**Program for Students with Disabilities**

Roles and responsibilities in the assessment process

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<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/swdassess.aspx>

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# PURPOSE

These guidelines have been prepared to:

* describe the respective roles of schools, the assessment service (Assessments Australia), and Student Support Services (SSS), in supporting applications under the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD).
* outline the four stages of assessment for students referred to Assessments Australia.

A detailed flowchart indicating the respective roles of Schools, Assessments Australia and SSS through each stage of the assessment process is included (see Appendix 1).

# BACKGROUND

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) is committed to delivering an inclusive education system that ensures all students have access to a quality education that meets their diverse needs. The Department provides a range of policies, programs and resources for schools to support the delivery of high quality schooling for all students, including students with disabilities. These resources may be provided in the Student Resource Package, through student support services including psychologists, social workers, youth workers, speech pathologists and visiting teachers or through specific early identification and intervention programs. The Program for Students with Disabilities is one such form of provision available to schools.

### Program for Students with Disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) is a targeted supplementary program that provides resources to Victorian government schools to support the education of a defined student population with disabilities and moderate to severe needs. The program has eligibility criteria under the following categories:

* physical disability
* visual impairment
* severe behaviour disorder
* hearing impairment
* intellectual disability
* autism spectrum disorder
* severe language disorder with critical educational needs.

Further information regarding timelines and eligibility for the PSD is available online in the *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines* at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/handbook.aspx>

In addition, professionals may access the *Program for Students with Disabilities Professional Guidelines* from regional disabilities coordinators for detailed assessment guidelines and reporting templates under each disability category.

### The Assessment Service

The Department provides an assessment service to support applications for the PSD on behalf of students in Victorian government schools in the categories of Intellectual Disability (ID) and Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs (SLD-CEN).

Assessments Australia is contracted by the Department to manage and administer the assessment service. All assessments are conducted by qualified and registered psychologists and speech pathologists.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## The role of the school

### Establishing the Student Support Group

Every Victorian government school is encouraged to establish a Student Support Group for any student with additional learning needs.  A Student Support Group, a cooperative partnership of parent/guardian/carer(s), school representatives and professionals, ensures coordinated support for each student's educational needs. The Student Support Group is central in making an application under the PSD.

Guidelines for the Student Support Group are available at:

### <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/handbook.aspx>

### Gathering evidence

The Student Support Group is responsible for gathering the documentation containing evidence of the student’s eligibility and educational needs, and submitting applications within the Department’s timelines.

The assessments and reports required to support applications under the PSD provide a profile of a student’s specific strengths and weaknesses. This documentation provides a rich source of information to assist teachers with planning for effective teaching and learning, and enables schools to provide ongoing support to ensure the needs of students are met, regardless of the outcome of applications to the PSD.

### Coordinating support from professionals

Documentation to support applications under the PSD may be sourced by schools from various professionals including:

* Student Support Services (SSS) Officers
* Assessments Australia
* Early Childhood Intervention Services
* External specialists.

It is recommended that all students identified with disabilities and additional learning needs should be brought to the attention of SSS officers for advice and support as required. In particular, SSS officers may assist schools in the preparation of reports to support applications under the Autism Spectrum Disorder and Severe Behaviour Disorder categories. Schools should request these assessments and reports from SSS by creating an individual student case in the Student Online Case System.

### Creating an Individual Student Case in the Student Online Case System

To engage Student Support Services, schools use the Student Online Case System (SOCS). SOCS assists principals and Student Support Services (SSS) (including visiting teachers) to support students by providing a data management system for all SSS cases, assessments and interventions. SOCS promotes accountability and role clarity, assists with workload management, facilitates more effective interventions through comprehensive student information, and reduces duplication through accurate record keeping.

The system includes the following features:

* online case preparation, assignment and management processes
* service allocation and case management
* standardised service reporting
* service review involving network teams and schools

In relation to students who may be eligible for the PSD under the categories of ID and SLD-CEN, it is the responsibility of schools to identify these students, and collect sufficient information to support a referral to Assessments Australia.

In order to achieve a coordinated approach to student wellbeing, the school should ensure that SSS officers are notified of referrals to Assessments Australia, including when the assessment is completed, to enable ongoing support as required and to prevent duplication of work. This could occur through regular communication and through SOCS. Schools should aim to involve SSS officers and allow adequate time for support and advice to be provided. This may be particularly important to ensure timelines for PSD submissions are met.

## The role of the assessment service

Assessments Australia is required to work closely with the Department’s Wellbeing Health and Engagement Division, regions, networks and schools to manage and administer the assessment service for students who may be eligible under the categories of ID and SLD-CEN for the PSD.

Further clarification regarding the role of Assessments Australia:

### Eligibility

Assessments Australia recommends to schools whether assessment results indicate that an application should proceed, however the eligibility of a PSD application is determined by the Department’s Resources Coordination Group.

### Types of PSD applications

Assessments Australia provides assessments to support new applications to the program, Year 6-7 Reviews and applications for students with short-term funding. They do not provide assessments for reappraisals.

### Disability categories

Assessments Australia provides assessments to support applications in the categories of ID and SLD-CEN. Assessments Australia do not accept referrals or administer assessments for applications under other disability categories such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and Severe Behaviour Disorder.

### Change of category

Schools seeking to change the disability category for students to ID or SLD-CEN may be referred to Assessments Australia.

### Educational Needs Questionnaire

It is the responsibility of the school and Student Support Group to gather evidence to substantiate Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ) indicators. For applications under ID and SLD-CEN, Assessments Australia endeavour to present a complete profile of a student’s educational needs. However for some students, additional supporting evidence will be required from local service providers, including relevant health professionals and SSS to substantiate ENQ indicators.

### Students already assessed

Referrals to Assessments Australia are not recommended for students already fully assessed by external professionals or SSS officers. For applications under the ID category, a full assessment includes a cognitive assessment, Vineland and detailed case history. The Resource Coordination Group will accept applications that include external assessment reports, provided that the assessments have been administered within recommended timelines, and all relevant eligibility criteria have been addressed. Assessments Australia will provide a ‘Vineland only’ report in instances where the external assessment report that diagnoses an intellectual disability does not include a current Vineland report. Schools should contact either their regional disabilities coordinator or Assessments Australia for advice as required.

### Acceptance of referrals

Assessments Australia accept referrals for students likely to be eligible under the categories of ID and SLD-CEN for the PSD. If a referral does not contain sufficient evidence to indicate the likelihood of a student meeting the relevant eligibility criteria, then Assessments Australia will provide feedback to the school about the reasons the referral was not accepted and appropriate actions the school may take. This may include the establishment of an ongoing Student Support Group, development of an Individual Learning Plan, or referral to SSS for further assessment and advice.

Referrals can be made by contacting Assessments Australia on 03 9663 6622 or [psd-as@assessments.com.au](mailto:psd-as@assessments.com.au).

## The role of Student Support Services

The purpose of Student Support Services (SSS) is to assist children and young people facing a range of barriers to learning to achieve their educational and developmental potential through the provision of a range of strategies and specialised support at individual, group, school and network levels.

Student Support Services comprise a broad range of professionals including psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists, social workers and visiting teachers. Student Support Services Officers work as part of an integrated health and wellbeing team within networks of schools, focusing on providing group based and individual support, workforce capacity building, and the provision of specialised services.

Operating individually and in teams, Student Support Services officers work:

* directly with groups of students and individuals to:
  + direct support or intervention with individual or groups of students to address barriers to learning and engagement
  + undertake various assessments (e.g. cognitive, speech and language, psychosocial) as required to identify additional learning needs and at risk or vulnerable student cohorts
  + respond to critical incidents, emergencies and disasters and provide recovery and restoring wellbeing support.
* to build workforce capacity by:
  + working with schools to strengthen student wellbeing structures, processes and programs to benefit all students
  + providing advice and expertise about student wellbeing, engagement and inclusion
  + improving school capacity to meet the needs of students with additional needs through consultancy, professional learning, teaching and learning strategies, service coordination and case management
  + contributing to the development of student learning or support plans for students with disabilities, behavioural issues or other learning and wellbeing needs, including identifying and facilitating the involvement of other services
  + contributing to the development and implementation of student wellbeing primary prevention and early intervention programs and strategies in schools
  + assisting schools to identify students with additional learning, wellbeing, or communication needs in order to commence earlier support planning and prevent disengagement.

SSS officers contribute significantly to the PSD by:

* consulting with schools in relation to application processes and the ongoing support needs of students with disabilities
* assessing students and producing written reports as required
* screening students and recommending referrals to Assessments Australia when appropriate
* attending Student Support Group meetings
* contributing to the development of individual learning plans and behaviour management plans
* assisting in the development of teaching and learning strategies to be implemented by teachers
* meeting with and supporting teachers and parents
* coordinating and liaising with external support agencies.

Further clarification regarding the role of SSS in PSD assessment processes:

### Assessment of students with ID or SLD-CEN

All assessments to support applications under ID and SLD-CEN should be referred to Assessments Australia in the first instance. In some circumstances, SSS may be asked by schools to undertake a formal assessment of a student where the referral has not been accepted by Assessments Australia. It is advised that the SSS officer discuss the specific circumstances with their regional disabilities coordinator before proceeding with the assessment, to enable full consideration of eligibility implications.

### Educational Needs Questionnaire

It is the responsibility of the school and Student Support Group to gather evidence to substantiate ENQ indicators. For some applications, including those submitted under ID and SLD-CEN, evidence may be required from SSS to substantiate relevant ENQ indicators. Requests to undertake assessments would be made through the Student Online Case System.

### Reappraisals

Reappraisals require schools to submit additional evidence in support of increased ENQ indicators for students already eligible for PSD funding. The substantiation of increased ENQ indicators should be addressed by the school or local service providers, including relevant health professionals and SSS.

### Special school enrolment approval

Students already eligible for the PSD under the ID category who require an updated cognitive assessment for the purposes of regional special school enrolment approval, should be referred to a SSS psychologist.

Further information regarding SSS is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/ssso.aspx>

# THE FOUR STAGE ASSESSMENT SERVICE PROCESS

## STAGE 1: Pre Referral

**The school, in conjunction with the parent/guardian/carer(s) and SSS officers, identify a concern about a student and discuss the need for referral.**

The school should create an individual student case in SOCS in order to document the support provided. At this stage, the case may simply be saved as ‘draft’ and not submitted to SSS.

Schools should be sensitive to the impact on parents of referring a student to the assessment service, in particular, for the potential identification of an intellectual disability or severe language disorder. For this reason, it is recommended that these referrals be targeted only for students with a significant and ongoing history of moderate to severe learning difficulties. Schools should also ensure that all local supports are already in place and that other possible reasons for the student’s presenting issues have been fully considered.

SSS officers may assist the school to identify students who may be eligible for additional support under the PSD. In consultation with the school, they will be able to help determine whether a referral to Assessments Australia is appropriate.

Information that should be collected to substantiate the referral includes:

* previous cognitive or language assessment results
* relevant background information (e.g. medical reports, family history, hearing assessment)
* details of interventions and adjustments that have been made which have been aimed at assisting the student’s learning.

Schools may refer to Appendix 2 for further information regarding the collection of evidence to support referrals to Assessments Australia.

In the case of students with a suspected SLD-CEN, including Childhood Apraxia of Speech, the information should describe the nature of the student’s speech or language difficulties, and the student’s broader educational needs.

SSS officers may assist the school in collecting relevant information to complete the referral process and provide information or reports if they have had prior involvement with the student.

**The school contacts Assessments Australia**

The initial contact requesting a referral should be made by telephone or email by the principal (or designated nominee). Their discussion with Assessments Australia will focus on the information/evidence which indicates the potential existence of an ID or a SLD-CEN.

Assessments Australia will confirm that the referral has been discussed with the student’s parent/guardian/carer(s), and will then discuss the student’s difficulties with the Principal and determine if a referral is appropriate. An Assessments Australia professional will be available to discuss more complex referrals with schools or consult with SSS staff if required.

**If the referral does proceed**

If the discussion results in a referral, Assessments Australia will accept the case and a referral pack will be emailed to the school (or posted if requested in hard copy by the school). This pack includes a Teacher Referral Form, Parent Referral Form, and Parent Consent Form. If the referral is for ID, a Vineland will be posted to the school.

It is then the responsibility of the school to complete the referral pack. The school should provide sufficient information to Assessments Australia to support the referral. SSS officers may assist with completion of the referral and provide available information and evidence as requested by Assessments Australia.

**If the referral does not proceed**

In the situation where the referral is not accepted by Assessments Australia, feedback will be provided to the school regarding further actions the school may take. The school will continue to provide ongoing support to the student, with support from SSS if required.

This may include the establishment of an ongoing Student Support Group, development of an Individual Learning Plan and ongoing case management. This may also include further assessment, for example, where it is thought the student may have a learning difficulty.

Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) is a resource available to teachers to support the teaching and learning of students with disabilities and additional needs.  The ABLES Assessment Tool provides a learning profile across five foundational learning areas, and a range of recommended learning and teaching strategies. Further information is available at:

## <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/ables.aspx>

## STAGE 2: Referral to Assessments Australia

Based on the referral information collected, the school, in conjunction with the parent/guardian/carer(s), and SSS officer where appropriate, decide whether to proceed with the referral to Assessments Australia.

If the school decides not to proceed with the referral (for example if, through the process of collecting background information, it becomes apparent that the student would not meet the guidelines for support under ID or SLD-CEN categories), Assessments Australia should be notified, and the school should continue to provide ongoing support, with the SSS Officer if required. This may include the establishment of an ongoing Student Support Group, development of an Individual Learning Plan and ongoing case management.

If a decision is made to continue with the referral, the relevant documentation is forwarded to Assessments Australia by email or post.

**Assessments Australia reviews the referral**

Assessments Australia will review the information contained in the referral pack to determine if further assessment is appropriate.

If the referral is not accepted, Assessments Australia will provide feedback to the school about the reasons the referral was not accepted and appropriate actions the school may take. The school will communicate this to the student’s parent/guardian/carer(s) and continue to provide ongoing support, with support from SSS if required. This may include the establishment of an ongoing Student Support Group, development of an Individual Learning Plan and ongoing case management.

If the completed Referral Forms and scored Vineland (for ID) indicates a further assessment is appropriate, and the Parent Consent Form is completed, Assessments Australia will accept the referral and the appropriate assessment will be arranged.

## STAGE 3: Assessment

The assessment will usually occur shortly after Assessments Australia receives the completed referral information from the school.

Based on information obtained through the referral process and a pre-assessment interview with the parent/guardian/carer(s) and school staff, Assessments Australia will compile an initial case history.

Assessments Australia conducts formal testing/interviews with the student using standardised testing materials as specified in the *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines for Professionals* which are provided by the Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division and are available from regional disabilities coordinators. This assessment is usually carried out at the student’s school.

Face to face feedback is provided to the school and the parent immediately after the assessment. At this time further information regarding the student’s history may also be collected if required. If parent/guardian/carer(s) are unavailable for face to face feedback on the day, Assessments Australia will arrange a follow-up meeting. In cases where parent/guardian/carer(s) are not available for follow-up meetings, Assessments Australia will provide feedback via telephone.

Assessments Australia may consult with and seek further information from schools and/or SSS officers in some cases to ensure an accurate assessment has been completed.

## STAGE 4: Report and Post Assessment

Written reports and feedback will be provided by Assessments Australia following the assessment process. The report(s) will outline the findings of the assessment, and make recommendations on whether an application under the PSD should proceed. The report(s) will be provided regardless of the outcome of the assessment.

If desired, the school can upload the provided report into SOCS. The case can then be closed or submitted to SSS for further action.

**If the application does not proceed**

If Assessments Australia indicate that a PSD application should not proceed under the PSD a **Report for Schools and Parents** will be emailed to the school.

This report will outline the results of the tests undertaken and provide educational and programming recommendations for the student. The school should print out three copies of the narrative report – one for the school, one for the parent/guardian/carer(s) and the other to be kept in the student’s Department Confidential Student (DCS) file.

Schools may request that copies of reports be posted in hard copy.

The involvement of Assessments Australia ceases at this point. The school will continue to provide ongoing support as required, with support from SSS if necessary. This may include the establishment of an ongoing Student Support Group, development of an Individual Learning Plan and ongoing case management.

If the parent/guardian/carer(s), school, SSS officer, or other relevant personnel require further information about the report or the assessment process, they may contact Assessments Australia for additional feedback. It is advised such requests be made within reasonable timelines (i.e. within 3 months of the assessment) to ensure detailed feedback from Assessments Australia personnel.

**If the application does proceed**

If Assessments Australia indicate that an application should proceed under the PSD, two reports will be emailed to the school: the **PSD Summary Report** and the **Report for Schools and Parents**.

Three copies of the **PSD Summary Report** should be printed – one for the school, one for the PSD application, and the other to be kept in the student’s Department Confidential Student (DCS) file. This report will contain test results, and information that provides a history of the student’s problems and other evidence to support the ENQ, where available. This report *should be* included to support the PSD application.

Three copies of the **Report for Schools and Parents** should be printed – one for the school, one for the parent/guardian/carer(s) and the other to be kept in the student’s Department Confidential Student (DCS) file. This report will examine the results of the tests undertaken and provide educational and programming recommendations relating to the student. This report is not required to support the PSD application.

Schools may request that copies of reports be posted in hard copy.

After the assessment process is completed, Assessments Australia returns all materials and student records created for assessment purposes to the relevant Student Support Service (SSS) Network office.

**School compiles and sends completed application**

The school convenes a Student Support Group meeting and completes the application as outlined in the *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines*. The completed application is posted by the school to the Resources Coordination Group.

**Application is processed**

The application is processed by the Resources Coordination Group who will determine if the student is eligible for additional resources via the PSD.

**Outcome of the application**

The Principal will be notified of the outcome of the application via the Program for Students with Disabilities Management System (PSDMS). It is the Principal’s responsibility to notify the parent/guardian/carer(s) of the outcome of the application, eligibility, and level of support allocated to the school.

Regardless of the outcome of the application to the PSD, the Principal will reconvene the Student Support Group, discuss the support needs of the student, and set and prioritise educational goals.

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# FURTHER INFORMATION

## Privacy and Confidentiality

Department of Education and Training staff are required by law to protect the personal and health information a school collects and holds. The Victorian privacy laws, the Information Privacy Act 2000 and Health Records Act 2001, provide for the protection of personal and health information.

Student Support Services files are known as Department Confidential Student (DCS) files, to make a clear distinction between files that are established as a result of intervention by a Student Support Services officer, and those a school might ordinarily keep about a student enrolled at the school.

DCS files can contain information which may be highly confidential in nature, including family details, records of interventions and reports from Student Support Services working with the student and/or family. Under the Health Records Act, DCS files, created by Student Support Services and the personal information contained within, is considered to be “health information” and subject to the [Health Privacy Principles](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/downloads/hppextract.pdf) of the [Health Records Act 2001](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/E57A0A1DDCD389FBCA256E5B00213F4D/$FILE/01-002a.pdf). These principles restrict the use, access, dissemination and other associated record management issues associated with these files.

The Executive Chair and individual principals are responsible for the management and secure storage of DCS files in line with network policies to ensure confidentiality is maintained and access is limited to only those professionals who require access in accordance with the purpose for which the information was collected, for example, direct case management or service provision.

Inappropriate disclosure of confidential information has the potential to cause harm to individual students and their families and may constitute a breach of privacy legislation given the sensitive nature of the confidential information contained in the DCS file.

Networks, schools and principals are responsible for ensuring that all school staff, including teachers, Student Support Services officers and other education support staff are aware of their obligations with regards to privacy and confidentiality of student files.

## Department Resources

* **Information Privacy** - The School Policy and Advisory Guide provides information about the obligations of a school concerning the need to have a privacy policy, legislative requirements, compliance strategies and privacy exemptions. It also provides information about how schools should respond to requests for information from a variety of sources, from parents and other government departments, to lawyers and the police. For further information see:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/privacy.aspx>

## PSD Guidelines

Further information regarding timelines and eligibility for the PSD is available online in the *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines* at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/handbook.aspx>

## Professional Guidelines

The *Program for Students with Disabilities Professional Guidelines* for assessment and reporting under each disability category are available from regional disabilities coordinators.

## Student Support Group Guidelines

The *Student Support Group Guidelines* are available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/handbook.aspx>

## Assessments Australia

Referrals can be made by contacting Assessments Australia on 9663 6622. Further information is available at:

[www.assessments.com.au](http://www.assessments.com.au).

## Student Support Services

General Information about Student Support Services is available from:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/ssso.aspx>

## Regional Offices

Schools may contact their Regional Disabilities Coordinator for support and advice regarding inclusive practice in schools.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx>

## PSD Applications Helpline

The PSD Applications Helpline provides assistance and advice to schools about general matters relating to the Program for Students with Disabilities application process, such as:

* the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines
* Program for Students with Disabilities application timelines
* the Program for Students with Disabilities application process
* requirements for different types of applications
* relevant Department of Education and Training circulars

Schools can contact the PSD Applications Helpline on **1300 308 964.**

# APPENDIX 1



# APPENDIX 2

**Collecting evidence to support referrals to Assessments Australia**

Schools should endeavour to provide Assessments Australia with detailed information regarding the student’s presenting difficulties, and evidence of significant and ongoing learning difficulties.

Prior to disclosing a student’s personal and/or health information with Assessments Australia, schools should ensure parent consent is attained in accordance with Victorian privacy laws: the *Information Privacy Act 2000*, *Health Records Act 2001* and other relevant Acts.

Principals must ensure that:

* respectful and confidential communication between family, health professionals and the school occurs
* staff who receive or have access to confidential information, both verbal or written, understand their responsibility to keep this information confidential.

Once parent consent is attained, the following questions may assist schools when collecting information to support a referral to Assessments Australia:

* Are the student’s parents aware of any delayed developmental milestones, such as crawling, walking, talking, and toilet training?
* Has there been any involvement of early intervention services, external specialists and/or Student Support Services?
* Have there been any previous formal assessments administered, and if so, what were the results?
* Does the student have any history of birth difficulties, medical conditions, or receive prescribed medication?
* Is there a family history of similar problems?
* Is the student delayed across a range of academic and/or developmental areas (i.e. not just literacy)?
* Are there any specific measures of academic performance that may indicate significant delay in comparison with age peers?
* Have observations of the student been made in order to make comparisons of his/her daily functioning and social maturity, in comparison with age peers?
* Have there been any school interventions, targeted supports, or repeated years?