

Working Together

Information for
Parents of Children
with Special Needs
in School



Healthy Child
Manitoba



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Putting children and families first

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with special needs in school

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A Word about This Guide

Parents, along with educators and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, share a common goal and that is to ensure that children with special needs benefit from an educational experience that includes quality learning opportunities with expectations that consider each child's individual needs.

In Manitoba, we are committed to the following philosophy of inclusion as our guiding principle:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.

In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us.

This pamphlet is a brief overview of the information for parents of children with special needs available in the handbook *Working Together: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School* or at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/parent/index.html.

How Do I Find Out If My Child Needs Help?

If you or the classroom teacher finds that your child is having difficulty learning, or your child is entering school with special learning needs, there are certain areas that need to be considered to plan appropriately. A child's social or behavioural skills, communication skills, cognitive/learning skills, and/or physical or sensory skills are the areas a teacher may look at to find out more about a child and how he or she learns.

Parents are valued partners and parent participation is an important part of planning for education in Manitoba. As parents, you know your child best. You know your child's strengths, abilities, needs, and challenges, and, as a result, you have an important role in the education of your child.

Your continued involvement and support in the education of your child will make a positive and meaningful impact. It is important that you participate in decisions that affect your child's education.

School boards are required to provide an education for all school-age children who live in their division. In Manitoba, children have the right to attend school from age five to high school graduation or age 21. Children with special needs, including those with lifelong disabilities, need educational opportunities that are appropriate for their learning needs, age, and level of school achievement.

Where Do I Begin?

If you feel your child is having difficulty learning, the first step is to talk with the classroom teacher. Teachers have a number of ways to identify your child's learning needs, including

- talking with your child
- observing your child during classroom activities
- analyzing your child's class work
- assessing your child's abilities in areas such as mathematics, reading, and so on

Parents can also gather information that may be useful in the assessment process. This information could include medical reports, and recent behavioural changes and observations made about the child's learning needs, such as how he or she behaves outside of school.



How Is an Assessment Carried Out?

After you provide consent to the school for referral to a clinician or resource teacher, an assessment plan will be developed. Depending on your child's needs, a number of specialists may be involved in the assessment plan. These could include a resource teacher, reading clinician, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist, or others.

An assessment may be done for the following reasons:

- to find out whether your child has a special learning need
- to identify your child's current capabilities, skills, and needs
- to find out how those special learning needs affect your child's ability to learn and function in school
- to identify appropriate programming and services that will meet your child's individual needs

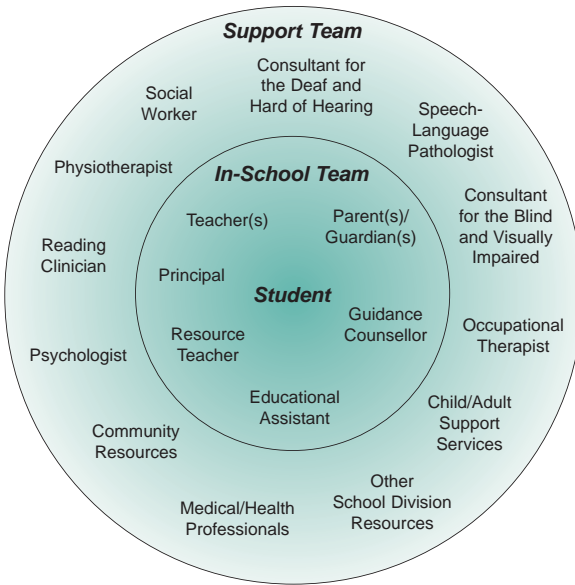
When all the assessment results are completed, the school will contact you and arrange a meeting with the staff who completed the assessment to explain the results, discuss the recommendations, and involve you in any related decisions. Often a written report is shared with you and the teacher or others working with your child.



What Is a School Team?

For children who have learning needs that require support, a team is often formed to develop a plan. The team can vary depending on your child's needs.

The in-school team is usually those people who may be involved with your child on a daily basis at school. The support team are those who provide consultation and expertise to the in-school team in the area of planning, assessment, and programming.

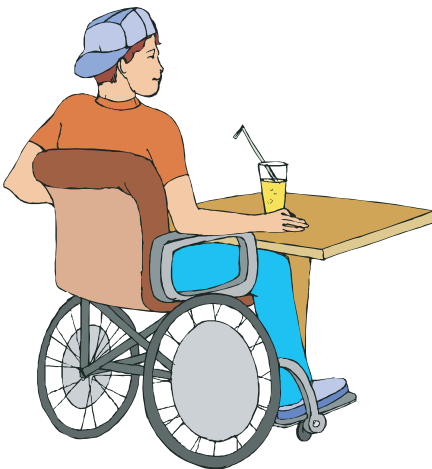


As a parent, you play an important role in ensuring that your child has a successful educational experience by being an active participant on your child's team.

What Is Effective Programming? What Should I Look for?

Effective programming can be delivered in any setting. Effective programming is

- based on an individual child's needs
- an active process that is monitored and adjusted to meet a child's needs
- inclusive, allowing children to participate in the regular curriculum to the fullest extent possible
- consistent across environments



What Is an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

Individual education planning is the process where teachers, support personnel, and parents work together as a team to meet the needs of students who require a range of supports by developing outcomes or goals based on the child's current needs and skills. The written plan is called an IEP. Teams write the plan for the school year in an IEP. Most often, IEPs are written for children who need support for behaviour and learning or cognitive skills. Sometimes an IEP is required by Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, especially for those children receiving modifications or individualized programming.

What Is an Effective IEP?

The IEPs that are most effective in promoting student learning

- involve parents as active and equal team members in planning and implementation
- are working documents, linked to daily planning and activities
- involve all members of the team
- identify clearly who is responsible for teaching the child on a daily basis and for gathering information about progress
- are “living” documents (revised as the child's circumstances and progress indicates)
- link clinician and consultant reports and programming to daily programming

How Do I Plan for My Child's Changing Needs?

Children with special needs frequently experience difficulty in making transitions. Important issues to discuss with the school team are:

- entering the school system
- moving between activities and settings
- moving from grade to grade
- Early Years (Kindergarten to Grade 4) to Middle Years (Grade 5 to Grade 8)
- Middle Years to Senior Years
- preparing for adult life

What Should I Do When Issues Arise?

As a parent of a child with special needs, there will be a variety of decisions you will have to make throughout your child's education. The issues that may affect your child are as many and diverse as there are children.

When issues arise it is important to start the discussion by

- contacting your child's teacher—share your concerns or questions
- including the important members of the school team (resource teacher, guidance counsellor, school principal), as needed
- including the school division student services administrator or superintendent when necessary

Try to resolve issues at the local school level whenever possible.

How Do I Decide Where My Child Should Go To School?

Choosing an appropriate placement or learning environment for a child with special needs should be done on an individual basis. Most children with special needs attend their neighbourhood or local schools, and are provided with programming, supports, and services to meet their individual needs. Educating students with special needs in regular classrooms in local schools is the first placement option considered by a school division, in consultation with parents, school staff, and students.

School divisions in Manitoba offer a range of placement and learning options. Parents have different views on what would be the most enabling placement or learning environment for their child. Children may attend school

- in their neighbourhood school in a classroom with their peers for the majority of the day
- in their neighbourhood school in a classroom with their peers and a special learning environment for part of the day
- in their neighbourhood school in a special learning environment for the majority of the day
- in a special learning environment that may not be in their neighbourhood school

If you have questions regarding programming or supports for your child or would like information regarding funding, contact your child's school or school division.

What Questions Should I Ask?

1. Is my child working at or meeting the grade level outcomes? If not, why not and what would be the best way to proceed?
2. Is my child meeting the outcomes outlined in his or her individual education plan (IEP)? If not, why not and what would support my child's learning?
3. What do the scores or marks mean?
4. Is my child receiving adaptations or modifications to his or her work?
5. Does my child have major strengths or weaknesses in specific subject areas that I don't know about?
6. How would you describe my child's learning style?
7. What supports does my child need to learn? What strategies have worked well for him or her?
8. Is it necessary for him or her to go to the resource room or out of the classroom for periods of time?
9. Have my child's class assignments been completed?
10. Has my child been attending classes regularly?
11. Are there any potential social issues with peers I need to be aware of?
12. Does my child need a referral to the school resource teacher, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, reading specialist, or guidance counsellor? What would be involved with the referral and how would that affect my child's programming?
13. What can we be doing at home to support my child's learning?
14. What is the educational assistant's role with my child? How do I communicate with the educational assistant?



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