



Specialised learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

From the start of 2018, students with autism who have complex support needs can apply to enrol in one of six specialised learning programs located in public primary and secondary schools.

In 2018, specialised learning programs will open at Coinda Primary School (PS), Heathridge PS, Marangaroo PS, Samson PS and Southern River College. The specialised learning program that opened at Gosnells PS in 2017 will also continue.

By 2020, programs will be located in eight primary schools and eight secondary schools.

What are the specialised learning programs for students with ASD?

These programs cater for the needs of students from Kindergarten to Year 12 with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The programs are designed for students at significant risk of disengagement, underachievement and/or students who exhibit very complex behaviour.

The programs target age appropriate student academic engagement and achievement. Teaching and learning activities are aligned to the Western Australian Curriculum. Each student has a personalised plan that addresses their specific learning needs. The programs use evidenced-based teaching approaches including: applied behavioural analysis; explicit teaching; and positive behaviour support.

There are usually between 22 and 25 students in each primary program and between 12 and 18 students in each secondary program.

Secondary school programs will be close to primary school programs. This will result in a stronger, more coordinated pathway for students with autism from Kindergarten to Year 12.

How long do students stay in the program?

Students usually spend some of their time in their “homeroom” classroom undertaking personalised learning and some of their time in their mainstream classroom where they also receive additional support.

Teachers closely monitor the progress of students and, if a student meets exit criteria, and if a move is supported by parents, the school staff work with the family and the local school to support the student to transition to their local school.

Who is eligible for the programs?

There are specific eligibility criteria, which include:

- 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.

Are the staff trained?

Yes. Each program is staffed with a Program Coordinator, trained teachers and education assistants. All teaching and support staff receive professional learning that enables them to support the teaching and learning needs of students with ASD. Program schools will select their staff during Term 3, 2017.

How do I apply to enrol my child?

Parents can express their interest in enrolling their child for the program by contacting schools directly.

Principals of program schools will also work with nearby schools with eligible students to ensure families have the opportunity to consider the new programs.

When will I know if my child is accepted into the program?

Enrolments for 2018 programs will be finalised during Term 4, 2017. Schools will contact parents who have expressed an interest in the program early in Term 4.

Parents will be asked to attend an interview that will help the school assess the child's eligibility for the program and to determine whether the program is suited to the students' needs. Students will continue to be selected for the programs as vacancies arise.

Can my child continue at their local school?

Yes. 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.

Can my child enrol in one of the programs if they do not live in the school's local intake area?

Yes, students are able to apply to enrol in the school running the program regardless of where they live.

Generally, parents are responsible for transporting their children to and from school. Parents can apply to the Department of Transport for an allowance to help with associated transport costs.

How are the programs funded?

Schools that are running the programs receive additional funding. This funding supports the school to coordinate and manage the program, provide specialist professional learning for program staff, and to purchase specialist resources and equipment.