

Working Together as Partners in Education



*A handbook for parents of children with additional
needs in school*

February 2014

Acknowledgement

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PREFACE

Parents and staff in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland- Newcastle, share a common goal.

Our goal is to ensure that children with special needs benefit from an education that includes quality learning opportunities with expectations that consider each child's individual needs.

We are committed to the following philosophy of inclusion as our guiding principle:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.

Educators in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all.

This philosophy of inclusion, adopted by the Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, in 1995, is reflected in the development and content of *Working Together as Partners in Education: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Additional Needs in School*.

This handbook emphasises the diverse and changing learning needs of students with additional needs. As well as offering support and encouragement to you as parents and families of students with additional needs, this resource describes some of the services and activities that might be used to meet individual student needs at school. It also includes practical information and strategies for helping your child make successful transitions, for enhancing your role on your child's school team, and for staying informed.

Research tells us that children do better in school when their parents and families are involved in their education; this is especially important when a child has additional needs. This Parent Handbook is designed to assist you throughout the years that your child attends school

INTRODUCTION

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Parents are valued partners in education in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. As parents, you know your child best. You know your child's strengths, abilities, needs, and challenges, and, as a result, you have a vital role in the education of your child. It is important that you and your child participate in making decisions that affect your child's education. Your participation in planning for education and your ongoing involvement and support will make a positive and meaningful contribution to your child's education.

Students with additional needs, including those with lifelong disabilities, require educational opportunities that are appropriate for their learning needs, age, and level of school achievement.

Developments in Special Education

The Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, has commissioned a number of reviews to examine the provisions for the education of students with special needs. Since the first review in 1994 there have been many changes and improvements in the area of Special Education. Significant developments have taken place in recent years. These are listed below:

- **Special Education Review 2005:** A complete review of services for children and youth with special needs in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle was undertaken in 2005 and resulted in a series of recommendations by Professor Bob Conway (University of Newcastle). The Conway Report resulted in a restructure of the way in which services are provided to students with additional needs.
- **The Disability Standards for Education 2005:** the Disability Standards make clear the obligations that schools and training authorities have when providing appropriate access and participation in educational programs for students with disabilities. More information is available at www.ddaedustandards.info/education_stds.php

"The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse learning needs of their students, accommodating both the different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school."

Salamanca Statement 1994

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook is intended for parents of children with additional needs in school. It contains the following five main sections:

- i. **Introduction:** the introductory section explains the background, content, and organisation of this parent handbook. It includes definitions related to Special Education that are used throughout this resource.
- ii. **Identification and Assessment:** this section outlines what is involved in identifying and assessing individual learning needs so that your child can make the most successful adjustment and progress in school.
- iii. **Planning and Programming:** this section provides information about contacts and supports available in your school to assist in planning and developing effective educational programming for your child. It also suggests ways in which you can be involved in and contribute to your child's education.
- iv. **Communication:** this section talks about the importance of ongoing communication between families and schools throughout a student's education and suggests ways in which questions and issues may be addressed.
- v. **Additional Information:** in this section you will find forms/lists that may help you in meeting your child's needs.

The divider pages for the five main sections within this Handbook are meant to help you organise information. You are encouraged to keep the Handbook in a ring binder/folder and add other information relevant to your child's education.

WORDS YOU MAY HEAR USED IN SCHOOL

Definitions of Commonly Used Words

Whether your child is entering the school system or is currently in school, you may hear teachers or other people working with your child use words such as those defined on the following pages. It is important that you ask teachers or others in your child's school about words they use and have them clarify what they mean in relation to your child.

Words Related to Special Education

Adjustments

Changing the teaching process, the types of materials, and/or the assessments, assignments or products a student may produce to achieve the expected learning outcomes. Adjustments may also be made to enable a student to better access and participate in the school environment.

Assessment

The systematic process of gathering information about what a student knows, is able to do, and is learning to do.

Counselling and guidance services

School personnel who provide support for activities that involve:

- counselling students and parents
- evaluating students' abilities
- assisting students in personal, career, and social development
- providing referral assistance
- working with other staff members in planning and conducting guidance programs for students

Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disability is a term used to describe lifelong disabilities attributable to mental or physical impairments manifested in childhood. A developmental disability generally results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living, and economic self-sufficiency;

Differentiated Instruction

A way of teaching that acknowledges and responds to the differences among students. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to support student learning and to help each student be as successful as possible.

Health Care Management Plan

A formal plan of support for students with more complex medical needs.

Inclusion

A way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe.

Inclusive Education

Providing all students with the supports and opportunities they need to become participating members of their school community.

Individual Behaviour Support Plan (IBSP)

An intervention and support plan developed by a team to meet a student's social and behavioural needs.

Individual Plan (IP)

An annual plan developed and used by a team to set goals and determine strategies required to meet the individual learning needs of a student.

Individual Programming

Programming designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities who need programming outside the regular curriculum in the areas of cognitive, social/behavioural, self-help, motor, and communication skills.

Life Skills (Years 7 – 12)

Syllabus set by the NSW Board of Studies which parallels the regular curriculum and allows for increased focus on individual learning needs. Life Skills outcomes and content are for the small percentage of students with special education needs, particularly those with an intellectual disability, who cannot access the regular outcomes and content, even with adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment

Learning Difficulty (LD)

Learning difficult is a term applied to students whose difficulties cannot be traced to an intellectual disability or delay, sensory impairment, cultural or linguistic disadvantage, or inadequate teaching. The difficulty manifests itself as a marked discrepancy between ability and academic achievement. Less than 3% of the school population presents with a learning difficulty exhibit chronic problems in mastering the basic academic skills, a few have problems with social skills, and a few have minor difficulties with physical skills.

Learning Support Coordinator (LSC)

A teacher employed by a secondary school to support students and educators through consultation, resources and/or direct assistance. This person, in collaboration with the school executive, coordinates Learning Support personnel and programs in a secondary school.

Learning Support Assistant (LSA)

A paraprofessional employed by a school to support students and teachers to implement student specific programs in consultation with and under the direction of the class teacher.

Learning Support Teacher (LST)

A teacher employed by a school to support students and educators through consultation, resources, and/or direct assistance. This person, in collaboration with the school executive, coordinates Learning Support personnel and programs in a primary school. A LST may be employed in a secondary school within the Learning Support faculty.

Learning Support Team

A group of staff members who meet regularly to discuss issues that are relevant to Learning Support issues.

Occupational Therapist (OT) (clinician)

A professional trained to help people improve their ability to do activities related to their daily living, such as self-care, work, and leisure. The purpose of occupational therapy is to promote and maintain performance and health. An occupational therapist provides student-specific assessment, suggests student-specific adaptations and modifications to classroom equipment, and provides training of staff to help children participate as fully as possible in school programming and activities. Occupational therapists often work in conjunction with physiotherapists.

Physiotherapist (PT) (clinician)

A professional concerned with the assessment, maintenance, and improvement of physical function and performance of the body. Physiotherapists often work with students who have difficulties with movement, coordination, or balance. They provide student-specific assessment, recommendations, and staff training in some cases to meet a student's physical needs. Physiotherapists often work in conjunction with occupational therapists.

Psychologist (school counsellor)

A professional who provides counselling and guidance support to schools. This support includes psycho-educational assessment and advice concerning child development, student wellbeing, mental health concerns, and behaviour management issues.

Speech Pathologist (clinician)

A professional who supports the school team by providing specialised knowledge in the area of communication development and difficulties and their impact on curriculum and social outcomes for students. A Speech Pathologist provides assessment, makes recommendations, provides therapy, and suggests modifications or adaptations in the area of communication.

Student Support Unit Education Officer

An educator with post-graduate qualification in Special Education employed by the Catholic Schools Office who provides consultation and support to schools in the areas of assessment, child development, student well-being and behaviour management, and programming and curriculum adjustment.

Student Support Unit

A team of staff within Teaching & Learning Services employed by the Catholic Schools Office to support schools to meet the needs of students who have exceptional learning, social, behavioural or physical needs.

Identification and Assessment

IDENTIFYING AND PLANNING FOR YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

If your child has additional needs and is entering school, or if you and / or the classroom teacher find that your child is having difficulty learning, certain areas need to be considered to plan appropriately. To find out more about your child and how he or she learns, a teacher may look at the following areas:

- social or behavioural skills
- communication skills
- cognitive/learning skills
- physical or sensory skills

A doctor's diagnosis of a specific condition or disability does not provide enough information for planning for your child's individual needs. No two children are exactly alike. Children identified with the same diagnosis often have different abilities and learning needs, and require different supports. For example, two children could be diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome, but each child could have very different learning needs. One child might function quite well in the classroom with the regular curriculum and need a little support to be successful, while the other child might have severe difficulties and need programming outside the curriculum as well as close supervision at all times.

First Steps in Getting Support

If you feel your child is having difficulty learning, the first step is to talk with the classroom teacher. To identify your child's learning needs, the teacher may organise for a Learning Support Teacher / Coordinator to:

- talk with your child
- observe your child during classroom activities
- analyse your child's class work
- assess your child's abilities in areas such as mathematics / reading

As a parent, you can also gather information that may be useful in the assessment process. This information could include medical reports and observations you have made about your child's learning needs and recent behavioural changes outside of school.

After taking these steps in assessing a student's needs, the teacher and Learning Support Teacher / Coordinator, in consultation with the parents, may decide that a referral to a specialist for support or further assessment is necessary. Written parental consent is recommended before any referral to other education or clinical resources within the school is made. Each school has different assessment procedures, so talk to your child's teacher or the Learning Support Teacher / Coordinator about what kind of assessment or referral will take place and how long it will take.

Early identification and intervention for young children with special needs often leads to better school adjustment and performance. The assessment will help determine the child's individual needs. Some children may have difficulties learning at a particular time and may require short-term assistance, but some additional needs

may be lifelong needs. Your child's needs may change, depending on the environment and the coping strategies he or she develops.

Many other factors can affect a child's educational needs, and it is important that the school team meet regularly to identify and discuss these factors, and adjust the child's program as needed.

After you give consent to the school for referral of your child to additional support services, an assessment plan will be developed. Parents can be involved in the assessment process in various ways.

How an Assessment Is Carried Out

Depending on your child's needs, a number of specialists may be involved in the assessment plan. These specialists could include a learning support teacher / coordinator, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist, or others.

Different professionals are qualified to assess different areas of your child's development. For example, a psychologist may assess a child's cognitive functioning. A classroom teacher or learning support teacher may assess children's learning skills and level of achievement. Talk to your child's classroom teacher about who will conduct assessments and what that will look like. Some assessments may need to be sourced through the health care system by parents.

A variety of assessment tools may be used to determine a child's learning, cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and/or behavioural development or needs. Some assessment tools include both parents and teachers to ensure that the information gathered accurately reflects the child.

An assessment may be done for the following reasons:

- To find out whether your child has a special learning need
- To identify your child's current capabilities, skills, and needs
- To find out how those special learning needs affect your child's ability to learn and function in school
- To identify appropriate programming and services that will meet your child's individual needs

Your child's development may be assessed in one area, or in various combinations of areas, depending on his or her specific needs.

When all the assessment results for your child are completed, the school will contact you and arrange a meeting with the relevant staff who participated in the assessment to explain the results, discuss the recommendations, and involve you in making any related decisions. A written report may be shared with you, the teacher, and/or others working with your child.

If you are concerned about how long an assessment may take, discuss your concerns with your child's teacher or the learning support teacher assigned to your child's school. In some cases, the school works with the Student Support Unit (SSU) personnel at the Catholic Schools Office to identify further services and supports required and to make application for funded support for students with disabilities. The SSU Education Officers receiving the school request will review the referral and determine their level of involvement. Check with your child's teacher about the timeline for your child's assessment.

P

lanning and Programming

Learning: An Individual Process

All children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way, at the same time, or at the same rate. Learning is an individual process. Students with additional needs have different learning needs, and there are many different ways of meeting those needs. What is right for one student may not be the best for another. Meeting students' individual learning needs means:

- identifying current needs and skills
- choosing and developing individual outcomes or goals for a student
- choosing the best learning setting
- deciding on and planning for appropriate programming

Effective Programming

Effective programming is:

- based on an individual student's needs
- planned and active, continually adjusted as necessary to meet a student's needs
- inclusive, allowing students to participate in the regular curriculum to the fullest extent possible
- consistent across environments
- dependent upon parents and teachers working together

Meeting Students' Programming Needs

Most students with additional needs require some programming assistance to learn. This may involve changing the way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments, or participate in the classroom. To determine the type and extent of programming assistance needed, a school team considers the student's abilities, strengths, and needs.

Types of Programming Assistance

In addition to *adjusting instruction* for all students, schools use *accommodations*, *curriculum differentiation*, or *individual planning and programming* to support students. An explanation of the ways to meet students' programming needs follows.

- **Instructional Adjustments:** all teachers attempt to provide programming that responds to different learning needs among all students by adjusting their classroom teaching. Teachers will often vary their teaching methods or approaches when planning daily lessons, when working with students in the classroom, and when assessing student progress.
- **Accommodations:** when a student is capable of meeting the learning goals or outcomes of the curriculum but needs physical accommodation or a different form of instruction or assessment, accommodations may be used. Accommodation means changing the teaching process, the types of materials, and / or the assignments or products a student may produce. For example, some students with physical disabilities cannot write and need a computer to do their written work; students who are blind may need their learning materials to be available in Braille.
- **Curriculum Differentiation / Adjustments:** some students with special needs may have significant cognitive learning difficulties that mean they

cannot meet all of the curriculum outcomes. They need the curriculum to be differentiated or modified.

Differentiation is the change/s that a teacher makes in their teaching program to meet a student's learning needs. It is important that a student's teachers discuss why and how the adjustments are being made. Parents need to be informed and involved in the discussion, with adjustments outlined in an IP. In senior secondary grades, when the school team determines that a student might be more suited to a Life Skills Course, the student and parents must be included in this discussion.

- **Individualised Programming:** some students whose cognitive disabilities are so significant that they do not benefit from participating in the mainstream curriculum need highly individualized, functionally appropriate learning goals. A team makes the decision to provide individualised programming based on a student's cognitive abilities. Individualised programming is based on planning in the areas of cognitive/functional academic skills, communication skills, social/behavioural skills, self-help or personal management skills, and fine and gross motor skills. These student-specific outcomes or goals should be outlined in an IP.

For senior secondary students, individualised programming often includes transition to post school environments and vocational planning.

Talk to the classroom teacher about the type of programming assistance your child needs or is receiving. If your child is receiving accommodations, curricular adjustments, or individualised programming and you would like more information, contact your child's classroom teacher or learning support teacher/coordinator.

Your Child's Team

A team may be formed for a student who has additional needs that require support. The number of people involved on a team can vary, for example, for students who have severe learning needs, a variety of support persons may be involved, including a learning support teacher, a learning support assistant, a psychologist, a speech pathologist, or others.

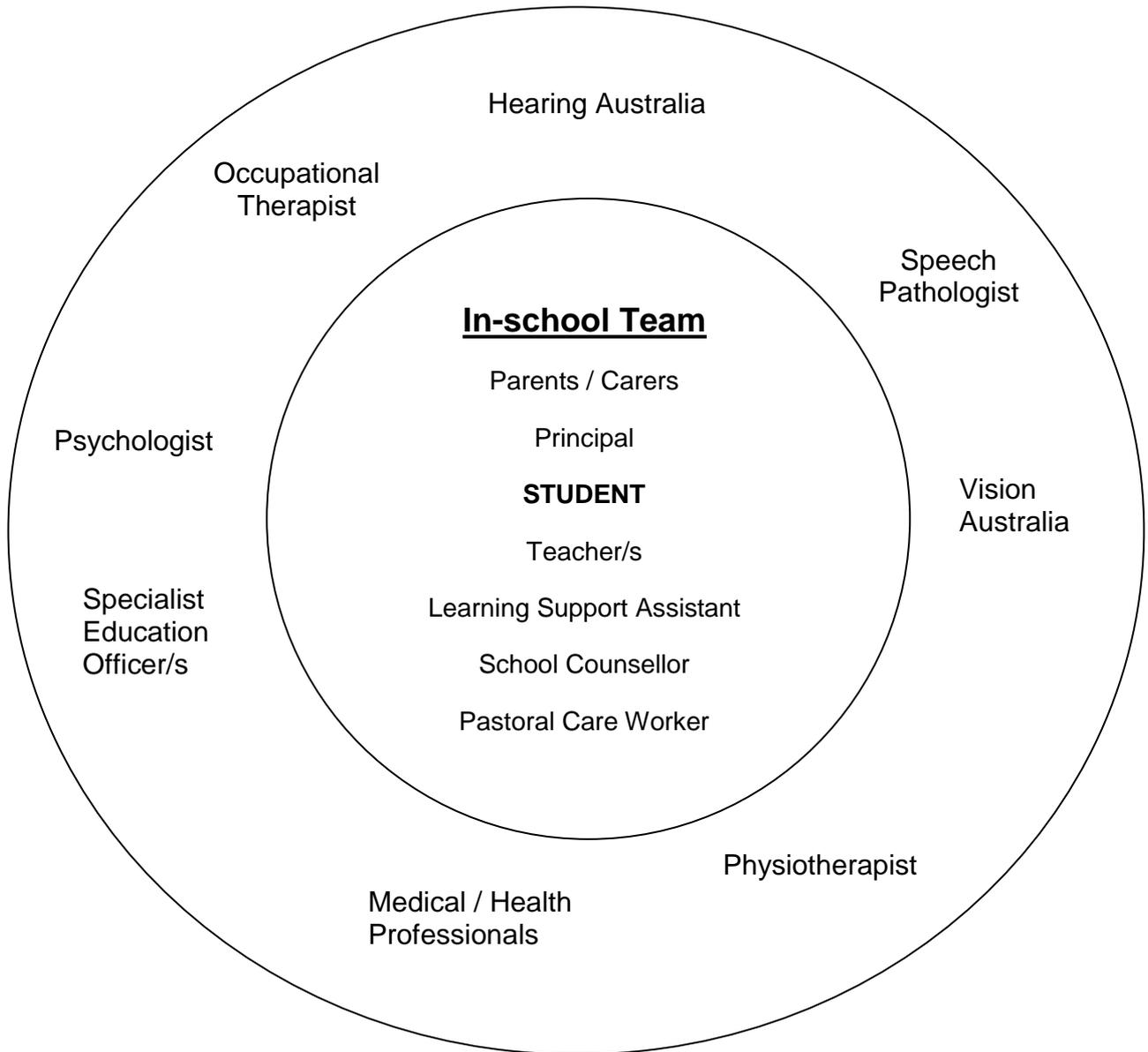
The number of people on your child's team will depend on the needs of your child and the expertise needed to plan and develop a programming plan.

Team Members

The circle below identifies people who may be on your child's team.

In-School Team: This team usually consists of people who may be involved with a child at school on a daily basis.

Support Team: The people on this team consult with the in-school team and provide expertise in the areas of planning, assessment, and programming.



Contributing to Your Child's Team

As a parent, you play an important role in ensuring that your child has a successful educational experience. Being a strong advocate for your child includes being an informed, contributing member of your child's team.

You can actively support and participate in your child's school experiences in the following ways:

- Participate in decisions that affect your child's education.
- Let the teacher(s) know when you respectfully disagree and ask to discuss issues as they arise.
- Give your informed, written consent for any needed assessments of your child.
- Be fully informed of school policies and practices.
- Share your preferences regarding your child's educational program and be part of a discussion about options in your school.
- Obtain information on your child's learning and development and pass on to teachers and others on your child's team.
- Review reports on your child's progress with the teacher at regular intervals throughout the school year.
- Participate in the development of your child's individual plan (IP).

When working as a team, all members participate in making decisions and share information with each other. As a parent, you may want to share:

- current medical information about your child
- successful learning and behaviour techniques that you are using at home
- changes in the home setting that might cause emotional reactions
- past school experiences
- ongoing goals for your child that you are supporting at home

Sharing relevant information with your child's teacher can have a positive effect on your child's learning experience.

Getting to Know Your Child's School

One of the most important ways of building an effective team is to establish positive working relationships with your child's teachers and other school staff. You can make meaningful connections in a variety of ways:

- Get to know the staff early in the school year and ensure there is ongoing communication.
- Make an appointment to visit the school at the beginning or end of a day to introduce yourself.
- Call the school to find out the best time to have a brief conversation with the teacher and learning support personnel.
- Welcome parent / teacher conferences as an important opportunity to exchange information and to work together.
- Get to know your school principal. The principal is responsible for the school as a whole and he or she can be a source of information and is an important member of your child's team.

Individual Planning (IP)

Individual Planning (IP) is the process whereby teachers, support personnel, and parents work together as a team to meet the needs of individual students who require a range of supports. The team develops outcomes or goals based on a student's current needs and skills, and writes the plan for the school year in the student's IP. The written plan is called an Individual Plan (IP).

Who Needs an IP?

An IP is compulsory in schools within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle for students receiving Students with Disability (SWD) funding. However, there are potential benefits of individual planning for a wide range of students with very different needs. Most IPs are written for students who need support for significant behavioural, learning or cognitive skills. An IP will be developed when parents and staff together decide that this is the best way to meet a student's additional needs.

Purpose of an IP

The purpose of an IP is to provide a plan to help a student meet individual outcomes or goals beyond his or her current skills. For this reason, an understanding of what a student can and cannot do is essential to the individual planning process.

Each IP is individual to the student for whom it is designed. As members of the IP team, parents should be part of the individual planning process and sign the IP for their child.

Components of an IP

All IPs, regardless of the individual needs of a student, contain certain essential components:

- student identification and background information, including strengths and areas for development
- information about performance and needs in the following areas: Curriculum, Communication, Mobility, Personal Care, Safety, and Social Skills
- current levels of performance that reflect teacher observation and team consensus on the student's abilities and needs
- student-specific outcomes or goals
- performance objectives
- teaching adjustments, materials, and strategies
- the names of team members who will implement the IP
- plans and timelines for evaluation and review

Stages of Developing an IP

Developing an IP involves the following four stages:

1. gathering and sharing information
2. setting learning goals
3. developing and writing the IP
4. implementing and reviewing the IP

These stages may occur in different sequences or may be worked on simultaneously, depending on the individual needs of the student. As parents and as members of your child's team, you can be actively involved in all stages of the IP-development process.

Stage 1: Gathering and Sharing Information:

You are a source of valuable information in the initial stages of developing and setting the learning goals of the IP for your child. You can provide information about your child in areas such as the following:

- aspirations and goals for your child
- personality traits
- interests, talents, and desires
- strengths and needs
- family and educational history that affects your child's present learning situation
- current medical history and health care needs

Stage 2: Setting Learning Goals:

Choosing priorities helps the team focus on what is most important for your child to learn each school year. At this stage the team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered so far.

To determine priorities, the team needs to do the following:

- List your child's learning needs.
- Rank your child's learning needs in order of importance.
- Select your child's most important learning needs for the school year.

To determine your child's most important learning needs, the team needs to consider the following questions:

- What can your child's peers do that your child can't?
- How can this be overcome?
- What does your child need to know before he/she can make further progress in this area?
- What successfully learned skill would make the biggest difference in your child's life?

Stage 3: Developing and Writing the IP:

As part of your child's team, you can offer ideas and information for the development of student-specific outcomes. These outcomes or goals usually indicate what the student might accomplish in a specific area in a determined amount of time during the school year. They are often written according to subject areas (e.g., English, mathematics) and planning domains (e.g., curriculum, communication, personal care, mobility, safety, and social skills).

Stage 4: Implementing and Reviewing the IP:

At this stage of the IP development process, the team members review the student-specific outcomes and decide how they will know when the student has met the goals. Teaching and assessment strategies are put into practice. At this time the team reviews the content of the IP in relation to the student's timetable (either classroom or individual) to make sure that the IP is able to be carried out at the times suggested.

The team will decide how often it is necessary to meet throughout the school year. During review meetings, your child's progress within the IP is discussed, and possible changes to the plan are considered. It is important for you to attend these meetings so that you can discuss your child's progress and be part of the planning for next steps. At least once a year, usually in the later part of the year, the team will review the IP, make adjustments, and plan for the last school term/s. An IP is written for the school year using current school performance as well as the information gathered from the previous year and recorded on an impact statement.

Promoting Successful IPs

The IPs that are most effective in promoting student learning:

- involve parents as active and equal team members in planning and implementation
- are working documents, linked to daily planning and activities
- identify clearly who is responsible for teaching a student on a daily basis and for gathering information about progress
- are "living" documents, changed to reflect a student's circumstances and progress
- link clinician and consultant reports and recommendations to daily programming

For More Information...

For more information about Individual Planning talk to the Learning Support Teacher or Learning Support Coordinator at your child's school.

Learning Support Assistants (LSA)

When the school team is planning or carrying out the IP for a student, it may be decided that the support of a Learning Support Assistant is necessary. You may hear many terms used to identify the assistant, such as teaching assistant, teacher's aide, paraprofessional, and so on, but the accepted term in Diocesan Schools is Learning Support Assistant (LSA).

LSAs provide supportive and complementary services to enhance the learning experiences of students, particularly those with additional needs. They receive direction, supervision, and instruction from teachers or the school principal. Learning Support Assistants may be asked to take on the following roles and responsibilities under the supervision of a teacher:

- Carry out the daily implementation of the student-specific IP outcomes or goals
- Reinforce a concept or skill that the teacher has taught with a small group of students
- Provide personal care in areas such as personal hygiene, dressing, or helping a child use adaptive equipment (such as computer technology)
- Help prepare materials for an individual student, classroom, or school
- Provide the teacher with information and/or written documentation about a student's performance, behaviour, and needs

The amount of time a LSA is assigned to a classroom, an intervention program, a group of students, or a particular student varies from school to school. Teachers are ultimately responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing student progress.

Planning for Transitions

Transitions are a normal part of life and occur at different times throughout our lives. For children and youth, transitions occur at various times during their education. Transitions occur when students:

- enter the school system for the first time
- move from grade to grade
- move from Early Years (Kindergarten to Year 2) to Primary Years (Year 3 to Year 6)
- move from Primary or High School (Year 7 to Year 10) or Senior High (Years 11 to 12)
- move from school to post-school environments and adult life
- move around the school between classroom and non-classroom settings

Starting school, changing grades, changing schools, and moving to a new setting after completing school are common transitions for everyone. Getting used to a new classroom or school, new classmates, a new teacher, a new bus, or a different learning support assistant can be difficult for many students.

Children and youth with additional needs can experience difficulty in making transitions. The new situations they face because of life changes such as entering or leaving school require planning. When teams are meeting it is important that they discuss and plan for any issue related to students' current or upcoming transitions.

Early Childhood Transition to School

Entering the school system is an important event in a young child's life. Much of a child's future success in school depends upon his or her transition into school and upon having successful experiences in the early grades.

For many children with special needs it is necessary to consider programming requirements and physical modifications to the school and/or classroom (e.g. ramps, special equipment) before they begin school.

To help parents and schools in planning for children's transition to school, the Catholic Schools Office has prepared a *Transition Handbook* and *Guidelines for the Enrolment of Students with Additional Needs*.

These documents promote information sharing and collaborative planning between community-based agencies working with preschool children with special needs and the school system in the year prior to the children's enrolment in school.

Many schools have contact with agencies providing services for children with special needs to discuss school transition planning. In addition, many use transition-planning processes to help make the beginning of school successful for students.

If your child is starting school, there are some important things for you to know and do. The following checklist may help you in planning for this important transition in your child's life.

Transition to School - Checklist

1. Plan Ahead

When planning for your child's entry to school, ask yourself some questions:

- What is your vision for your child's educational experience?
- Is there information about your child that would be helpful for the school to know?
- Does your child have specific programming needs?

Taking into consideration your child's needs, explore local resources and practices.

- What services are available in your school or school locality?
- What are your school policies on programming or students with special needs?

2. Inform the School

At least a year before your child starts school, contact your child's local school to let staff know when your child will be enrolling. Ask for information about the steps required to begin planning.

If your child is currently receiving services from a preschool program or service, ask that a meeting to support your child's entry to school be organised between the preschool agency and the school.

Provide a copy of all documentation you have to assist the school. Ask if the school needs any other information / documentation.

3. Work Together

Once your child is enrolled in school, request a meeting with the classroom teacher, learning support teacher, and relevant preschool service providers to discuss your child's educational programming. If there are specific plans for programming, equipment, or services, ask for a written plan that outlines what will be done, by whom, and when.

You may wish to include preschool service providers in discussion with school staff to identify the supports and services most beneficial to enhancing your child's strengths and addressing your child's needs.

Discuss the programming or training needs of the school staff who will work with your child. Ask what supports will be available to the school.

Provide the school with copies of reports that may assist them in making programming decisions for your child.

Let the teacher know that you want to participate in the planning meetings. Discuss how that will work.

Notes

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Transition Planning for Students Preparing to Leave School

As students get older and prepare to enter the senior years of secondary school, there is a need to identify what their hopes and dreams are for the future, and to begin to plan for the next phase in their life after school. This is a time for families to discuss and outline realistic plans for the future, taking into consideration the child's and parents' preferences for living and work options, training or educational opportunities, and recreational needs.

Transition planning often begins at school because that is where students spend the day and have individuals or a team of people who know them. To work towards a successful and smooth transition to adult life, planning needs to expand to include other parts of students' lives.

This is a time for the student, parents, and school team to begin the following steps in transition planning:

- Identify the student's strengths, abilities, skills, interests and needs.
- Identify programs that may be available to address the student's individual needs.
- Explore the availability of and requirements for:
 - post-secondary education, vocational training, and employment (including supportive work options)
 - independent or supported living options
 - leisure or social opportunities
 - Develop a person-centred plan for leaving school, based on the student's individual needs and desires.

Transition planning for students with special needs should begin by at least age 14-15 (approximately Year 9). If your child continues on to Year 12, the planning should resume by mid Year 11. Students, parents, the school, support workers, and others develop a written plan that outlines roles and responsibilities, timelines, and actions to be taken before students leave high school.

Students with additional needs often require more intensive and coordinated planning than most high school students to enable them to make a successful transition when leaving school. The following checklist may help you and your child plan for important transitions in your child's life.

Post-School Transition - Checklist

Communicate

- Ask for a meeting with your child's team to begin transition planning.
- At this meeting, discuss the supports currently in place for your child and some of the new or adult-focused supports that will be needed.

Plan Ahead and Work Together

- In planning during this stage of your child's life, begin with a clear understanding of:
 - who your child is and where he or she wants to be
 - what supports and services are available or need to be available
 - what actions need to be taken to achieve the transition plan

Ask yourself some questions.

- What are your child's strengths and needs?
- What do you see your child doing in two to five years?
- Where does your child see himself or herself?
- Do you and your child have enough information to make decisions?
- Do you need to investigate what opportunities or options are available?
- Are there some specific skills your child needs to focus on to be as independent as possible?

Talk to your child's teacher or other family or community support workers to assist you in the transition process.

- Gather information from various sources, such as the following:
 - CentreLink – Disability Support Pension; Job Capacity Assessment
 - ADHC – Community Participation Program or Transition to Work Program
 - Disability Employment Networks, e.g. *Castle Personnel, the Samaritans*
 - TAFE or University
 - Local Health Care Professionals

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For More Information...

To find out more about post school options and agencies that might assist, talk to the school Learning Support Coordinator or visit the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website to access information about the National Disability Coordination Officer Program:

web: www.deewr.gov.au/ndco

email: ndco@deewr.gov.au

Communication

As a parent of a child with special needs, you will have to make a variety of decisions throughout your child's education. The issues that may affect your child are as many and diverse as there are children.

Research tells us that both parents and teachers feel ongoing communication is vital to the success of a child's education. While the need for parent involvement is accepted as crucial, schools have different protocols around the nature of this involvement. Clearly, a strong parent-teacher relationship needs trust, mutual respect, open communication, active listening, flexibility, and shared responsibility.

During your child's years in school, issues may arise regarding your child's education, learning needs, assessment, school attendance, social or behavioural expectations, and so on.

Whether you are planning to meet with your child's classroom teacher, the school team, or others working with your child, it is important to prepare for the meeting. The following questions are examples of what you may wish to ask when discussing your child's progress or other issues of concern.

Questions to Ask

1. Is my child working at or meeting the grade level outcomes? If not, why not? What would be the best way to proceed?
2. Is my child meeting the outcomes outlined in his or her individual plan (IP)? If not, why not? What would support my child's learning?
3. What do the scores or marks mean?
4. Is my child receiving adjustments to his or her work?
5. Does my child have major strengths or weaknesses in specific subject areas that I don't know about?
6. How would you describe the way my child best learns?
7. What strategies does my child need to learn? What strategies have worked well for my child?
8. Is it necessary for my child to go out of the classroom for additional support for periods of time? Why?
9. Has my child completed class assignments?
10. Has my child been attending classes regularly?
11. Are there any potential social issues with peers that I need to be aware of?
12. Does my child need a referral to the learning support teacher/coordinator, speech pathologist, education officer or school psychologist? What would be involved with the referral and how would that affect my child's programming?

13. What are the learning support teacher and learning support assistants' roles with my child? How do I communicate with these people?

14. What can I/we do at home to support my/our child's learning?

Resolving Differences

When you have questions or concerns about your child's programming, it is important that you address the issues with those who are involved. Try to resolve issues at the local school level:

- Contact your child's classroom teacher first. Share your concerns with the teacher or ask questions to find out more about the issues.
- Include the important members of the school team.
- Speak to the Learning Support Teacher/Coordinator, student coordinator or school psychologist about issues that may include them.
- Bring issues to the attention of the school principal, as required.

If the issues cannot be resolved at school, you may wish to contact the Parent Liaison and Resource Officer at the Catholic Schools Office.

Disagreement or misunderstanding between families and schools can occur in any system that strives to be inclusive. The existence of issues between parents and schools is neither good nor bad. When solutions are sought in a fair and respectful way, it is often possible to resolve disagreements in a positive manner.

There are, however, many possible approaches to resolving disagreements. Everyone benefits when issues are resolved locally. Children with additional needs, benefit from an education that addresses their learning needs.

Parents and educators benefit from a strengthened working relationship and a better understanding of others' interests and needs.

Additional Information - Resources

In this section you will find resources that are meant to assist you in meeting your child's needs:

Suggested Communication Contact List:

This chart identifies the people you may wish to contact when you have questions or concerns in specific areas.

My Child's Team:

You may want to make a copy of this form at the beginning of each school year and use it to identify local resources you can call upon for support when addressing your child's needs.

You are encouraged to keep this handbook in a ring binder and add other information relevant to your child's education.

My Child's Team

School:

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

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Agencies / Services

Copy this form and make a list of the local resources you may wish to contact during the school year about your child's needs.

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