Program for Students with Disabilities

Roles and responsibilities in the assessment process
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1. PURPOSE
These guidelines have been prepared to:

- describe the respective roles of schools, the assessment service (Lewis & Lewis), 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 Lewis & Lewis.

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

2. BACKGROUND
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is committed to improving the learning outcomes of all students, by acknowledging their diverse needs and catering for different learning styles. A key element of this commitment is an emphasis on improving the learning outcomes for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, including strategies that ensure inclusive practices are in place in schools.

A range of services and programs are available to support students with disabilities and additional learning needs, including SSS and the Language Support Program. In addition, schools are allocated resources through their Student Resource Package to facilitate the development and delivery of teaching and learning programs for all students. Each school is responsible for the effective use of total resources for students in its care and has flexibility to employ Education Support staff or invest in alternative programs where appropriate.

Program for Students with Disabilities
The PSD is a targeted initiative that provides additional resources to government schools to support the school’s delivery of educational programs for eligible students with moderate to severe disabilities. The PSD aims to maximise student potential growth in education and learning, and ensure that students with disabilities are valued and participate in all aspects of school life, consistent with optimal and relevant goals and aspirations.

The program’s eligibility criteria are developed from internationally recognised World Health Organisation definitions, targeting 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:


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).

Lewis & Lewis is contracted by the Department to manage and administer the assessment service. All assessments are conducted by qualified and registered psychologists and speech pathologists.
3. 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:


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 Officers
- Lewis & Lewis
- 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 Lewis & Lewis.

In order to achieve a coordinated approach to student wellbeing, the school should ensure that SSS officers are notified of referrals to Lewis & Lewis, 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

Lewis & Lewis is required to work closely with the Department’s Student Inclusion 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 Lewis & Lewis:

Eligibility

Lewis & Lewis 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

Lewis & Lewis 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

Lewis & Lewis provides assessments to support applications in the categories of ID and SLD-CEN. Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis.

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, Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis 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. Schools should contact either their regional disabilities coordinator or Lewis & Lewis for advice as required.

Acceptance of referrals

Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis on 9380 5742.
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 providing 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 Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis in the first instance. In some circumstances, SSS may be asked to undertake a formal assessment of a student where the referral has not been accepted by Lewis & Lewis. 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:

4. 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 Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis.

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 Lewis & Lewis

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

Lewis & Lewis will discuss the student’s difficulties with the Principal and determine if a referral is appropriate.

If the referral does proceed

If the discussion results in a referral, Lewis & Lewis will accept the case and a referral pack will be sent to the school. This pack includes a Referral Form, Parent Consent Form and Screener/Vineland.

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

If the referral does not proceed

In the situation where the referral is not accepted by Lewis & Lewis, 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:


**STAGE 2: Referral to Lewis & Lewis**

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 Lewis & Lewis.

If the school decides not to proceed with the referral (for example if screening tools clearly indicate the student would not meet the guidelines for support under ID or SLD-CEN categories), Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis.

**Lewis & Lewis reviews the referral**

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

If the referral is not accepted, Lewis & Lewis will provide feedback to the school about the reasons the referral was not accepted and appropriate actions the school may take. The school will 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 initial discussion and screening indicates a further assessment is appropriate, and the Referral and Parent Consent Forms are completed, Lewis & Lewis will accept the referral and the appropriate assessment will be arranged.

**STAGE 3: Assessment**

The assessment will usually occur shortly after Lewis & Lewis 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, Lewis & Lewis will compile an initial case history.

Lewis & Lewis 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 Student Inclusion 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 parent/guardian/carer(s) are unavailable for face to face feedback on the day, Lewis & Lewis will arrange a follow-up meeting. In cases where parent/guardian/carer(s) are not available for follow-up meetings, Lewis & Lewis will provide feedback via telephone.

Lewis & Lewis may consult with and seek further information from schools and/or SSS officers on some cases to ensure an accurate assessment has been completed.
**STAGE 4: Report and Post Assessment**

Written reports and feedback will be provided by Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis indicate that a PSD application should not proceed under the PSD, three copies of the **Report for Schools and Parents** will be provided – 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 outline the results of the tests undertaken and provide educational and programming recommendations for the student.

The involvement of Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis personnel.

**If the application does proceed**

If Lewis & Lewis indicate that an application should proceed under the PSD, two reports will be provided to the school.

Two copies of the **PSD Summary Report** will be provided- one for the school 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 application.

Three copies of the **Report for Schools and Parents** will be provided- 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 application.

**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**.

**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.
5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Privacy and Confidentiality

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 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 of the Health Records Act 2001. 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

- Student Support Services Ultranet Design Space (120886088)
- **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:
  
PSD Guidelines
Further information regarding timelines and eligibility for the PSD is available online in the Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines at:


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:


Lewis & Lewis
Referrals can be made by contacting Lewis & Lewis on 9380 5742. Further information is available at:

www.lewisandlewis.com.au

Student Support Services
General Information about Student Support Services is available from:


Student Support Services staff, principals, teachers and education support staff can access SSS Guidelines from the SSS Ultranet Design Space (ID 120886088, DEECD staff only) at:

www.ultranet.vic.gov.au

Regional Offices
Schools may contact their Regional Disabilities Coordinator for support and advice regarding applications under the PSD.

http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx
6. APPENDIX 1

Roles and assessment processes to support ID and SLD-CEN applications under the Program for Students with Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent / Guardian / Care((s))</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Student Support Services (SSS)</th>
<th>Lewis and Lewis</th>
<th>Resources Coordination Group / Student Wellbeing Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent((s))/School/SSS identify concern and discuss need for referral</td>
<td>The School contacts Lewis&amp; Lewis</td>
<td>Lewis&amp; Lewis discusses case</td>
<td>Not accepted Feedback provided to school</td>
<td>Accepted L&amp;L provides referral pack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and SSS provide ongoing support as required, which may include an assessment eg learning difficulties</td>
<td>School collects detailed information regarding the student's current and ongoing learning difficulties and completes referral pack</td>
<td>SSS may assist with completion of referral and provide available information and evidence as requested by L&amp;L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School in conjunction with parent((s))/SSS decide whether to proceed with referral and school sends referral if appropriate</td>
<td><strong>IF NO</strong> School and SSS provide ongoing support as required, which may include further assessment</td>
<td>L&amp;L reviews referral</td>
<td>Not accepted Feedback provided to school</td>
<td>Accepted L&amp;L compiles initial case history from referral process and pre-assessment interview with parent((s)) and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>IF YES</strong> L&amp;L conducts assessment</td>
<td>L&amp;L meets with relevant people eg parent((s))/school staff to complete case history and provide feedback</td>
<td>L&amp;L writes report and provides copies for school, parent((s)) and confidential student file</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application does not proceed School and SSS provide ongoing support as required</td>
<td>Application does proceed School compiles and sends completed application with the support of the DEEDC nominee Assistance may be provided by the SSS</td>
<td>Application is processed Eligible Ineligible</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Application is processed Eligible Ineligible</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX 1
7. APPENDIX 2

Collecting evidence to support referrals to Lewis & Lewis

Schools should endeavour to provide Lewis & Lewis 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 Lewis & Lewis, 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 Lewis & Lewis:

- 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?