

# FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: [www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form).

## Starting School

Going to school for the first time is an important milestone for all children. It can also be a stressful and anxious experience for parents. There are some additional considerations for children living with Spinal Cord Injury as they transition to the school environment. Generally discussions about school and preschool will occur at a clinic appointment.

Allow plenty of time to find the right environment. Start talking to the team at the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service or children's hospital and look for a suitable school at least 12 months before your child is due to start.

### Choosing a school

The following questions are from the "Raising Children Network" and could be helpful when thinking about primary schools.

- Will you and your child feel welcome at the school?
- Does the school offer a 'transition into school' program?
- What options are available for before and after school care?
- What do other parents you know think about the different schools in your area? What are their experiences?
- What approach does the school take to behaviour management?

The school is not required to have perfect wheelchair access, as an occupational therapist can provide recommendations to the school to ensure your child can

be included in all school activities. Below are some suggestions to consider regarding your child's Spinal Cord Injury needs at school:

### Wheelchair and mobility access.

Many of the newer schools are wheelchair accessible. Ideally you will be looking for a level school ground. Make sure you look specifically at the playground areas. Will your child be included and independent in the playground? Is the play area on site to the school? Is it flat or sloping? Can your child access the library and the canteen?

### Toilet and bathroom access.

Will your child be able to manage their personal care needs comfortably in this school environment? What is the access to the bathroom like?

### Classroom access

Is your child able to independently access the classrooms? What support is available in the classroom to assist your child's learning needs? Most state schools have a 20 student to 1 teacher ratio. Independent and religious schools may be different so be sure to ask.

### Transport to school

How is your child going to get to school? Is it possible to access public transport? Is there a safe pick up and drop off area they will be able to physically access? If you are concerned about being unable to drive your child to school, ask about the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP), your child may be eligible for this service through the Department of Education and Communities.

## Preparing to go to school

Your child may already be at preschool and some of the logistics regarding their care needs and Spinal Cord Injury needs have already been negotiated. Getting your child ready to attend primary school includes the usual organisation of:

1. Uniforms – Discuss the specifics with the school you choose.
2. Shoes – Consider reading the “Foot care” fact sheet before buying school shoes.
3. Bags – What does your child need to be able to carry their school equipment in?
4. Class room supplies – Discuss the specifics with the school you choose.

In addition there is also the consideration of:

5. Toilet routines
  - Are there accessible toilets that are private for your child that they will feel comfortable in?
  - Will there be staff available to be trained or provide assistance for your child as needed?
  - Can the school provide a safe and secure area for your child to keep any personal care supplies away from other children?
6. Equipment required
  - Is the school willing and open to provide the recommended equipment by the Spinal Cord Injury teams Physiotherapy, Social Worker Occupational therapist or Nurse, to make your child’s time in school safer and easier?

## Communicating your family needs with the school

Open communication with your chosen school is recommended. Some tips to consider:

- Let the school know you are keen to be involved.
- Advise them what your preferred management strategies are for siblings. (They are not the parents, and should be allowed have their own place at school.)
- Be part of your child’s individual education planning process.
- Supply the school with relevant documentation such as assessments, reports, etc.
- Share any particularly useful resources you use with school staff and advise them of the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service. The team are available to educate and support school staff.

## What support is available?

- The NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service is available to visit potential schools (pre, primary and high) if you want assistance. The team can advise you on the specific school needs of your child.
- The NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service is a resource for schools if they need additional support and information about Spinal Cord Injury. The school can make direct contact.
- Peer support may be something you wish to explore for your child. Meeting another person living with Spinal Cord Injury who is older can help reduce fears of the unknown. You may also like to talk to other parents who have a child living with Spinal Cord Injury. The team can match you with a suitable peer if you are interested.

### Further information about Spinal Cord Injury is available at:

- The Sydney Children’s Hospital Network has a series of fact sheets about Spinal Cord Injury. [www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets)
- The Agency for Clinical Innovation have a series of fact sheets available under the Spinal Cord Injury tab: [www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/consumer-resources](http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/consumer-resources)

### You can find more general information about transitioning to a school environment at:

The Raising Children Network:  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/choosing\\_a\\_school.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/choosing_a_school.html)

The Parents Council NSW:  
[www.parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au/announcements/choosing-a-school-for-your-swd-child](http://www.parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au/announcements/choosing-a-school-for-your-swd-child)