



Transition to school guide



A milestone for the family

"We value inclusivity, where all children are accepted and supported to thrive in their educational journey."

- Plumtree

When your child starts school, they will bring years of family love, their personalities and all their strengths. Many children are eager to be "the big kid going to big school". Others may be anxious about what school might be like.

Finding a school, learning about the school and starting school takes time. When a child has a developmental delay or a disability, it becomes essential to prepare early. Ideally, the transition to school process begins around 18 months before school starts. Some children may need more time. In the first year, allow the first 6 months for your child to settle into the new school.

About this eBook

This eBook helps families explore aspects of the transition process and understand what to expect. It can also assist professionals in guiding families.

There are five chapters:

- About your child
- Collaboration: the team around your child
- School options
- Government, NDIS and additional supports
- Advocacy

Each chapter addresses common questions from parents and caregivers, and provides resources that can help. Although the resources apply for families in New South Wales, they may also be relevant for other states and territories.

This eBook is part of the School & Life project by Plumtree Children's Services. It may reference other programs and services that we or other providers offer. Please note that this resource is a guide only and not meant to replace professional supports. We encourage you to talk to the professional in your child's team.

Acknowledgements

This eBook was developed by Nina Kyle, Elise Benjamin, Amos Wong, Julie Cowmeadow and Sylvana Mahmic.

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Chapter 1: About your child

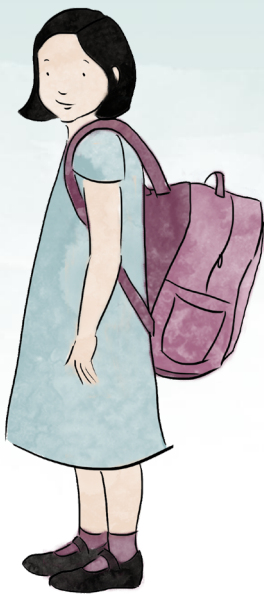
Tahlia was asked by her new therapist: "What do you like about your child?"

Without hesitation she responded: "My child has a beautiful soul ... and a wonderful sense of fun."

Tahlia's child is 4 years old and non speaking.

As a parent or caregiver of a child requiring specialist developmental supports, you may find yourself being asked to describe your child's problems and challenges. This places them in a negative' space. When talking about your child for school, focus on their strengths and interests.

Think about what you want for your child, a vision you have for their school life. You may need to talk with others and do some research, but everyone wants success for this transition: your child, yourself, other family members, as well as the educators and therapists.



Describing your child to the school

You may feel that there's a lot of information you want to share about your child, and it may seem unclear where to start. Often there is an emphasis on formal reports. But remember, your child is much more than reports! Sharing the things they enjoy, what makes them laugh, their strengths, dislikes and a little about their family shows them more fully as the person they are.

Your educators will then be able to provide relevant activities and strategies to help them get settled. As time goes on, knowing your child's preferences can help others know when to offer encouragement or rewards to support them to attempt tasks they usually avoid.

If your child expresses some ideas about what they want around starting school or have any concerns, take the time to listen to them. Share their thoughts with the educators where appropriate and work on addressing them.

As well as sharing your child's strengths and interests, let the educators to know about the goals you are working towards and the strategies to achieve them. This information can be helpful to use in school routines where possible.

Resources and further reading

[Creating an 'All About Me' page](#)

A resource by Belongside Families (formally Kindred) that introduces your child and provides information about them. It communicates the positives about your child and their identity, rather than their diagnosis.

Getting settled at the new school

Almost every child will find some aspect of school new and challenging. During the first year, it may be separating from parents, wearing a uniform, following new routines and academic tasks. There could be sensory triggers, such as loud noises.

Talk with educators about any challenges that may arise in this new setting. You can then discuss strategies that can help. Your child's new educators will appreciate your honesty and you will be able to get a sense of varied nature of their role and how they can assist.

Priority skills for starting school

Many parents and caregivers think that academic skills, like a child being able to count or write their own name are essential for starting school. It can be a much debated question for families!

However, research has shown that school educators view self-help, communication, and social and emotional skills as priorities. For mainstream classes, these include:

- Separating from loved ones
- Toileting independently
- Eating independently using lunch box and waterbottle
- Dressing themselves
- Recognising own name on belongings and items
- Staying on task for short periods
- Following simple instructions and rules
- Communicating needs and requesting for help

It's also helpful if children can play with others, take turns and calm themselves when stressed. Rest assured, all children enter school with mixed skills.

The skills for your child to focus on will vary depending on the school setting; whether they will be in a mainstream class, a support class or special school. During your discussions with the school, identify what skills they see as priorities.

Becoming more independent is a part of the school experience. Consider any specific skills you want your child to have, such as opening their lunch box or toileting. Work with your child's therapists and current educators on developing goals and strategies for these skills. Explore ways they can be embedded into the school routine.

Resources and further reading

[Starting school: preparing children](#)

Raising Children Network provides free, practical tips, ideas and strategies on preparing your child for school and parenting matters. The Starting school section includes tips on getting familiar with the school, practical preparations, managing feelings and the early weeks.

[Ready.Set.School!](#)

A step-by-step transition to school guide by Reimagine Australia (charges for the resource may apply).

[Starting school: Useful skills to work towards for your child](#)

A survey with 250 teachers on crucial skills for school by Dr Coral Kemp from Macquarie University.

[Transition to school: strategies and stories from families](#)

A resource by Belongside Families (formerly Kindred) discussing topics including expectations, creating social stories, routines and positively educating the school community.



Chapter 2: Collaboration and the team around your child

"... it is not just about getting the child ready for school. It is about all of us being ready—community, school, services, all of us working together."

Vanna Lockwood, St Peters Community Preschool

"We believe in working together with families and communities to create inclusive environments that nurture the potential of every child."

Plumtree

The ideal time to speak with your local school is two years before your child starts kindergarten. It's particularly important if you have lots of questions or feel that physical adjustments may be required, such as installing a wheelchair access ramp. Consider also visiting the school's Orientation Day when your child is around 4 years old.

Your child will be moving into a more formal learning environment compared to the family home or the play-based settings of childcare and preschool. There will be more people to relate to, new routines and physical spaces explore and navigate. There may also be a lot of 'newness' for yourself and some challenges. Consider reaching out to good friends or family members to talk things through.

Transitioning to school involves teamwork between you, the parent or caregiver, and:

- Your child's current educators
- Your child's therapists
- The new school educators
- Your child

Respectful, open, clear and honest communication is essential for a successful transition. Developing a timeline and planning will help with organising relevant documents, visiting schools, enrolment, attending school orientation and establishing new routines in the first weeks. Everyone will be aiming for your child to settle and flourish in their new environment!

We will talk about timelines and document checklists later in this eBook.

Your team's roles and responsibilities

"The best partnerships have the interests of your child at their heart."

"The best relationships develop when parents and professional agree upon the most meaningful goals for your child and you plan together the strategies and processes to achieve the child and family goals."

Plumtree



Parents and caregivers, the experts on their child

Having the central role in the transition to school process may feel daunting, but remember: you know your child best and have been making the biggest difference in their development. If your child attends an early education service, you already have some experience. For advice and support, reach out early and talk with your child's therapists and early childhood educators on how they can help. You can also connect with other families in similar circumstances, or buddy with another parent to share information, help keep each other on track and offer support.



Your child's current educators, who know them in a group setting

If your child has been attending an early learning service, their educators will already be supporting them with a range of skills that include playing with peers, following simple instructions, participating in story and music time and self-care. Check in with educators to identify additional skills that can be helpful for your child to learn for starting at the new school.

Also, ask if they can prepare a written report for the new school (note that some staff may not be able to provide this). For children going to a public school, educators can complete a Transition to School Statement. It provides information about your child that includes their learning, development and future planning opportunities. The document complements other transition activities like information and orientation sessions.

See "Resources and further reading" at the end of this section for a guide on completing the statement to be used by early childhood educators.



Your child's therapists who know you, your child and their educators

It is helpful if your therapy provider can become a partner in navigating the transition process. If your child has more than one therapist, explore who can partner with you to be the main contact. Your NDIS goals will also guide how you involve your child's therapists.

Your therapist may be familiar with local schools and help you identify the ones to contact for visits, collaborate on questions you may want to ask and gather documents. They can also provide support with requests and timeframes for physical modifications required, such as ramps or change tables. Importantly, therapists will continue to work with you on your child's skill development and strategies, and provide a report for the new school. This information will help with a smoother transition.



Your child—the star!

All children's needs are different and they communicate in many ways. You know your child and how they express themselves. Check in with them regularly to see how they're feeling about going to a new school. Ask about what they want, how they feel and go gently. Let them know you want to understand.

Coaching your child to make good choices and including them in planning with professionals using the Child Voice model ensures that goals reflect their strengths and interests, not just adult views. This leads to relevant learning outcomes and independence.

Reading stories about starting school and creating a social story about it are great ways to introduce what's coming. A social story is a short document for your child that uses simple words and pictures. It helps them know what will happen at school and how they may feel. Take pictures of the new school, the school uniform and other related imagery like friends who are going to the same school, to use for the story.

If your child has older siblings already at the school, consider their needs. How do they feel about having their younger brother or sister at the same school? Do they want to play with them or their friends in the playground? Listen to them, and let them know that they have choices and you want the best for them, too.

Resources and further reading

[Guide to completing the Transition to School statement](#)

This NSW Government resource supports early childhood teachers and educators to complete the document to forward to a child's new school.

[A Child Voice model for children with disabilities to thrive in the future](#)

An evidence-based model developed by Plumtree that promotes coaching children in making the right choices and including them in planning with professionals.

[Transition to school](#)

A Plumtree resource on how therapist services change during school transition.

Visiting schools

Visiting a school gives you an impression of the people, the facilities and helps with making a decision. It is recommended that you make initial enquiries without your child. Check if it's possible to see some classes during the visit.

Arrange to meet the principal or assistant principal and prepare some questions to take along with your documents. In the meeting, share your child's strengths, interests and strategies that assist them. Your child's All About Me document can help.

If your child needs communication technology, this would be a good time to share the information and explore if staff need training. A school that actively listens and involves parents in the decision-making process often indicates a supportive and caring community.

You can raise any concerns you have. The principal should be able to answer your questions, explain the school philosophy and enrolment process. Ask about the frequency of parent-teacher interviews and if you can request additional meetings.

Pay attention to the school's facilities and resources, as they play a vital role in supporting children with disabilities. Explore options for parent involvement at the school if you have the capacity. Connecting with the Parents and Citizen's (P&C) Association may be helpful for some parents.

At public schools, the principal will also be able to share application information in relevant areas such as transport and support staff hours. Although the class teacher may not be confirmed yet, it is also a good time to clarify whether your child's therapist can visit to assist in supporting and settling your child.

Feeling good about the school? Take note of Open Days, orientation sessions or other events that are held in for new students. They are a great opportunity for you and your child to meet the educators and experience the school environment with other children. Educators can also see how the children respond to activities, each other and the school team.

The school environment compared to early learning settings

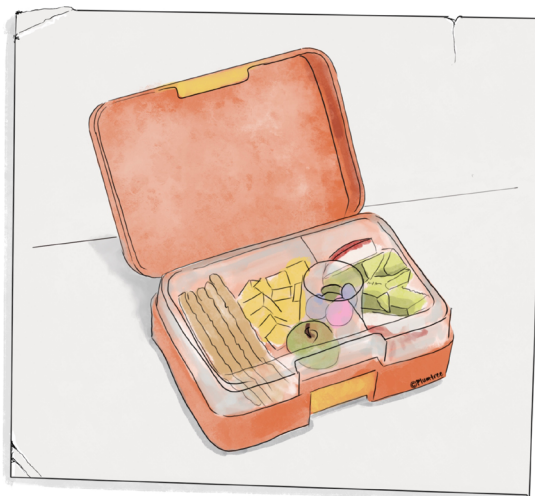
Going to school is a different experience compared to early learning settings, which are generally less formal. Some of the changes are:

- Switching from play-based learning to an academic focus: reading, writing and maths gradually take on a greater emphasis
- A larger physical environment with more buildings, a bigger playground with different equipment, and different bathroom layouts
- School classes cannot be interrupted and parents usually contact the office staff instead of the class teacher during these times
- More children and often less adults in the classroom; the adults are not usually addressed by their first names as they frequently are in early childhood settings

Preparing for the first day of school

The big day is almost here! On the night before, lay out the school uniform, fill up the water bottle, prepare lunch and morning tea and store them in the refrigerator. Pack the school bag and include a spare change of clothes; let your child know the clothes are in case of a toileting accident. Let your child help with some of these tasks if possible.

At bed time, make sure your child is settled and reassure that they are all ready for the day ahead. In the morning, give them their favourite breakfast if possible for a good start. Support their efforts to get ready and dressed (remember, school mornings are not the time for added pressures). Invite them to help put the food and drink bottle into their bag. Apply sunscreen if needed and take lots of photos! If you can, arrive at school a little early and reassure them when you will pick them up.



Setting individual goals at the new school

"We believe in the power of individualised support to maximise a child's potential and foster their overall development."

- Plumtree

School is a new place with new people and rules. Keep in mind that it is a time of change: as well as the 18 months or more of preparation, the transition includes at least the first six months of kindergarten.

You will develop an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) with the educators in collaboration with your support team. Your child's About Me document that identifies their strengths, goals, communication style and resources needed can help with creating the plan.

Support classes and special schools will already have access to many communication resources. For a mainstream class, you may need to discuss with your educators about providing visuals these resources and who will make them.

Priorities or goals may change during the first few days or weeks as your child experiences the new people and environment, so be flexible.

Resources and further reading

[Inclusion in practice](#)

Resources by Reimagine Australia (formerly known as early Childhood Intervention Australia) that include a Working Together agreement and a Strengthening Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Intervention best practice guide.

[Inclusion Together - A map for working better, together](#)

Practical tools to support children of children with disability or developmental difference through building an inclusion team that works well together. Led by the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency.

[Now & Next School](#)

A four-session, evidence-based online program to discover your child's strengths, coach them to make choices and enhance collaboration with educators for an effective Individual Education Plan (IEP).

[Parent-professional relationships](#)

[Families leaning into partnerships with professionals](#)

Statements created by families for families on developing the best partnerships between parents and professionals from the 2017 and 2018 Now & Next Alumni Conference.

Chapter 3: School options

"Every child with a disability has a right to access and participate in quality education on the same basis as other children."

"Children with disabilities should have access to appropriate support to ensure they can fully participate in all aspects of school life."

Disability Inclusion Act

"The first word of inclusion is 'Welcome.'"

Plumtree

In NSW, when a child turns 5 on or before 31 July in a given year, they are eligible to begin kindergarten the following school year. For example, if your child is 5 on 31 July 2023, they can begin school in 2023. All children from 6 years of age in NSW are legally required to be attending a school, be registered for and attending home schooling, or have a valid exemption. This is the compulsory school age.

Deciding when your child should start school is a personal choice that varies for everyone. Beginning school closer to 6 years old can enable an extra year for maturity and independence to develop for some children, but may not have significant advantages for others.

To help you make an informed decision, consult educators and therapists who are familiar with your child and knowledgeable about the school system. If possible, seek feedback from other parents who have children with disabilities attending the school. Their firsthand experiences can offer valuable insights for your decision.

Finding the right school may take time. Trust your instincts and focus on what will be the best fit for your child's unique abilities and needs. This is a journey you'll take together, and with the right support and preparation, they can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Your choice will inform further preparations.



Transitioning to school is an exciting and positive step in your child's life. By working together and choosing a place that embraces inclusivity and celebrates diversity, you are setting the foundation for a successful and enriching educational experience for your child.

School choices

Every child has the right to attend their local public school. For children with disability and developmental delay, many schools have accessible infrastructure, special education programs and trained support staff. The options vary between the school systems.

In New South Wales, the options are:

- Public or government schools
- Catholic schools
- Independent or private schools
- Home schooling

Depending on the school, students attend either a mainstream class or a support class. Some schools have both options available. Certain eligibility criteria is needed for support classes and special schools. There is a limited number of available positions and placement is based on an application process.

The *Education Act 1990* allows parents to choose to educate their children at home. For home schooling in NSW, the child must be registered by The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). Please note that it may take up to 12 weeks from the time of application to receipt of a certificate to proceed.

Resources and further reading

[Guidelines for Home Schooling Registration in NSW](#)

A downloadable NESA pdf with information on the home schooling registration process, requirements, the NSW curriculum and where to access more information.

[Home schooling support groups and networks](#)

A NSW Government list of some of the larger home schooling support groups.

[School options in NSW](#)

A Plumtree resource with links to the NSW Department of Education, Local Education Offices, Independent Schools Australia, ASPECT schools and Catholic schools.

When to apply for school

Generally, it is recommended that parents and carers contact their local school during:

- Term 2 of the year before starting school for a child with disability and additional learning and support needs (see the section “Schools for specific purposes and support classes”)
- Term 2, two years before starting school for a child needing access or mobility support. This includes wheelchair access or other significant changes required to the school environment

If you are planning to move to another area when your child is due to start school but haven't decided where, you can still begin enquiries at your local public school.

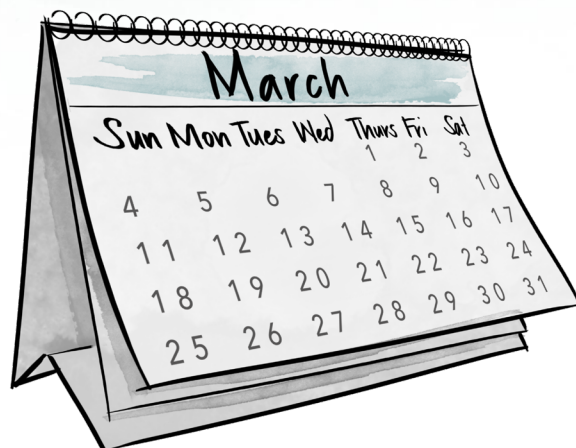
Resources and further reading

[Inclusive learning support](#)

A NSW Government webpage for parents and carers of a child with disability or additional learning and support needs. Includes information on when to talk to your local school (you can enter your child's age to generate a timeline); support in early childhood education, primary school and high school; after school pathways and resources.

[Going to a public school—Enrolment](#)

A NSW Government page with information on topics including enrolment areas, privacy and health.



Schools for specific purposes (SSP) and support classes

Schools for Specific Purposes (SSP) in NSW provide specialist and intensive support in a dedicated setting for students with moderate to high learning support needs. They educate students with a wide range of disabilities, sensory impairment or learning difficulties. Support classes are located within some mainstream schools and are smaller than mainstream classes.

Enrolment into a SSP or support class is done by invitation from the school.

The Sydney Catholic Schools website states that their schools 'provide reasonable adjustments and targeted interventions to support students with disability and additional learning requirements.' Their teachers will work with parents and specialist staff to develop individual plans. Placements at special schools and specialised support classes are limited in number and need a review process.

Resources and further reading

[Support classes](#)

NSW Government information on support classes including size, staff and placement.

[Students with disability](#)

The Independent Schools Australia website provides general information about education for children with developmental delay or disability.

Applying for a specific purpose school or support class

Talk to the local school to apply for you as early as possible in the year before your child begins. You will need to provide a recent copy of your child's developmental assessment. The school will work with you to determine eligibility.

Special school and support class options are available when:

- Your child has significant support needs and meets the department's disability criteria
- The support will meet their educational needs

The application is called an Access Request (this is different to the access request for the NDIS). The school will arrange for you to complete this application in collaboration with the learning and support team. A panel of specialists considers the application and decides an outcome.

If the school does not have support classes, the Access Request is used to apply for additional supports for your child, such as extra funding to hire more teachers or learning support officers.

Independent, ASPECT or Catholic Schools need to be contacted individually for enquires.

Resources and further reading

[Access Requests](#)

NSW Government information on when your child needs an access request.

Applying for an out-of-area school

You may want your child to attend a school that is not the 'local' school. This can be for a variety of reasons: you live near a school but it is outside your local catchment area, or it has a class not available at the local school.

Contact the school that you are interested in for more information. If they can accommodate out-of-area enrolments, the school will advise on any selection criteria. You will need to submit an expression of interest; most schools may have an online enrolment system.

Applying for an exemption

In NSW, a child may be granted an exemption from starting school if a formal assessment by medical specialists indicates their disability significantly affects the ability to participate in a school environment. Health, learning and social needs benefits from the continuation of an individual program are also considered.

If your early education and early intervention team feel that additional time before starting school is beneficial, talk with your local school in advance. They will inform you on the required documentation.

As a condition of exemption, your child must also be involved in an appropriate educational program, and you will need to provide supporting documentation. The decision for granting the exemption is based on their individual needs and circumstances. In most cases the exemption cannot be longer than six months after your child's 6th birthday.

Resources and further reading

[Exemption from school procedures](#)

A 2015 NSW Government document with current information on this topic for public schools.

[Exemptions from attendance and enrolment](#)

Information on two types of independent school exemptions by the Association of Independent Schools.

Starting school gradually

Some children will benefit from transitioning gradually to school, as easing into full-time attendance can make the process smoother. Discuss this during transition to school meetings if you feel it is a good arrangement.

For instance, your child may initially attend school for shorter days, with the goal of leading to full-time attendance in the future. Providing the required support for a successful transition is the right of every child.

Resources and further reading

[Choosing primary schools for children with disability](#)

[Enrolling and starting primary school: children with disability](#)

Online information and tips by Raising Children Network.



Chapter 4: Government, NDIS and additional supports

There is a range of funding and supports for additional resources, meeting education costs or providing useful services for schools and families.

Financial supports

Integration Funding support (IFS) is available for public schools. The funding can be used to employ additional teachers or school learning support officers to assist with your child's individual learning in a mainstream class. In practice, a child will receive a certain number of hours per day or week for support. They will be used by the school for the best times that meet your child's needs.

Schools may apply for additional funding assistance to support children assessed with a moderate intellectual disability, a physical disability or autism accompanied by intellectual disability. An application form detailing education support needs is completed by the school with support from the family. The amount of funds will be determined by the education department and is calculated based on these needs.

Some state funding is available for enrolment at a local public school. Children assessed in the mild range of disability are eligible for small group learning assistance. This means the school may allocate your child some additional support during their school day. This could look like extra small group learning experiences or help on the playground.

If you are unable to pay for fees or items such as uniforms because of financial hardship, the school may be able to provide exemptions or financial support. Contact the principal to discuss your situation.

Resources and further reading

[Integration funding support](#)

Further information on when it is needed, eligibility, how schools apply, funding reviews and appeals.

[Government and NDIS support](#)

To help cover the costs for primary school aged school children.

[Voucher programs](#)

To help cover the cost of creative sporting and recreational activities for high school children.

[Travel and transport](#)

Information on free or reduced transport services for primary school children to and from school.

Assisted travel to and from school

Families of a child with a disability not attending their local school due to appropriate placement elsewhere may be eligible for free specialised transport through the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP). The criteria requires that you demonstrate in writing your inability to provide or arrange travel for your child either fully or in part.

Transport through the ASTP is provided as an in-kind support for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants who are eligible to receive the service. It is available in both government and non-government schools in NSW, with a maximum of two funded trips per day from home to school in the morning and from school to home in the afternoon.

To be eligible for transport in Catholic schools, a student must have a disability confirmation form on meeting the Department of Education criteria and be attending a support class or special school. This is obtained through the Diocesan Office.

Resources and further reading

[Assisted School Travel Program eligibility](#)

Find out if your child is eligible for the program.

[ASTP and the NDIS](#)

Facts and infographic on the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Assisted School Travel Program.

Outside of school care

Outside of school hours care (OSHC) services provide care, play and learning for primary school-age children before and after school, during school holidays and on pupil-free days. In NSW, some services are also called Out of School Hours (OOSH) services.

They are usually located in public, private and independent schools, and need a separate application for enrolment. If not available on the school site, OSHC services are also run by community organisations or privately. Choosing an OSCH service can be similar to seeking a new school. Some questions to ask when you make enquires include:

- The adult-to-child ratio
- The fees
- How my child get to the service—such as a supervised walk with other students from their school
- Requests by a child wanting to rest
- How bullying and related issues are managed
- Staff helping my child with self-care if needed

If your child has specific strategies for communication, self-care or behaviour support, ask if their therapist can visit to coach the staff. If significant difficulties arise in their OSHC service, explore if you can use NDIS funding for a support worker to attend. Keep in mind that the funds need to be used for your child's NDIS goals.

Remember, the first year of school can be exhausting for all children. If your child needs to attend OSCH for part or all the week, keep in mind that these new routines can impact their behaviour. For example, they may be tired and fall asleep before dinner or become agitated with family members.

Resources and further reading

[Outside School Hours Care \(OSHC\) services](#)

A NSW Government page with an OSHC guide, case studies, regulations and other information.

[Child Care Subsidy](#)

An Australian Government page on assistance to help with the cost of child care, including vacation care.



Role of the NDIS at school

The NDIS promotes the independence, social and economic participation of people with disabilities and assists them to exercise choice and control. It can fund reasonable and necessary costs that enables a child with a disability to go to school, including:

- Personal care and support at school
- Transport to and from school
- Assistive technology such as wheelchairs or personal communications devices
- Specialised training for school staff to carry out a student's support needs
- Support for developing social and communication skills
- Additional transition training beyond what their school provides
- Assistance to plan and coordinate student supports by the NDIS, the school and other services

Schools vary in their need for therapy support and capacity to implement it on site. Some schools may feel that having a series of therapists visiting different children across the day and week is disruptive for classes.

It is important to understand that you need to advocate for therapists to visit the school. If yours is available for school visits, make a request. There are four key steps to have an NDIS-funded support such as therapy delivered at school:

1. Ask the school in writing
2. Meet with school staff to discuss details
3. The principal will consider your request, taking into account the needs of your child, other students and school operations
4. The principal makes the final decision, and will you know if the provider can deliver their services at school
5. The support provider must be a part of the Child Safe Scheme, required by the NSW Government Office of the Children's Guardian

Resources and further reading

[NDIS: What are we responsible for?](#)

Examples of supports that the NDIS may fund.

[Child Safe Scheme](#)

Information about the scheme at the NSW Office of Children's Guardian.

Chapter 5: Advocacy

“People with disabilities and their families have the skills, knowledge and confidence to be active and valued members of community.”

Family Advocacy, NSW

All children need their parents to speak up for them to protect and promote their best interests. Advocacy, in relation to children with disabilities starting school, ensures that they have equal access to education and the necessary support. This involves promoting their rights, addressing any barriers and creating an inclusive learning environment that accommodates their needs and potential. It enables the same opportunities as their peers to thrive in their educational journey.

Advocacy is about communication to respectfully deepen an understanding between people and enable positive action or change. Transitioning to school will involve open and honest communication between parents, educators, therapists and other adults. Your child may need you to introduce them in person or in writing, so the new people in their life can get to know their interests, strengths and best supports.

You and your child’s rights

Conversations on disability often involves sensitive personal issues. To ensure that personal information is treated appropriately, you and your child have the right to confidentiality with therapists, early childhood educators, service providers and the school. In other words, information about your child and family can only be shared with your permission.

To get the best outcomes at school, developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for your child is a part of this process. An IEP ensures access and equity in the schooling experience for students with disabilities. You have the right to provide information about your child and be included in decision-making related to their education.

You can ask for support when speaking with the school team. Having another person to attend meetings can help with questions, note taking and communication. It can be a family member or your child’s therapist. Families that speak English as a second language are entitled to have an interpreter present. People who are hearing impaired have the right for a signer for assistance.



All children need to feel protected and safe in the classroom, the playground and on any transport provided for them. Ask the school how they manage bullying and fighting. Furthermore, ask what happens if your child bullies another child if you also have this concern. Open, honest, non-judgmental communication is essential in these discussions.

If things go wrong, you have the right to complain. Raise your concerns first with the people involved. If the issue cannot be resolved, speak with the school principal. When talking with potential schools it may be useful to ask for their complaints procedure.

Advocacy support

We need to feel confident and empowered to advocate. As well as informal support through friends and family, you can consult with your therapist on school-related advocacy matters. There are also a range of advocacy networks and organisations across Australia that can provide support.

Resources and further reading

www.dana.org.au/

DANA Disability Advocacy Network Australia provides tools and contact details of Australian state and territory advocacy networks and peak organisations for people with disabilities.

[Resources to help you with the education system](#)

Guides about your rights, inclusive education factsheets and other resources by Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

[Fostering your child's self-advocacy skills](#)

Dr Melanie Heyworth, director of Reframing Autism and former Plumtree peer worker, gives practical tips to encourage and support this new responsibility.

[Now & Next](#)

Now and Next is an evidence-based program, designed and facilitated by parents for parents of children with developmental concerns, developmental delay or disability. Achieving positive relationships and learning outcomes for your child, and the role of parents as advocates and family leaders are some topics of the program.

[Family Advocacy](#)

An independent organisation to defend the rights of people with disability in NSW.

[Ombudsman New South Wales](#)

Manages complaints relating to unfair treatment by NSW Government agencies, local councils, or NSW Government funded community service providers.

Extra information

Children's books on starting school

Here's a list of books about starting school that may spark your child's imagination and help begin a conversation about the big day! Some of these books may be available from your local library. See if your child's long day care or preschool has other books to recommend on the topic.

If you have the time, take photos of the new school and make a social story for your child. Images could include the drop-off and pick-up site, the school entrance, the playground, classroom, library and their new teacher. Your therapist may be able to help with this project.

Starting School by Jane Godwin and Anna Walker

A beautiful book focusing on the experiences and feelings of five very different children as they begin at school for the first time.

First Day by Andrew Daddo and Jonathon Bentley

This story follows a child and her mother on the morning of the first day of school. Playfully they undertake their preparation—including a very yummy breakfast! Amongst the play are some good organisation tips for what to take and what may need to be left behind. The story also touches on the mother's feelings.

Ready, Set, Big School by Jan Stradling and Jedda Robaard

A Play School Mindfully Me book about starting school.

Maurice is excited and a bit nervous about starting school, but his friends are here to make new friends and begin their learning adventure together.

Little Tiger Starts School by Sue Graves and Trevor Dunton

This story offers a gentle introduction to the experience of starting school for young children. It includes activities and ideas to talk through together to help children reflect on their experiences.



My First Day at School by Meredith Costain and Michelle Mackintosh

With gorgeous illustrations and a positive storyline, the book provides a detailed insight into attending school and slowly becoming independent. From making friends to going to the bathroom, the story is an uplifting way of reassuring children and parents alike before the first day at school.

Jessica's Box by Peter Carnavas

Jessica is starting school but she is worried she won't make any new friends. She brings a different present in a cardboard box. Will what's in her box help her find a new friend?

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Chester Racoon doesn't want to go off to school so his mother explains the magic of the kissing hand. A lovely tale about how family will always be with you.

Starting School by Janet and Allen Ahlberg

From first-day nerves to finding your peg, this book will reassure any reluctant school starters. School is great and there are so many things to do and learn.

Maddie's First Day by Penny Matthews and Liz Anelli

Another great guide to what school environments are like, Maddie begins her day by walking to school with her Dad. She experiences comforts in meeting friends and singing songs while eating her packed lunch. It is Maddie's first day of school and she has everything ready—her uniform, shoes, socks and hat. But there is one special thing that Maddie can't leave behind—her blanky!



The big picture

Here is a broad timeline for transitioning a child to school in New South Wales that complements the custom generated timeline for your child on page 16 resource “When to talk to your local school.” It includes potential tasks, depending on your circumstances. Talk with your child’s therapists, current educators and/or your local school to determine which ones are relevant for you.

Time	Task	eBook page
Two years before school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the school options available and talk to any independent or out-of-area schools Discuss options with people who know your child well Arrange a developmental assessment for your child, so a report is available before Term 1 begins <p>Alternately, arrange for an assessment when your child is 3 ½ years old so that the report is ready when they are 4 years old. Remember to apply in advance, as an assessment can take six months or more to schedule; the report takes a further 2 months to produce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss making an application for school/early intervention Consider attending school information sessions for knowledge in advance 	15 9, 14 17 8 11
Year before school Term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit different schools to clarify your options and their enrolment dates Ask for and collect reports from your child’s therapists and early educators to take to school visits Discuss making an application for integration funding support through the NSW Department of Education If considering mainstream or Autism support classes for your child, approach your local school regarding enrolment 	11 10 20 16

Year before school Term 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are choosing a public school, this is the term you may need to enrol your child • Continue conversations about school with therapists, current educators and your child • Continue to identify your priorities for school preparation • If you have decided on your child enrolling in a public school support class or SSP placement, complete the Access Request application early in this term—check with the school to confirm the cutoff date 	16 9 6 17
Year before school Term 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have enrolled your child in a mainstream class, contact the school about meeting and developing a transition plan • Complete application for support funding if required and check with the school about cut-off dates 	19 20
Year before school Term 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended your child attend their school orientation/ transition to school program • Complete the transport request application if your child requires transport to and/or from school 	8 21
School term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may start school in the year they turn 5 before 31 July • Your child must start school when they turn 6 years old 	14 14

Checklist

Documents

Here is a list of documents you may need to provide to your child's school. The ones required will vary depending on your circumstances. Talk with your child's therapists, current educators or your local school to determine which ones are relevant for you.

Document	Yes/No	Date submitted to school:
Developmental assessment This is an essential document required by all schools for children with developmental delay or disability		
Medical reports		
Therapy reports and goals Occupational therapist Physiotherapist Speech pathologist Behaviour therapist Other (eg NDIS goals)		
Early childhood educators reports This may be provided as a TTS Digital Statement through the Education NSW website		
About my child/Snapshot of my child: an introduction page or booklet you may prepare for your child's teacher (see section 1 of eBook)		
Other		

Application forms

Here is a list of application forms you may need to request from your child's school or access through relevant websites (see body of eBook for website links). Not all applications may apply to your situation.

Application	yes/no	Requested date	Date
School enrolment—relevant for all children			
Out-of-area expression of interest, if relevant to you			
Home schooling registration for families making this choice			
Access Request application for both NSW Public school special classes and Schools for Specific Purposes			
Application for Integration Funding Support (IFS) for mainstream classes			
Exemption requests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools and independent schools have separate forms 			
Assisted Transport application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education NSW or local Catholic Diocesan Office 			
Outside school hours care (OSHC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As required by specific service Fees subsidy: see Services Australia website 			
Other			



Plumtree is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation that helps families thrive.

Trusted for over 40 years, we provide free centre-based playgroups and online parent education workshops. We also provide therapies and support for children aged birth to 8 years with a disability or developmental delay and their families. At Plumtree Preschool, children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds learn together and begin to understand the value of inclusive communities.

Our award-winning, evidence-based programs and resources help families take control of their own learning and achieve positive outcomes.

Plumtree's passionate, culturally diverse team of specialists work from the heart in a caring environment where families feel respected and informed.

Visit our website www.plumtree.org.au and join the Plumtree mailing list or Facebook page to find out about our services, workshops and events.



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