

My child has vision impairment

Information for Queensland families of young children



Photo by Jo Umrah / iStockphotos

A Parent Connect resource

Message from the Minister



Some children in Queensland experience vision impairment. Every child is different, and while some children will not be significantly impacted, others may require a range of supports for them and their family.

As parents, you will no doubt have many questions when you find out your child is diagnosed with vision impairment, especially about what supports and services are available.

My child has vision impairment is a guide for families about how they can support their child's inclusion in family and community life.

It includes practical information about your child's development and early intervention services and supports that are available.

Accessing specialist services during these early years not only provides important support for families, but can enable children to achieve crucial developmental milestones.

The Queensland Government is focused on revitalising frontline services for families of young children. Through initiatives such as Parent Connect, and by increasing the number of speech and language pathologists for all children with a disability in Queensland schools, we are delivering direct assistance to families.

As we deliver these new priorities for Queensland, I look forward to enabling a better future for Queensland families of children with vision impairment.

I would like to thank Vision Australia for their contributions to this guide and for their ongoing support for children with vision impairment and their families.

The Honourable Tracy Davis MP
Minister for Communities, Child Safety
and Disability Services

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1. About vision impairment

This guide is intended to answer some of the questions you may have if your child has been diagnosed with vision impairment or if you think your child may be experiencing vision difficulties.

According to Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment criteria, vision impairment is any diagnosed condition of the eyes or visual system that cannot be corrected within normal limits.

Vision impairment may affect a child's clarity of vision and range of what can be seen and their perception of colour. If children have normal visual acuity in one eye and reduced acuity in the other eye, then they do not have vision impairment.

When people speak about vision impairment they may use different terms which can be confusing. The terms 'vision impairment' and 'low vision' mean different things. Vision impairment refers to a person having impaired vision, which could mean total blindness. Low vision is a term used to describe the condition of a child with some vision.

Generally the following three terms are used to refer to the degree of vision loss:

- **low vision or mild to moderate vision impairment** – when a person has a visual acuity measurement of 6/18 to 6/60 (a person with normal vision has 6/6 vision. The greater the second number, the lower the visual acuity)
- **severe vision impairment (legal blindness)** – when a person has a visual acuity of 6/60 or less
- **blindness** – 1/60 (equivalent to 6/360 or count fingers at one metre) or less.

A child may be prescribed glasses or contact lenses to correct a refractive error. Prescription glasses and contact lenses generally help the image of what your child is seeing to fall directly onto the retina.

Many eye conditions cannot be corrected to normal vision or improved with glasses or contact lenses. Your child's ophthalmologist or optometrist can give you specific information relating to your child and their eye condition.

Every child with vision impairment may be affected in different ways, however, there are some characteristics that many children with vision impairment may exhibit. These may include:

- a heightened sensitivity to light and glare
- needing to get closer to objects and small details in books
- using other senses such as touch and hearing to support vision
- a cautious approach to walking
- going down to floor level to feel changes in ground surfaces before walking over them.

They may have lower achievement of vision related developmental milestones such as smiling, reaching, crawling, walking, throwing a ball and scribbling with a crayon.

This may mean children with vision impairment have fewer opportunities for learning through incidental learning and modelling.

For these children, a wide variety of firsthand experiences is very important. This may range from as simple as playing with containers in the bath to more complex activities such as experiencing travel on different modes of transport.

Causes of vision impairment

Blindness and low vision can occur as a result of a number of different diseases, conditions or accidents. Some eye conditions are congenital (present at or near birth), some are caused by a disease or infection, and others can be caused by accidents or through exposure to light (ultra violet and sunlight) or chemicals. Many of the most common eye conditions have no known cause.

Are there different types of vision impairment?

Many different conditions cause low vision or blindness. Some conditions can be inherited:

- **Leber's congenital amaurosis** is caused by impaired development of the retina and can affect a child from birth.
- **Optic atrophy** occurs due to degeneration or damage to the optic nerve. Vision loss will vary for each child.
- **Retinitis pigmentosa** causes the retina to degenerate slowly and progressively. Symptoms generally develop between the ages of 10 and 30, but can develop in younger children.
- **Albinism** is a genetic condition causing a reduction or absence in the presence of melanin pigment in the body, including the skin and eyes. The lack of pigment results in poor vision.
- **Optic nerve hypoplasia** is a non-progressive congenital condition with damage to, or under development of, the optic nerve fibres. Visual acuity can range from normal in mild cases to total loss of vision.

- **Retinopathy of prematurity** is damage to the developing eyes of premature babies due to disturbances in the vascularisation of the retina. The disease is categorised by five stages with stage 1 being the mildest form.

Other conditions become evident at birth or soon after, for example:

- **Cataracts** cause the focusing lens inside the eye to become hazy and stop light from entering the eye. Many children with cataracts will have good outcomes from surgery.
- **Congenital glaucoma** is caused by pressure in the eye and optic nerve, resulting in peripheral vision loss.
- **Nystagmus** is the rapid involuntary movements that may cause one or both eyes to move from side to side, which results in low vision or blindness.
- **Cerebral visual impairment** is caused by damage to the visual cortex or posterior pathways as a result of causes such as head injury. Children with this condition will experience fluctuating vision.

Some conditions may not become evident until later in childhood (or even adulthood) and may be caused by brain injury, infections or degeneration of the eye, for example:

- **Stargardt's disease** is a type of macular degeneration that can develop up to the age of 20 and causes a progressive loss of central vision of both eyes, but does not affect peripheral vision.

What are the early signs of vision impairment?

All children develop differently, however, signs that may indicate your child has vision impairment include:

- your child has difficulty focusing on your face or on objects from four to five weeks of age
- your child's eyes moving rapidly from side to side while trying to focus on something
- your child's eyes not reacting to a bright light being turned on in the room
- your child's pupils appearing white or cloudy
- noticing your child squinting
- your child being sensitive to light
- your child sitting too close to the television.

All babies develop at their own rates, which can make it difficult to know if your child is reaching developmental milestones. As a parent you know your child best. If you have any concerns about your child's vision, consult your GP, ophthalmologist, paediatrician or optometrist.

Find out more

Vision Australia

1300 84 74 66

www.visionaustralia.org.au

2. Diagnosis

The early years are the most critical for your child's development. While different conditions affect children in different ways, early diagnosis is important. It will enable a treatment program to be developed that meets your child's needs and minimises the impact of their vision impairment.

A formal diagnosis of vision impairment will also allow your child to access early childhood intervention services, which will usually focus on helping to develop physical coordination, language, and independent movement, social and daily living skills. Some services will also provide information and support for you, as parents, about how to support your child's development.

In addition to the many skills that a child can learn to help minimise the impact of their vision impairment, there is also a range of aids, equipment and assistive technology that can assist your child in their activities of daily living, play and education.

Who provides a diagnosis of vision impairment in Queensland?

In Queensland, an ophthalmologist can diagnose vision impairment.

An optometrist can identify or detect eye conditions or diseases and refer the child to an ophthalmologist for appropriate diagnosis.

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who specialises in eyes. They diagnose eye conditions and prescribe lenses or medication or other forms of medical treatment. A diagnosis by an ophthalmologist may be required in order to access some services.

Tips for parents

Cuddling and carrying your child while talking can help with the development of your child's other senses. For more activity ideas to do with your child visit

www.visionaustralia.org.au

An optometrist prescribes and fits glasses and contact lenses and can detect eye conditions and disease, short sightedness, long sightedness or astigmatism.

Your child will need a referral from a GP or child health nurse to see an ophthalmologist. Ophthalmologists can be seen privately or through the public health system. There will usually be costs for private ophthalmologists, however, waiting times for an appointment may be shorter. The consultation will be at no cost if it is with an ophthalmologist in the public health system.

The diagnosis process will involve an eye test using an eye chart. Sometimes an ophthalmologist will dilate your child's eyes with eye drops to assist with examining them. Find out whether this may happen so you can talk to your child about this before the appointment.

Tips for parents

It's a good idea to keep a diary of any concerns you have about your child's development. This information will help you in your consultation with your GP or medical specialist.

An orthoptist may also be involved in the diagnosis of your child's vision impairment. Orthoptists manage eye movement and eye muscle disorders, and provide advice on aids and equipment that can support your child.

Families living in rural and remote areas can access a visiting Queensland Health paediatrician.

Local Area Coordinators can provide information to families on how to access a visiting paediatrician and other key services to obtain a diagnosis in rural and remote areas of the state.

After diagnosis

Even if you have suspected for some time that your child may have a vision impairment you may feel overwhelmed when you first learn about your child's diagnosis. You are likely to need extra support.

You may get this support from your family and friends, but it is also good to talk to your GP. Your GP can tell you about local parent support groups and the availability of professional support such as a counsellor or social worker if you are feeling overwhelmed.

When your child receives a diagnosis, a number of things will happen. Your ophthalmologist or optometrist will discuss the types of supports and services that will optimise your child's development, and a treatment plan will be developed. You will also receive information on the services and supports available in your local community.

Vision Australia

Is a provider of blindness and low-vision services and offers a range of support and resources for families.

Parent Connect

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' Parent Connect initiative supports

parents of newborns and children newly diagnosed with disability. It is an early-response service providing information and linking families to family support networks, community services and funding to access specialist services.

Child health services in the community

Staffed by nurses and allied health professionals, free child health services are available at community clinics. Home visiting may also be provided. Child health checks are recommended at one, two, four, six and 12 months of age. Information is available on child health, parenting, child development, immunisation and nutrition. Families can be linked to local services and parent groups. For further information refer to your baby's Red Book (personal health record).

Carers Queensland

Carers Queensland provides carers with information, education, training, advocacy, counselling and other support services that may assist them in their caring role. The organisation also raises awareness about the valuable role and contributions of carers.

Financial support

If you live in a rural or remote area and need to travel to attend specialist medical appointments, you may be eligible for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Ask your GP for further information.

Should your child's support needs mean that you are unable to enter paid employment, you may be eligible for a Carer Payment. Centrelink can provide more information regarding your eligibility as well as information on supplementary payments such as Carer Allowance and Child Disability Assistance Payment.

Find out more

Parent Connect is provided by the following organisations:

Cairns – The Benevolent Society
4045 0003

www.benevolent.org.au

Townsville – The Cootharinga Society of North Queensland
4759 2008

www.cootharinga.org.au

Rockhampton – The Cootharinga Society of North Queensland in partnership with The Umbrella Network
4928 6550

www.theumbrellanetwork.org

Sunshine Coast – Sunshine Coast Children's Therapy Centre
5441 4937

www.scctc.org.au

Brisbane North – Mission Australia
3828 9311

Brisbane South – Mission Australia
3713 2602

Ipswich – Mission Australia
3713 2602

www.missionaustralia.com.au

Gold Coast – The Benevolent Society
5644 9400

www.benevolent.org.au

Find out more

Vision Australia

1300 84 74 66

www.visionaustralia.org.au

Child Health Services in the Community

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

www.health.qld.gov.au

Carers Queensland

3900 8100

1800 242 636 (Advisory Service)

www.carersqld.asn.au

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

www.health.qld.gov.au

Centrelink

132 468

www.humanservices.gov.au

Disability Information Services

13 QGOV

www.communities.qld.gov.au

3. Early intervention services

Early intervention services are important for children with vision impairment to help them develop skills in play, communication, social relationships and functional behaviours.

Early intervention services can also help develop your child's independence and ability to adapt to their environment, the skills they need to participate in child care and kindergarten, and their readiness for school.

A range of supports for families of children with a disability, including children with vision impairment, from birth to school entry, can be provided.

These services include:

- information and planning
- advice on your child's developmental needs
- multidisciplinary therapy to help your child reach developmental milestones
- referrals to other specialist services and mainstream services
- coordination of services for children with complex needs
- support with transitioning to a kindergarten program and school
- counselling and linking families with other families and support groups.

How will my child benefit from early intervention?

Early intervention is most effective and provides the best possible outcomes for your child when provided as early as possible after diagnosis.

Tips for parents

Get your child moving and exploring their environment — children learn most when exposed to new things and people. This is also true for children with vision impairment.

Early childhood intervention services should be tailored to the individual needs of your child and family. It is important for you as a parent to have a good rapport with your child's specialists and feel able to ask lots of questions about their therapy and progress.

Early childhood intervention services provide you and your family with knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of your child, optimise your child's development and increase their ability to participate in family and community life.

All services recognise the importance of working in partnership with families. Ideally services will be provided in a flexible way that meets the needs of as many families as possible.

Successful early intervention services may involve professionals working directly with your child as well as teaching you strategies to support your child to develop their potential.

Professionals should spend time with you working on goals that can be incorporated into your family routines and play activities. This is particularly important for families whose children are unable to attend centre-based programs, for example, families living in rural and remote areas.

Where can I access early intervention supports?

It is likely your child will require different kinds of early intervention. These include speech and language development, educational and social development, positioning and mobility skills, and support to develop basic life skills (e.g. eating, drinking, bathing and dressing).

Your child may receive early intervention services from specialists such as occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, orientation and mobility instructors, psychologists or physiotherapists. For example, an orientation and mobility instructor may teach your child how to move around safely and perform day-to-day activities such as negotiating steps or crossing the road.

Both the Queensland Government and the Australian Government fund early intervention services for children with vision impairment in Queensland. This section details the main services available.

Better Start

Australian Government funding for early intervention services is available for children diagnosed with vision impairment through the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative. Your child must have a diagnosis and be registered with Better Start before they turn six years of age, however, you can access funding up until their seventh birthday.

Better Start provides up to \$12,000 (maximum \$6000 per year) for your child to access services, including audiology, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy, psychology and speech and language pathology.

Up to \$2100 (35 per cent) per year of a child's early intervention funding can be used to purchase resources.

Resources must either be recommended by a Better Start service provider, be directly linked to an early intervention service or be for the delivery of interventions in the family home.

Families living in outer regional or remote areas may be eligible for an additional one-off payment of \$2000.

This payment is to assist with additional expenses associated with accessing services.

To access funding through the Better Start initiative, you will need to register with Carers Queensland.

Medicare

Children with vision impairment may be eligible for services funded through Medicare. These include:

- developing a treatment and management plan by a specialist, consultant physician or GP for children under 13 years
- up to four sessions with health professionals such as audiologists, occupational specialists, speech and language pathologists or physiotherapists to develop a child's plan
- twenty intervention sessions with health professionals as identified in a child's plan — available for children up to 15 years.

Speak to your GP or medical specialist for more information about these Medicare services.

Find out more

Better Start

Call Carers Queensland
1800 242 636
www.betterstart.net.au

Medicare

132 011
www.humanservices.gov.au

Vision Australia

Vision Australia provides training and resources for children aged from birth through to school-leaving age, who are blind or have low vision.

Vision Australia's service will focus on increasing your child's choices and independence, their development, and access to education. Specialist staff can work with your family to develop programs that meet your child's needs.

Early intervention services

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services also provides early intervention services to children who have, or are at risk of having, a vision impairment.

These services can support your child in their play and independence, as well as develop their communication skills, and gross and fine motor movements.

The department also provides information for families on a range of topics and will support you to connect with other services and supports such as playgroups, childcare and parent support groups.

Children are prioritised for services according to their level of need and availability of places.

Local Area Coordinators

Local Area Coordinators link children with a disability and their families in regional, rural and remote areas with supports and services relating to their individual needs and interests.

Early childhood development programs and services

Therapy and early intervention services are available through the Department of Education, Training and Employment. Services are available for children from birth to pre-Prep age who have a suspected or diagnosed disability with significant educational needs. This includes children with vision impairment.

Tips for parents

Your ophthalmologist may be able to put you in contact with other families who have a child with a vision impairment who could be a good source of support for you.

Programs and services may include playgroup session, outreach support in your home, centre-based sessions and support to transition to Prep. The program can also provide access to Advisory Visiting Teachers, who have specialist knowledge and skills to support your child at school.

Contact your local Education Queensland regional offices for information on how to access these programs and services.

Narbethong State Special School

Narbethong State Special School at Buranda (Brisbane) provides specialist teaching for students with vision loss. If your child has an additional disability and a special school environment is more suitable, this may be an alternative for your family.

The school has an early intervention approach and its Early Childhood Development Unit caters for children from birth to high school graduation.

Child Development Services

Department of Health provides early childhood intervention services to eligible children with a moderate to severe developmental delay or disability up to nine years of age.

Priority is given to children not eligible to receive services from other Queensland Government agencies.

Services include providing advice on your child's developmental needs and therapy services that encourage your child's development. Parent education and information sessions are also provided.

Guide Dogs Queensland

Guide Dogs Queensland works with children from a young age, providing them with mobility training and assistance with their orientation skills. Instructors incorporate play and exploration activities that are fun and safe and teach children how to develop other skills.

Guide Dogs Queensland also has counselling services, education programs and workshops for families

Support for parents

As a parent, it can be a challenge to strike the right balance between supporting your child with vision impairment and the needs of the rest of your family. It is normal to feel overwhelmed from time to time, especially during times of change, such as when your child starts school.

Make sure you have a good network of people around you, and don't be afraid to ask your GP or early intervention service provider for information about formal support such as classes, self-help groups or counselling.

You may find that the best support comes from other parents who know what you are going through. Early intervention service providers will be able to give you advice about how to link with other parents of children who have vision impairment.

You may also find it useful to access some of the following services which provide support for parents and families of children with a disability.

Vision Australia

Is a provider of blindness and low vision services and offers a range of support and resources for families.

Raising Children Network website

Is an Australian Government initiative that provides a web-based source of information about parenting and child development activities for children, including children with disabilities.

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program can help many parents to creatively problem solve and develop flexible and supportive family routines and strategies to support their child's learning and development.

Find out more

Early Intervention Services

Disability Services service centres
13 QGOV
www.communities.qld.gov.au

Child Development Services

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
www.health.qld.gov.au

Local Area Coordinators

13 QGOV
www.communities.qld.gov.au

Early childhood development programs and services

Contact your local education regional offices
www.education.qld.gov.au

Narbethong State Special School

(07) 3823 0777
www.narbethongspecs.eq.edu.au

Guide Dogs Queensland

3261 7555
www.guidedogsqld.com.au

Raising Children Network: the Australian parent website

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program

3236 1212
www.triplep-steppingstones.net
www.triplep-parenting.net

Stepping Stones Triple P has been specially tailored for parents of children with disability. It can help parents address their children's behaviour and emotional problems which may be more challenging at times (e.g. going to sleep, mealtimes, choosing what clothes to wear, dressing, toileting, going shopping and going to the doctors).

Stepping Stones Triple P can be accessed through information seminars, individual sessions on specific issues, group sessions, online options, and tip sheets and workbooks for parents.

Playgroups

Play is an integral part of all children's development, including children with disability. Through play, a child learns, builds confidence and develops a range of skills in readiness for childcare, kindergarten and school.

Playgroups nurture children with play-based learning experiences during key times of growth and development in their early years.

Playgroups offer a wonderful opportunity for young children to come together and play in a safe, relaxed and welcoming environment.

Playgroups are low cost and inclusive and all children under school age are welcome.

Playgroups also help families by providing social support for parents. It provides an environment where parents can discuss and share parenting experiences and obtain information on how to address parenting issues.

There are a range of playgroups available, including community playgroups, supported PlayConnect, and Playgroup Plus Program.

Tips for parents

Talk to your child's therapist about your child's interests and strengths. Ask for ideas for incorporating these into home activities such as suitable computer games for a child who likes computers.

MyTime groups

Provide local support for mums, dads, grandparents and anyone caring for a young child under school age with disability or chronic medical condition.

MyTime gives parents the chance to socialise and share ideas with others who understand the rewards and intensity of the caring role. Parents can meet with people in similar circumstances to have fun, hear from others and find out about available community support. Research-based parenting information is also available at group meetings.

Each group has a play helper who can lead children in activities such as singing, drawing, and playing with toys, blocks or sand so parents can spend time focusing on catching up with others.

Find out more

Playgroup Queensland

1800 171 882

www.playgroupqueensland.com.au

MyTime Groups

1800 889 997

www.mytime.net.au

Baby Bridges

Contact the Horizon Foundation

07 3245 4266

www.babybridges.com.au

Baby Bridges

Is a playgroup program for children with a disability from birth to five years. Parents and carers hear up-to-date information from carers and specialists while their child attends a playgroup taken by occupational, music or speech specialists

Find out more

Search for services or specialists in your local area through the websites of professional associations

The Australian Physiotherapy Association

www.physiotherapy.asn.au

Speech Pathology Australia

www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

Occupational Therapy Australia

www.otqld.org.au

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au

4. Early childhood education and care

What are early childhood education and care services?

Early childhood education and care services include child care and kindergarten services. Children can attend approved child care services from birth and all children are eligible to attend a kindergarten program in the year before they commence school (Prep). The Queensland Government provides funding support to approved kindergarten programs delivered in long day care or kindergarten services.

The early years of any child's life have a significant impact on their future health, development, learning and wellbeing. It is generally accepted that children who participate in early childhood education are likely to have better academic performance, better behaviour, and stay in education for longer. This includes children with vision impairment.

Participating in a quality early childhood education and care program can provide children with vision impairment opportunities to develop their social, communication and play skills from an early age.

Tips for parents

Consider enrolling your child in child care, even if only for a few hours a week. This may help to develop your child's play and social skills and their ability to adapt to new environments.

How will my child benefit from child care?

Child care provides all children an early opportunity to relate to peers and other adults. This is no different for children with vision impairment.

It can also be an opportunity for you to receive input from qualified early childhood professionals and try new approaches to supporting the development of your child.

As a parent, child care can also provide you with opportunities to return to work or study, or to have time with other members of your family.

Find out more

Early childhood education and care services

Early years centres provide education, family support and health services for children 0–8 years.

www.dete.qld.gov.au

Or phone 13 QGOV

What supports are available for my child to attend child care?

The Australian Government supports children with disabilities who attend child care through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. This support may be available to:

- subsidise the cost of additional educators or carers
- provide access to specialist equipment to assist inclusion
- provide professional development and resources for educators.

How will my child benefit from a kindergarten program?

All children benefit from participating in an approved quality early education program, including children with vision impairment.

Participation in a kindergarten program can help your child to develop skills in communication, social interaction and behaviour. It can also assist your child to follow routines and to be exposed to early literacy and numeracy concepts.

Participation in a kindergarten program will give your child a greater chance of successfully transitioning into Prep and then into mainstream schooling.

Kindergarten programs offer play-based learning in a fun and nurturing environment.

Tips for parents

Talk to kindergarten teachers and other parents to find out how they could support the inclusion of your child in kindergarten programs.

All children benefit from these early learning experiences and develop abilities including:

- being involved and learning to interact with other children
- developing a desire to learn as well as ways of getting involved in learning
- understanding and managing their feelings
- learning about themselves, and developing their identity, confidence and independence
- building communication skills.

How will my child be supported in a kindergarten program?

Kindergarten teachers in kindergarten services and long day care services can access support to assist children with vision impairment to participate in their programs.

Children with disability, including children with vision impairment, can receive additional supports to participate in a kindergarten program. Kindergarten services can apply under the Disability Support Funding Program through the Department of Education, Training and Employment, to receive additional funding to support your child's participation in their kindergarten program.

Additional support may include:

- equipment and play resources
- training and professional development for kindergarten teachers
- extra teacher aide time to support the child's inclusion in the kindergarten program.

Kindergarten programs in long day care services may be eligible for the Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

This provides professional development and other assistance to child care services supporting children with additional needs.

Kindergarten teachers can modify the kindergarten program to support the inclusion of your child. The wider kindergarten community can also be provided with information about vision impairment to encourage inclusion of your child and your family in the service.

How do I plan my child's transition into a kindergarten program?

Starting in a kindergarten program involves a significant transition for children with vision impairment and their families.

Your child will most likely need a period of preparation before they start in a kindergarten program. For example, support to settle in and ongoing support to ensure their needs are being met and they are achieving educational goals.

Successful transition planning requires a team approach with your family and the kindergarten teacher, which should begin six to 12 months before your child starts in the service.

Tips for parents

Learn about the activities and routine in the kindergarten program and introduce a similar routine at home, so your child becomes familiar with these activities and routines.

Tips for parents

Link your therapist or early intervention provider with your child's kindergarten teacher to help plan your child's program and identify the supports they will need, such as any aids and play equipment being used by your child.

Transition planning also involves activities with your child including visits to the kindergarten program to become more familiar with the environment and routines, and gradually adjusting routines at home to be similar to those they will experience in the kindergarten program.

Other activities involved in transition planning for your child include visiting the kindergarten to become more familiar with the environment and routines, and gradually adjusting routines at home to be similar to those they will experience in the program.

Find out more

Disability Support Funding Program, Early Childhood Education and Care Services and Kindergarten Services

www.dete.qld.gov.au

Inclusion and Professional Support Program (Australian Government)

www.mychild.gov.au

5. Starting school

Starting school is an important time for children and families. The transition to school may present challenges for your child, as well as for the rest of your family, so good planning is critical. It is important to start planning for the transition to school at least 12 months before your child is due to commence.

The choice of school is a decision parents will make depending on their child's needs and abilities and the resources available. It is best to seek advice from your local school before you make a final decision.

Where can I enrol my child?

All children are able to enrol at their local state school. You will need to complete enrolment forms and may be asked to have an interview with a staff member.

It is best to talk to the principal of the school about the type and level of support available for your child before completing enrolment forms. You and your child may be asked to attend an interview with a staff member as part of the process.

Choosing a school for your child is an important decision. It may also be useful to talk to other parents who have children at the school you are considering.

Tips for parents

Check to see if the school you are considering has an open day that you can attend with your child.

Is my child ready for Prep?

Prep is offered in all state schools as a full five-day-per-week program. To be eligible for Prep a child must turn five by 30 June in the year they start Prep. With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, full-time attendance in Prep gives students, including students with vision impairment, the foundation they need for successful learning in Year 1.

If you are concerned that your child is not ready to start Prep at that time, you can choose to start your child a year later when they reach compulsory school age (six years and six months).

You should discuss the specific needs of your child with the principal of the school you plan to enrol your child in, before you make a decision on when your child starts Prep or school. The principal will help you determine the impact of delaying your child's entry into Prep.

Parents of compulsory school-age children have a legal obligation to ensure their children are enrolled in school and attend every day of the educational program in which they are enrolled. Enrolment and full-time attendance at Prep fulfils this obligation.

How can I prepare my child for school?

Starting school is a big step for all children and their families. Children develop at different rates and in different ways. It is important to tell your child that they are ready for school.

We recommend you contact your local school in the year before you enrol your child to discuss your child's individual needs. This will give the school time for planning to ensure your child has a successful and positive start to schooling. If you are concerned about your child's readiness for school, discuss this with the school of your choice and your early intervention service provider.

There are a number of things you can do to help prepare your child for the transition to school. This should include visiting the school many times before starting school, initially during quiet times of the day (possibly before or after school hours) and later at busier times so your child becomes familiar with the school environment at different times of the day.

If your child has been receiving services from an early childhood intervention service or a kindergarten program, staff from these services can provide information to the school about your child's strengths and support needs, which will assist with the transition process.

While some early intervention programs finish once a child starts Prep or school, other programs offer support during the transition period. Make sure you check what other supports your early intervention service can offer you during transition. In some cases your early intervention service may be able to attend planning meetings with you and your child's Prep or school staff.

Tips for parents

Introducing your child to the concept of timetables is a good idea before they start school.

How will my child be supported to learn at school?

The Australian Curriculum Foundation Year has been developed to give students in Prep the important foundational learning they will need for successful progression to Year 1.

The Australian Curriculum started in Queensland in the 2012 school year. It aims to provide a high-quality curriculum for all, while understanding the diverse and complex nature of students with disability. It is shaped by the proposition that each student can learn and the needs of every student are important.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that all students with disability are provided with appropriate adjustments to enable them to access the curriculum.

When required, students who have vision impairment can be supported through appropriate adjustments made by teachers and schools in relation to:

- what a student learns
- how the student learns and instructional processes
- how the student demonstrates what they have learned
- the environment in which the student learns.

Student support services

Students who have vision impairment may require additional educational support so they are able to access and participate at school alongside their same-age peers.

These students can be supported through the full array of student support services allocated to regions and schools. This may include assistive technology, specialised equipment, special provisions for assessment, and access to specialist Advisory Visiting Teachers.

Students may also have access to speech and language pathologists, teacher aide support such as note taking, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and guidance officers.

Talk to your child's school about these services.

Getting to school — transport assistance

While it is the responsibility of parents to get their child to and from school, families who have had difficulty with transport for their child can contact the Department of Education, Training and Employment for an assessment to see if their child might be eligible for transport assistance.

The types of assistance available include passes for public transport, an allowance for driving your child to school, taxi or minibus services, or other arrangements.

Equipment at school

Education Queensland has an equipment loans service for students with disability who attend state schools. Schools can borrow specialised equipment and assistive technology from a regionally managed loans service to trial with students with disability. This helps schools to identify and make decisions about appropriate resources to support students' educational programs. The equipment remains the property of the Department of Education, Training and Employment.

Tips for parents

Having good communication with your child's teacher will help your child to have a successful education experience. It will also help you to quickly sort out any issues that arise.

Non-government schools

Catholic Education's Education Adjustment Program supports students who have a disability in Catholic schools by identifying the educational adjustments required by a school to meet the learning and teaching needs of your child. Other non-government schools may have specialist services for children with vision impairment — check with the principal of the school you are considering.

Find out more

Local schools can provide:

Education for children with disability: a guide for parents

School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disability

Support for children with disability at school

www.education.qld.gov.au

Delayed entry to Prep

www.dete.qld.gov.au

Australian curriculum

www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

6. Aids, equipment and assistive technology

If your child's disability affects their functioning across a range of areas, you may need to access assistive technology, specialised equipment or other aids to assist them in their daily living, communicating, learning, therapy and play. Professionals involved in your child's health, education and therapy will be able to give you advice regarding the most appropriate aids, equipment and assistive technology to consider.

This section details some services that may assist you to access support in this area.

Department of Health — Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme

The Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) provides access to subsidy funding for the provision of MASS endorsed aids and equipment to eligible Queensland residents, including children with disability.

The range of MASS aids and equipment is aimed at assisting people to live at home and includes aids for mobility, communication and daily living.

Aids and equipment are subsidy funded either on a permanent loan basis, private ownership or through the purchase of consumables.

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

Assistance can be provided to purchase aids, equipment and assistive technology for eligible children if the item is related to the disability and encourages independence and community participation. To access this

assistance, a prescription from your child's therapist is required.

The Community Aids Equipment and Assistive Technologies Initiative

The Community Aids Equipment and Assistive Technologies Initiative subsidises aids and equipment for eligible clients. Categories for aids and assistive technologies include community mobility, communication support, active participation and postural support.

LifeTec

LifeTec Queensland provides information, consultation, and education on assistive technology which aims to help improve quality of life and increase independent living skills. LifeTec has offices in Brisbane and Townsville and has a mobile outreach team that offers services across the state.

Department of Education, Training and Employment

Education Queensland has an equipment loans service for students with disability. This service provides specialised equipment for students with disability if it supports their educational program. The equipment remains the property of the school when a student leaves.

All Abilities Playgrounds

All abilities playgrounds are specifically designed to enable children with and without disability to enjoy fun and challenging play together, side-by-side. There are 17 playgrounds across the state.

Noah's Ark Toy Library

Noah's Ark Educational Resources and Toy Library have a wide range of toys and equipment, some of which are designed and adapted for children with disability.

To borrow from the Noah's Ark Educational Resources and Toy Library, you will need to be a member of Noah's Ark.

Membership is open to:

- families with a child with a diagnosed disability
- schools supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- community organisations supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- children's services supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- professionals (e.g. teachers, therapists) supporting a child or children with diagnosed disabilities.

Vision Australia library service

Vision Australia's information library service offers a huge array of information and services in a variety of formats.

Find out more

Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme

www.health.qld.gov.au

Disability Information Service

13 QGOV

CAEATI

www.qld.gov.au

Education Queensland

www.education.qld.gov.au

Lifetec

www.lifetec.org.au

All abilities playgrounds

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Noah's Ark Toy Library

3391 2166

www.noahsark.net.au

Vision Australia library service

www.visionaustralia.org

For further information contact the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services:

Telephone: 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

Telephone: Typewriter (TTY): 133 677

Email: disabilityinfo@disability.qld.gov.au

Web: www.communities.qld.gov.au

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service:

- TTY users phone 1133 677
- Speak and Listen users phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 13 QGOV (13 74 68)
- Internet relay users connect to the NRS (www.relayservice.com.au) and then ask for 13 GOV (13 74 68)

Other languages and formats:

If you need the assistance of an interpreter, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service, TIS National, on 13 14 50 and ask to be connected to the Disability Information Service.

This document is available in alternative formats (including large print) on request. If you would like a copy in another format, please contact Disability Information Service on 13 QGOV (13 74 68) or email disabilityinfo@disability.qld.gov.au

* Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.

Queenslanders now have access to disability related information at one easy online location. Visit www.qld.gov.au/disability to find out about government supports and services for people with disability, their families and carers. The new site includes links to information about support groups and counselling, education and where to access help.

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