



2018 specialised learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder

From the start of 2018, students with autism who have very complex support needs can enrol in one of six specialised learning programs located in public primary and secondary schools. Sixteen schools will be selected to run the \$32 million specialist autism programs by 2020.

About the new specialised learning programs

What are these new programs?

The new programs are located in mainstream primary and secondary schools and cater for the specific needs of students from Kindergarten to Year 12 with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The programs are for students at significant risk of disengagement, underachievement and/or who exhibit very complex and challenging behaviours. The programs target age appropriate academic engagement and achievement. Students typically spend some of their time in “homeroom” classrooms undertaking the specialised learning programs and some of their time in mainstream classrooms where they also receive additional support.

Why are these programs needed?

Autism is the fastest growing diagnostic category of developmental disorders in children. In 2017, there are over 5000 students with autism enrolled in local public schools. The vast majority of these students continue to be catered for in mainstream classrooms in local schools with support as required. However, a small proportion of these students presents with very complex and often challenging behaviours, and requires more support, particularly with social communication and social interaction skills.

How are the locations of the programs being determined?

Planning is underway for 16 programs to be operating in schools by the beginning of 2020. The location of the programs will be determined by three factors:

- sufficient numbers of students with autism within a network or local area to sustain the program;
- facilities in schools suitable for the program; and
- ability to be part of a Kindergarten to Year 12 pathway for students with autism.

How many students will be enrolled in each program?

There will typically be between 22 and 25 students in each primary program and between 12 and 18 students in each secondary program.

How will students be selected for the programs?

Schools will manage the enrolment process, guided by specific eligibility criteria for students:

- a diagnosis of autism;
- no diagnosed intellectual disability;
- significant social, emotional and/or behavioural issues and challenges directly attributed to the impact of autism;
- independent self-management of personal care requirements; and
- eligibility for enrolment in Western Australian public schools.

Can a student be in one of these programs if they do not live in the school's local intake area?

Yes, students will be able to enrol in the school running the program regardless of where they live. This is about providing students with the very best learning opportunities.

How will my child travel to one of these programs?

Generally, parents will be responsible for transporting their children to and from school, as is the case for all other students. Parents can apply to the Department of Transport for an allowance to help with associated transport costs.

What will the programs involve?

The teaching and learning aspects of the programs will be in line with the Western Australian Curriculum. The programs will use principles and methodologies of effective, evidenced-based teaching structures including 'explicit teaching' and 'positive behaviour support' which will help students to achieve their best. Each student will have an individual education plan which will address their specific needs associated with autism.

Will all children with autism be in these specialised learning programs?

No. Most students with autism perform well in mainstream classes in local schools, often with minimal additional support. Education support schools and centres will continue to enrol students with autism who have intellectual disability.

Will students move from these programs to other mainstream schools?

It is hoped that many students will move from these programs to their local primary and secondary schools. Each program will closely monitor the progress of every student and, if exit criteria are being met by a student and the transition is supported by the family, school staff will work with parents and the local school for the student to move.

Why are current programs not being used or expanded?

Where appropriate we will incorporate the current programs, including early intervention programs, accelerated learning programs and secondary extension programs into the new program structure. This will mean a stronger, more coordinated pathway for students with autism from Kindergarten to Year 12, whilst maintaining existing integrity and expertise.

2018 specialised learning programs for students with ASD

Where are the new specialised learning programs located?

In 2018 specialised learning programs will open at Coinda Primary School, Heathridge Primary School, Marangaroo Primary School, Samson Primary School and Southern River College. The specialised learning program at Gosnells Primary School will continue.

When will students be selected for the program?

Students will be selected for the programs during Term 3 and Term 4, 2017. Students will continue to be selected for the program as vacancies arise.

Will students be identified for the program or can parents apply to enrol their children?

Processes for selecting students will be finalised during Term 3, 2017. Program schools will work with nearby schools with eligible children to ensure families have the opportunity to consider the new programs. Any applications made directly to the school will also be considered.

How many new staff will the program bring to the school?

At full capacity (22–25 students), each program will be staffed with a Program Coordinator (Level 3 School Administrator), three teachers and up to 10 education assistants. This will ensure students receive the intensive, individualised support they require for their academic, social and personal development.

How will new staff be selected?

Staff will be selected on merit. The principal will manage the selection of staff with assistance from ASD education experts from the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability.

When will new staff commence?

Positions will be advertised as soon as possible and staff selected during Term 3, 2017. This will allow students to be selected, connections to be built with families, and all preparations for the program to be fully completed for the start of 2018.

What training and support will be provided for current school staff?

All teaching and support staff at specialised learning program schools will receive professional learning on teaching and working with children with ASD. The nature of the professional learning will be tailored to each person's role in the school. Some of the professional learning will be provided by the School of Special Educational Needs: Disability, and the expert staff delivering the program to students will provide ongoing support.

How will the programs be funded?

The schools will receive a Targeted Initiative with funding for salary costs for coordinating and managing the program, specialist professional learning for program staff, and specialist resources and equipment. The majority of funding will be through the per student funding of the student-centred funding model. Facilities' upgrades and refurbishments will be funded centrally.