between parents, teachers, specialist support teachers and other support personnel in setting individual goals for students for the school year and are developed directly with the school for your child. set milestones and goals and are reviewed throughout the year and allow parents to better engage with their child's learning.

Things to consider as you develop this plan are:

### **PLANNING AND PERSONAL SUPPORT**

This covers your child's special learning needs/disability, records evidence and assessment of individual needs of the child, and sets out specific learning goals.

### **CURRICULUM**

This is for adjustments to curriculum that your child needs to meet the curriculum requirements, and where there is a functional impact on the child's ability to learn that requires changes to the curriculum and teaching practices to enable the child to achieve the learning outcomes as described in the syllabus documents on the same basis as their peers.

### **COMMUNICATION**

This covers the functional impact on the child's ability to receive and understand information being conveyed by others (repetitive language), and the child's ability to convey a message to others (expressive language).

### **MOVEMENT SUPPORT**

This covers your child's needs in regard to mobility and positioning, and to their ability to use the hand motor skills required to participate in learning activities.

### **PERSONAL CARE**

This covers your child's ability to independently and appropriately carry out essential hygiene routines which require intensive individual management to support participation (hygiene), eating/drinking/dietary needs which require individual management (eating and dietary), and the procedures specified in an individual health care plan which require specialised support (health care procedures).

### **SAFETY**

This covers your child's ability to independently and appropriately engage in the management strategies required to ensure they safely reason causes and effect in situations of personal safety and wellbeing and/or the safety of others.

### **SOCIAL SKILLS**

This covers your child's ability to engage in successful basic and complex interactions with people and participate effectively in the full school program in a contextual and socially appropriate manner (social competence).

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<sup>9</sup> Diocese in NSW may use a variety of terms to describe these plans. This has been adapted from a Personalised Learning Plan – Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW)

## Appendix 6: Visuals Board

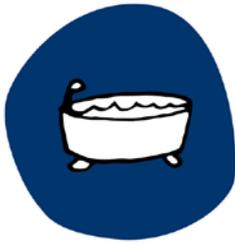
Create a table similar to the one below and print and use the visuals over the page to make a schedule for your child to help get ready in the morning or prepare for bed in the evening.

You can use a permanent marker to write in the name of the routine such as 'In the morning'.

You can laminate the board and visuals and apply Velcro dots or use "blu-tack" to keep them in place.

<i>In the Morning</i>				
				
<i>Get out of bed</i>	<i>Go to the toilet</i>	<i>Get dressed</i>	<i>Brush teeth</i>	<i>Lunchbox and drink</i>

# Visuals



*Bath time*



*Brush hair*



*Brush teeth*



*Catch bus*



*Lunchbox and  
drink bottle*



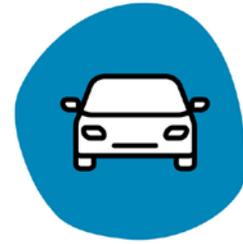
*School bag*



*Eat breakfast*



*Get dressed*



*Get in the car*



*Get out of bed*



*Go to bed*



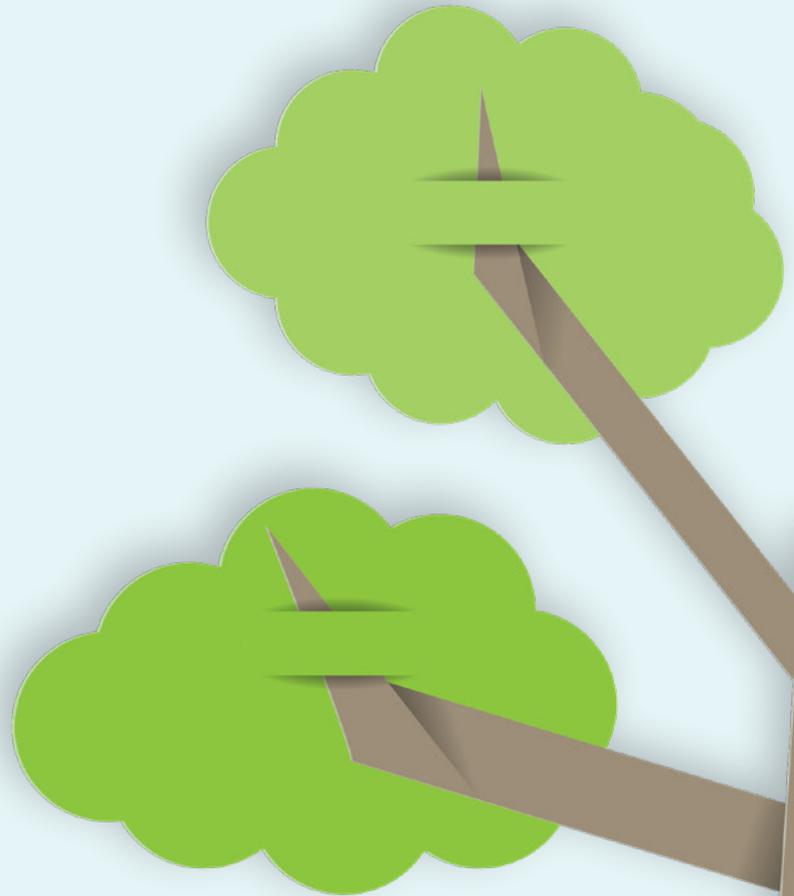
*Go to school*



*Go to the  
toilet*



*Put on shoes  
and socks*



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- **Judy Mullen** Education Officer – Student Support, CSO Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
- **Katrina Kemp** Education Officer - Developmental Disabilities, CSO Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
- **Natalie Pittman** Education Officer – Behaviour Support, CSO Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
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- **Mary Atkinson** Aboriginal Community Liaison Co-Ordinator Diocese of Wagga Wagga

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