

Choosing a High School

Advice from young people and parents

Resources



Takeaway Tips

Looking for a high school

Looking for a school that will welcome your young person and work with you to provide the best possible environment to support them in the high school years can sometimes be stressful.

The transition to high school is also often a stressful period for the young person. The change in environment, daily routine, academic structure and expectations is challenging for many students with a disability.

Start planning and preparing early! With limited places and sometimes long waitlists it can take some time to find the right school.

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.

Some things to consider when it comes to choosing a high school with your young person:

- **Start early** – Look into the different options available well ahead of time. Many city-based schools have "school expos," where prospective families can consider a wide range of schools. Most schools have web sites and offer school tours on a periodic basis.

- **Waitlist** – Put your name down on the waitlist of every school you are interested in. You never know which one will become available, and it is good to keep your options open.
- **Do they want you?** – Enrolling your child at school should not be a fight. Choose a school that wants to include your child and your family. It may not always be smooth sailing, but the school should want to have your child as part of their community.
- **Culture** – Make sure you meet the principal and other key players (e.g., the head of learning support), take a tour of the school and get a sense of what the school culture and environment is like.
- **Respect** – Choose schools who will value and respect your child, their abilities and their differences.
- **Input** – Consider schools who are willing to welcome parent / professional input when it comes to the best interests of your child.
- **Be positive** – Be proactive and informed, but still positive and polite. People will always be more responsive if they are respected.
- **Your child's rights** – know your child's rights and where to turn for help [Education - Australian Centre for Disability Law](#). This is a helpful toolkit which can be downloaded. 'Learning Together- tools to help you get the support you need at school.'

Helpful questions when assessing a High School

You should feel comfortable to ask as many questions as you like. Questions to ask could include:

- How many students with a disability they have at the school?
- 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?
- How are students included in all school activities? What reasonable adjustments are made?
- 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 and to extracurricular activities such as school sport and excursions?

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 with 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.

Some helpful resources

For young people with Autism/Disability

[Secondary schools for teens with autism, Raising Children Network](#)

[Secondary school: children with disability, Raising Children Network](#)

Collaboration and Support

Each local area district has a Department of Education Learning and Well Being Officer.

[Contact us \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)

Learning and Wellbeing Unit, Dept of Education. Support for students
[Student wellbeing \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)

[Engagement and Learning - The Centre for Inclusive Education \(qut.edu.au\)](#)

[Circles of Support, Resourcing Inclusive Communities \(ric.org.au\)](#)

[Family Advocacy](#) – Advocacy organisation with a wide range of resources including educational support for school age young people.

Creating a vision statement – Creating a clear vision statement for your student is an essential part of establishing a strong core of hopes and dreams for a future life (see resource sheet).

