

## School options for children with disability

Your child with disability can go to a government, independent or Catholic school, or she might also be able to go to a special school. Whatever primary school you choose for your child, she has the right to the same educational opportunities as all other children.

### Primary schools in Australia

In Australia, all children six years old and over have to go to school.

Children with disability can go to mainstream government, independent or Catholic schools, regardless of their level of disability. They might also be able to go to a government or independent special school. You can decide which option you think is best for your child and your family.

Whether your child attends a mainstream or special school, he has a right to the same educational opportunities as all other children. In Australia, [educational rights](#) are protected by law.



The Disability Standards for Education in the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act set out the rights of students with disability. The Standards say how education providers, such as schools and universities, must support these students.

### Primary school options for children with disability

Government mainstream schools

All Australian children have the right to go to a government school.

Many children with disability go to their local government primary school. There's a range of [disability support and funding](#) that can help your child.

In many schools children with disability are in classes with typically developing children.

In other schools children with disability have some lessons together as a group, and go to other lessons with their regular class group.

Some government special school programs are located in mainstream schools. These programs have their own staff, learning areas and facilities.

Most government schools also have enrolment zones. This means that, for your child to be able to enrol, your family must live within a certain area around the school. Out of zone enrolments are sometimes possible.

## Independent and Catholic mainstream schools

Independent schools are non-government schools. They have their own ways of supporting children with disability.

If you'd like your child to go to an independent or Catholic school, keep in mind that it might have a waiting list and that you'll need to pay fees.

## Special schools

There are special schools for children with disability, including children with intellectual disability, physical disability, hearing impairment, vision impairment and autism spectrum disorder. Most of these schools are government schools, but there are also special schools in the independent and Catholic systems.

To enrol in a special school, your child must meet the school's diagnosis criteria. This means there are some rules that your child's disability must fit in with.

Some specialist schools also have enrolment zones. This means that, for your child to be able to enrol, your family must live within a certain area around the school.

Like mainstream schools, special schools must have a curriculum based on the Australian curriculum, but it can be adjusted to suit students' needs. Class sizes at special schools are usually smaller than at mainstream schools. Some special schools have therapists on staff.

If your child has multiple disabilities, she might be able to go to several special schools. You can talk about this with the professionals who work with your child and with the schools that interest you.

## Home-schooling

By law, you're allowed to home-school your child, rather than sending him to school.

Home-schooling can give your child an environment and curriculum that meet her academic or behaviour needs. Home-schooling can also give you the flexibility to work around your child's medical, personal care or other needs.

If you choose home-schooling, you take on responsibility for educating your child. You'll need to register with your state or territory education department.

## Distance education

Distance education programs are designed for children who can't go to school or take part in regular classes. This might be because of illness, because they live remotely, because they can't travel to school, or because they find school difficult.

Teachers often do distance education classes online, but they can also send printed material and visual aids to your child.

There are rules that say who is allowed to enrol in a distance education program.

## Community schools

There are several small government community schools for families who want something different from mainstream schooling. These are usually small schools that cater for students who have particular types of social or behaviour support needs.

## Dual enrolment

In some states children can split their week between a government special school and a mainstream school, and spend part of the week at each. This is known as dual enrolment.

Some parents choose dual enrolment so that their child can benefit from the different experiences and resources that mainstream and special schools offer.

Dual enrolment works best if your family and the two schools all work together. Ideally people from both schools should go to any meetings about your child, agree on goals and strategies, and communicate openly.

If you're interested in dual enrolment, you could think about whether:

- your child and family will be able to settle into this routine
- there might be issues with equipment your child needs on a daily basis
- both schools support the arrangement and can work together and communicate effectively with each other, and with you, to make things go smoothly
- both schools can put together a suitable timetable for your child.

### State and territory education departments

For more information about your child's primary school options, you can contact your state or territory education department:

- [ACT Department of Education – Disability education](#)
- [NSW Public Schools – Disability, learning and support](#)
- [NT Department of Education – Special education and disability](#)
- [Queensland Department of Education – Education for children with a disability](#)
- [South Australian Government – Special needs learning plan](#)
- [Tasmanian Department of Education – Students with disabilities](#)
- [WA Department of Education – Children with special learning needs.](#)



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#### More to explore

- ▶ Choosing schools: children with disability
- ▶ Choosing a primary school for children with autism spectrum disorder

#### Web links

- ▶ Children with Disability Australia
- ▶ National Catholic Education Commission
- ▶ Australian Government Department of Human Services – Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (Centrelink)
- ▶ AADES – Australian Association of Distance Education Schools

Last Updated  
16-10-2013

Last Reviewed  
16-10-2013