



Making the move

Information for families of children with a disability
making the move from primary to secondary school

Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW



Human Services
Ageing, Disability & Home Care

An initiative of the NSW Government

stronger together ::

A new direction for disability services in NSW :: 2006-2016

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Contributors to the project include families of children with a disability, children and young people with a disability, service providers and representatives from government, non-government and Catholic schools.

The information and views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views held by ADHC, the NSW Government or the Minister for Disability Services.

Every care has been taken in the preparation of this publication and the information it contains is believed to be accurate. However, ADHC does not accept any responsibility for errors, omissions or inaccuracies.

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About this resource

Making the move provides information to help families support their son or daughter with a disability in making the move from primary school to secondary school. The information has been developed from:

- research findings
- focus group meetings held across NSW
- input from parents and service providers to a website forum
- advice from a Project Advisory Group established by Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW (ADHC).

This resource is not intended to be exhaustive. Children and young people with a disability and their families are diverse and have wide ranging needs, interests and talents. For this reason the booklet gives general information only. Readers are encouraged to use the links and contacts to seek more specific information that will be relevant to their own needs and interests.

Contacts, including phone numbers and websites, are located in the *Useful contacts* section at the end of this booklet.

Making the move

Moving from primary to secondary school is a very significant transition point in the lives of all children and their families. This transition period involves many changes that can be both challenging and rewarding.

It is a time when most primary school children move to a larger secondary school. Students need to adapt to managing their own timetable, attending a range of classes and interacting with different subject teachers and new friends.

It is also a time when students start to seek greater independence and experience rapid changes in their growth and development. It is important for parents to respond to these changes in an understanding and positive way.

As for all students, the issues around transition for students with a disability can vary greatly at this time, depending on their individual needs.

For example, some students with a disability will move from a regular class with support in the local primary school to regular classes with support in a secondary school. Others may attend the same specialist school through primary and secondary years. The needs of every student will be different and these are important to consider when choosing a secondary school.

Adjustments or modifications may need to be considered prior to secondary school enrolment of a student with a disability, to support attendance at school and participation in learning.

These can include building modifications needed for wheelchair access, changes to timetables, specialised equipment, staff development, as well as curriculum and assessment modifications.

Early planning is important to ensure that wherever possible these adjustments can be put in place before a student starts at the school.



Making the move supports families in planning and managing the transition of their child with a disability from primary to secondary school.

Information about school and other services for Aboriginal families who have a child or young person with a disability can be found in the resource *Shoulder to Shoulder*, available from ADHC.

Lester's story

Lester has an intellectual and physical disability and lives in a small rural community where he attended the local primary school. He enjoyed primary school but the prospect of moving to secondary school made him anxious and nervous. Lester's parents were also concerned about which secondary school would be best for him.

Like all children in the area, Lester needed to travel by bus to attend one of two secondary schools located in a nearby larger rural centre.

Lester's parents lead busy lives with his father sometimes working away from home. He has two older brothers and a younger sister. As for many families, finding out about schools was time consuming and confusing.

On advice from his primary school principal, planning for Lester's move to secondary school started in Year 5. During his last year at primary school, Lester and his parents visited both the local secondary schools. They were linked with the local transition support teacher who helped them with their decision in choosing the appropriate secondary school.

Lester's wish to attend school with his friends was a consideration in this decision along with the capacity of the school to meet Lester's needs.

Lester is now in year 10, has maintained his primary school friendships, has made new friends and enjoys school.

When talking about transition from primary to secondary school, Lester's parents say the advice from his primary school was invaluable.

Key factors in making the move successful included early planning, visiting potential schools, considering Lester's learning needs and his wish to attend school with his friends. With planned support, Lester has been able to cope with the larger school environment and is making good progress in his secondary schooling.

Sylvia's story

Sylvia's parents wanted her to attend a Catholic secondary school. They knew she would have to go to a school that could offer her ongoing support as she had a moderate intellectual disability, but did not know how to find the school she needed.

The special education teacher from Sylvia's primary school had always been very helpful explaining how schools in NSW work. She contacted several schools and took Sylvia to see them and meet the teachers before her family decided on a school they liked. The family felt so pleased that the teacher was willing to help because they didn't know what to do, or what questions to ask to get the information they needed.

Emma's story

Emma attended her local primary school with her friends and participated in a wide range of school activities including music and the school dance group. As she had an intellectual disability, Emma was provided with additional support to help her with learning.

Emma's parents were concerned about moving on to secondary school and how she would cope with the changes involved. Emma's primary school principal was helpful in suggesting some local schools for the family to contact or visit.

It was found that the local secondary school was very large and this was a concern for Emma's parents.

When Emma was in Year 5, they located a smaller independent school close by with a support teacher available to help with Emma's additional learning needs. This school also had a peer

mentoring program for students in Year 7. Importantly, some of Emma's friends were also planning to enrol at this school.

Emma and her parents visited the school when she was in Year 6, to meet and talk with the principal and her peer mentor who would help her when she started school. They visited the school several times to help Emma find her way around and locate facilities such as classrooms, toilets and canteen.

The first day at secondary school arrived and Emma was excited and anxious. She was met by her peer mentor and helped to settle into her home classroom where she was very pleased to sit with her friends from primary school.

Emma adjusted much more quickly than her parents expected and they were relieved and happy that all the hard work preparing for this transition had paid off.

Moving to secondary school

Planning for change

Moving to secondary school is a time of change for families and children. Careful planning will assist with the success of this important and exciting transition.

It is best to start planning this move as early as possible (depending on the needs of your child). For some, this may mean starting to plan when your child is in Year 5 at primary school. This allows time for the school to fully consider the needs of your child. This is particularly important if changes need to be made to the school buildings to ensure that physical access to the school is available.

The student support team at your child's primary school will be able to help you during this planning process.

Choosing a school

Gathering information from your primary school and friends can help you to start thinking about secondary school options. Choosing a secondary school that is able to cater for the needs of your child is important.

The school of your choice could be a government, Catholic or independent secondary school. It could also be a special school, if available.

When choosing a school it is important to consider issues such as:

- your child's wishes
- your child's strengths and interests
- available staffing and equipment
- which school your child's friends will be attending
- adjustments that will need to be in place



- issues relating to access and safety
- transport for your child to and from school.

What you can do

To help you choose the best option:

- ask other parents about their child's experience of secondary school
- talk to representatives from different schools well in advance
- find out about the educational approach of the secondary school in working with students with a disability
- discuss the support your child needs with the school.

Transport to school

If you are unable to provide or arrange transport to school for your child, transport services may be available from the Student Special Transport Scheme (SSTS). The scheme provides transport to eligible students with a disability. Your school principal will be able to provide current details regarding this service.

Safety and participation

Schools have a responsibility to make sure that all students and teachers are safe at school and that every student can take part in the variety of programs offered.

It is important that you inform the school of the particular needs of your child so that the school can plan the support needed. This includes information about mobility, communication and any assistive devices that your child uses.

It is also important that you provide the school with details of any health or behaviour issues that your child may have. This is so that the school can properly plan to manage these issues and ensure that your child and others are safe at school and while taking part in school activities.

This information is especially important if your child has difficulty in communicating or limited awareness of the surrounding environment.



Learning and support

There are several schooling options available for secondary school students with a disability that include enrolment in:

- a regular class
- a support (special) class in a regular school, or
- a special school.

Most students with a disability attend regular classes within a regular or 'mainstream' school and receive additional support so that they are able to participate in the school's learning programs. The type and amount of this support will depend on a student's specific needs.

Support or special classes cater for the specific learning needs of students with a disability.

Special education or support teachers work with classroom teachers to plan adjustments to programs that may be needed for the student.

At times there may also be a teacher's aide or school learning support officer helping the teacher in either the regular or special classroom.

Education plans

Some students may be supported by an individual education plan, which outlines the strategies to meet the student's learning needs so that he or she can participate fully in the life of the school. The school will involve you in discussions to help develop this plan.

For more detailed information about secondary schooling options, contact your primary or secondary school. Additional contact points for education providers are included in the *Useful contacts* section of this booklet.



Inclusion

In school your child will have opportunities to develop friendships and individual skills that will support involvement in the full range of activities available to all students.

Learning in the community

All schools have programs to promote the development of skills that can be used in a wide range of community settings. Community settings include local sporting facilities, excursions, work experience and use of public transport.

Advocacy and support

Parents and carers sometimes need help from an advocate or support person. This can be a friend, relative, or member of an advocacy association who can help in discussions about important choices regarding a child's education and ongoing support needs.

If you have concerns about decisions made regarding your child, speak with the principal.

Advocates should not make decisions for a child independently of the child's parents. They should be advocating in support of the child's or parents' wishes.

Advocacy services are available to help people with a disability increase the control they have over their lives. This includes the representation of their interests and views in the community.

Types of advocacy include:

- self advocacy programs to help people with a disability develop their skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to advocate on their own behalf
- citizen advocacy where organisations link people with a disability with an independent community person who advocates for this person
- group advocacy through peak organisations which work to change systems that affect people with a disability
- parent/family advocacy which helps families to represent the interests of their family members with a disability in the community
- parent/family support groups that help families to represent their interest in the community

- systemic advocacy by organisations that focus on making changes to government policy
- legal advocacy where lawyers and other skilled individuals help people defend their rights.

Advocacy services may help people with a disability, their families and carers in:

- developing capacity for self-advocacy
- making informed choices and increasing their participation in the community
- providing access to a trained professional advocate.

Extensive information on advocacy is available on the internet.

Communication

Regular communication between you and the school is important in ensuring a smooth transition for your child.

There will be times when you will meet and talk with a range of professionals such as teachers, doctors, therapists and counsellors. Feel free to ask questions so that any issues you have can be acknowledged and addressed.

With the help of family and school staff, students usually adapt quickly to their new situation.

Talking regularly about the school day can also help your child to understand how to relate to the range of people they come into contact with at school.

What if I don't speak English?

If you don't speak English you can still get advice and information about the range of family, school and health services that can help your child.

To be connected to the agency or organisation from which you are seeking advice, telephone the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) Phone 13 14 50.

Tell the operator what country you are from and what language you speak.



Belonging in secondary school

Friendships

Children and young people establish friendships with a wide range of people during their school years. In secondary school, students come in contact with new groups of people other than their family or primary school friends.

Before your son or daughter starts high school, talk to them about the different situations and people they might meet at school and promote the opportunity to meet new friends.

Feeling good

Feeling good about themselves helps children and young people to have confidence in meeting new people and in trying new experiences.

Talking about issues can help children and young people understand their feelings and recognise their achievements.

If you are worried about your child's confidence, arrange a meeting with the school to discuss your concerns.

Managing behaviour

Transition times can be very stressful for some children and young people. Sharing information with the school about your child's behaviour at home and in the community will help the school to identify and plan appropriate support for your child.

Schools have access to behaviour support teams which can provide additional advice and help in supporting student behaviour if needed.

Bullying and teasing

Schools have a range of policies and programs designed to prevent and manage harassment, bullying and teasing of students and to respond if it occurs.

Teachers are trained to identify bullying and to work to ensure that all students feel safe and protected at school.

If you have any concerns about bullying or teasing of your child at school, it is important to raise these with the school principal.

Sexuality

Sexuality is an emerging issue for all children and young people as they approach adolescence during their secondary school years. Parents may need support in preparing to discuss issues about sexuality with their child.

There are many helpful resources available from your local library, school and family planning organisations.

When discussing issues relating to sexuality it is helpful to keep the language simple and consistent.

Talking to your child about issues relating to sexuality is an ongoing process. What works for others may not work for you. Be aware that your child will be learning from a wide range of sources including peers, family members and through school education programs.

Ask your school principal about the school's approach to personal development programs.

If you have concerns about your child's physical and emotional development, talk with your local doctor or with other professionals at your community health centre.

Some services that provide specialist advice and support are listed in the *Useful contacts* section of this booklet.



Physical wellbeing

Physical changes

During adolescence, all young people experience varying rates of physical change and growth. There may also be changes to sleep patterns, appetite and food preferences.

Talk to your doctor or psychologist if any aspect of these changes worries you. It is important to know what is typical for development at this time so that you can help your child adjust.

Medication

Many medications need to be reviewed regularly during adolescence.

All schools have a policy in relation to the administration of medication. It is essential that you talk with the school principal if your child needs to take medication while at school.

Diet and exercise

Healthy foods in a balanced diet and exercise are important for everyone. Being active is an important part of physical wellbeing.

Discuss with school staff ways in which your child can be helped to participate in appropriate physical activities, both at school and in the community.

If you need further assistance, seek advice from your local doctor.

Sun smart

Sunburn can lead to skin cancers, so covering up and applying sunscreen is smart practice. Adolescents need to be encouraged to observe sun smart behaviour.



Recreation and leisure

There are many opportunities for children and young people to be involved in recreation and leisure activities outside school. Leisure activities might include attending sporting and cultural events, participating in sports, or taking up hobbies. Leisure is also about socialising with friends.

Encouraging interests and skills is an important part in the development of a healthy, balanced lifestyle. It allows children and young people to form relationships with a broad group of people. It also gives parents the chance to have a break.

Children and young people with a disability are encouraged wherever possible to participate in local sporting groups and organisations of interest. Some may need help with this.

Some organisations focus on providing specific activities for people with a disability. Examples of these are listed in the *Useful contacts* section.



Support for parents and carers

Changes in the lives of children can also be a stressful time for parents. Looking after your physical and emotional wellbeing, particularly at this time will help you in managing any stress you may be experiencing.

Some organisations that can help parents of a child with a disability are listed in the *Useful contacts* section of this booklet.

Respite

There can be times when young people with a disability and their families need to have a break. This is an important part of developing interests and connections outside the family home.

Joining recreation and sporting clubs and spending time with friends and other family contacts are good ways to have a break.

There are also respite services that provide opportunities for short term, time-limited breaks for families and other unpaid carers of children and young people with a disability.

The aim of respite is to support and maintain the family and/or other unpaid carers, as well as to provide positive, meaningful experiences for the young person with a disability.

The following types of respite services are available:

1. *Centre-based respite* where the person with a disability stays overnight or for a few days in a respite home.
2. *Own home respite* where respite is provided in the home of the person with a disability.
3. *Host family respite* which provides short-term respite in the home of a host family. Host families are matched to the age, interests and background of the individual and their carers.

4. *Flexible/combination respite* which provides an opportunity to participate in a positive experience in the community or own home while the young person's usual carer has a break.

Flexible respite activities may include:

- group activities
- peer support
- recreational activities
- camps, holidays and weekends away.

Respite services are provided by a broad range of services who have their own eligibility criteria.

For information about respite contact your regional ADHC office.

Useful contacts – Government agencies

Ageing Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW (ADHC)

Provides a wide range of services for people with a disability and their families. Contact the Information, Referral and Intake (IRI) service in your local ADHC region.

Metro North Region	(02) 9841 9350
Metro South Region	(02) 9334 3700
Western Region	1300 134 450
Northern Region	1300 364 563
Hunter Region	1300 205 268
Southern Region	1300 841 566

www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC)

Phone 1300 369 711
www.hreoc.gov.au

Ausport

Inclusive coaching in sport.
www.ausport.gov.au

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Services

Phone 1800 052 222
TTY 1800 555 677
www.health.gov.au

Department of Education and Training (DET)

Phone 131 536
(This line will automatically refer you to the region from which you are calling).
www.det.nsw.edu.au

DET Regional offices

Sydney	(02) 9217 4877
Sydney South West	(02) 9796 5446
Western Sydney	(02) 9208 9359
Northern Sydney	(02) 9886 7690
Hunter/Central Coast	(02) 4924 9999
Illawarra/South Coast	(02) 4222 2929
New England	(02) 6755 5934
North Coast	(02) 6652 0500
Riverina	(02) 6937 3871
Western NSW	(02) 6841 2110

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

Phone (NSW office) 1300 653 227
www.fahcsia.gov.au

NSW Health

Phone (02) 9391 9000
TTY 9391 9900
www.health.nsw.gov.au

NSW Sport and Recreation

Phone 131 302
www.dsr.nsw.gov.au

Public Trustee of NSW

Phone 1300 364 103
www.pt.nsw.gov.au

Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme

Phone 1800 623 724
www.transport.nsw.gov.au

Youth NSW

Phone (02) 9716 2871
www.youth.nsw.gov.au

Other useful contacts

Aboriginal Disability Network NSW

A network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability in New South Wales. Contact is through People with Disability Australia.

Phone 1800 611 889
TT (02) 9318 2138

Aquatic Activities

Aquatic activities for people with a disability, and their family, carers and siblings.

www.royallifesaving.com.au

Association of Independent Schools of NSW

Phone (02) 9299 2845
www.aisnsw.edu.au

beyond blue

Helping people with depression.

Phone 1300 22 4636

Carers NSW

The peak organisation in NSW for carers who are caring for people with a disability, mental health problem, chronic condition or who are frail aged.

Phone 1800 242 636
www.carersnsw.asn.au

Catholic Care Sydney

Catholic Care provides for the social and emotional wellbeing of communities, families and individuals and can provide advice on local disability support services.

Phone (02) 9390 5377
www.catholiccare.org

Catholic Education Commission, NSW

Providing education and information on religious education. Ask for the State Coordinator Special Learning Needs.

Phone (02) 9287 1555
www.cecsw.catholic.edu.au

Diocesan offices

Armidale	(02) 6772 7388
Bathurst	(02) 6332 3077
Broken Bay	(02) 9847 2600
Canberra/Goulburn	(02) 6234 5455
Lismore	(02) 6622 0422
Maitland/Newcastle	(02) 4979 1200
Parramatta	(02) 9830 5600
Sydney	(02) 9569 6111
Wagga Wagga	(02) 6921 1200
Wilcannia	(02) 6853 9300
Wollongong	(02) 4253 0800

Disability Complaints Service (DCS)

Contact DCS if you have asked for assistance but feel you haven't been listened to or have not been treated well.

Phone 1800 422 015
TTY (02) 9318 2138

Family Advocacy

An independent, advocacy organization in NSW, working with families who have a child or adult with developmental disability.

Phone 1800 620 588
www.family-advocacy.com

Kids Help Line

Provides a 24 hour online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.

Phone 1800 55 1800

Lifeline

Provides a 24 hour counselling service.

Phone 13 11 14

Mensline

A dedicated service for men with relationship and family concerns.

Phone 1300 789 978

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) of NSW

An advocacy organisation that provides a range of advocacy services and projects for people from a non-English speaking background (NESB) with a disability, their families, carers and service providers in NSW.

Phone 1800 629 072

TTY (02) 9687 6325

www.mdaa.org.au

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability

The peak body representing the rights and interests of people with an intellectual disability in NSW.

Phone 1800 424 065

www.nswcid.org.au

Nican

Information about recreation, tourism, sport and the arts for people with a disability.

Phone/TTY 1800 806 769

www.nican.com.au

People with Disability Australia Inc.

Peak organisation for advocacy, complaints and rights services and support for people with any type of disability in NSW.

Phone 1800 422 015

www.pwd.org.au

Relationships Australia NSW

Builds stronger relationships to enhance the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Phone 1300 364 277

www.relationships.com.au

Riding for the Disabled Association

Provides riding instruction activities for people with a disability.

www.rdansw.org.au

Sailability Australia

Facilitates sailing and boating throughout Australia for people with a disability in social, recreational and competitive activities.

Phone (02) 8424 7408

www.sailability.org.au

Special Olympics

www.specialolympics.com.au

Scouts Australia

Encourages the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development of young people.

Phone (02) 9413 1133

www.scouts.com.au

Translating and Interpreting Service

For help in a language other than English.

Phone 13 14 50

Wheelchair Sports NSW

Phone (02) 9809 5260

www.wsnsw.org.au



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