



No matter whether you choose a mainstream or a special setting you need to have your child tested to apply for funding.

An introduction to education systems and funding for students with Down syndrome in Victoria

by Ian Cook

Victorian school systems

There are three different school systems operating in Victoria.

Your child can attend:

- A state (government) school under the auspices of the state Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). This includes all Special Schools (SS) and Special Developmental Schools (SDS).
- An independent (non-government) Catholic school under the auspices of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV)
- An independent (non-government) school under the auspices of the Association of Independent Schools Victoria (AISV)

You are likely to incur significantly higher schooling costs in an independent school than in a government school and will need to obtain information regarding this from individual schools.

Choosing a school

For information on questions to ask and factors which may influence your decision please consult the Down Syndrome Victoria publication, 'Choosing a School' which is available at

www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au

Once you have chosen a school you approach the Principal and begin the funding process with that school.

Australian residency

If you are not an Australian citizen you will have to establish your residence status before an application can be made for funding to assist your child at school. There are various categories of residential visas. For further information in this respect contact

www.immi.gov.au

Student assessment

Testing of your child is mandatory. It serves two purposes:

- To establish eligibility to receive funding to assist with your child's education.
- To establish whether your child is eligible to attend a state Special School (SS) or state Special Developmental School (SDS) if such is your wish. To enrol at a SS your child's IQ

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Any child, regardless of their IQ score, is eligible to attend a mainstream school.

must fall between 50 and 70. Below 50 the child is eligible to attend an SDS.

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Assessment tools:

- An IQ test, which must be administered by a registered psychologist, and which is valid for two years and can not be re-administered during that time. The tests vary according to the child's age but may be the WISC - III, WISC - IV, WPPSI - 3, WPPSI – R or Stanford – Binet.
- The Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales. This is a checklist of the child's independence, social and self-help skills such as the ability to dress themselves, use a knife and fork, etc.
- You may also be required to submit language assessments performed by a speech pathologist

There can be no training for such testing. Families can use a psychologist nominated by the school or can engage one privately.

Mainstream settings / Special settings / Zoning

- It is the parent's choice whether your child will attend a mainstream school or a special education setting. No matter whether you choose mainstream or a special setting you need to have your child tested to apply for funding.
- Your child has a right to a place at your local state mainstream or special setting school. You may reach agreement to attend a school other than the local one. Some mainstream secondary state schools have become so popular that they have been granted zoning rights.
- If you opt to attend a special setting in most instances that school will have a dedicated bus service. However you will only be able to use their bus if you live within that school's zone. If outside that zone and therefore, within another special setting's zone, you are responsible for taking your child to your chosen school.

Funding

In all three systems you have to apply for funding through the school you have selected.

The process is broadly similar in all three systems. In every case the application must be accompanied by a current psychological assessment as discussed above.

State schools

The principal will arrange a meeting at which an Educational Needs Questionnaire (ENQ) will be completed. Your child's abilities will be assessed in various areas including Mobility, Fine Motor skills, Expressive Language, Receptive Language, Behaviour, Safety, Hearing, Vision, Self-Care, Medical and Cognitive Skills. The submission includes an individual learning plan. It helps greatly if you

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have relevant reports available such as Speech Pathology, Audiology, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Medical reports and of course psychological testing results. Children with Down syndrome establish eligibility under the area of cognition. A summary of this questionnaire is then forwarded to the DEECD and results in your child's school receiving funding to support your child. The closing date for submission of the ENQ is late September for funding for the beginning of the following year. Should you arrive mid year there is provision for you to apply on arrival. If you and / or the school are not happy with the level of funding offered there are official channels for appeal. To view the ENQ format go to www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/default.htm

Use of funding

The school Principal determines how the funding will be used, but a prudent Principal would do so in consultation with parents. The majority of funding is usually used for employment of a School Support Officer (SSO – Integration Aide) to support your child's program in the classroom. Other uses may include paying for outside consultancy such as the Down Syndrome Educational Support Service, outsourcing Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy etc. Schools also have to make allowances for replacement SSOs in case of sickness and other overheads. The degree to which this affects your child's funding or the central school budget depends on the school.

Levels of funding

Levels are from 1 to 6. Currently the levels are as follows:

Level 1	\$5,287
Level 2	\$12,227
Level 3	\$19,301
Level 4	\$26,342
Level 5	\$33,330
Level 6	\$40,355

Most children with Down syndrome receive either level 2 or 3 funding – unless they have exceptional needs in areas such as safety, medical or behavioural. If they receive higher levels of funding it may be offered with the attached clause that it be reviewed after 12 months. Otherwise the funding level remains constant until Year 6 when there is a mandatory review ahead of enrolment into a secondary setting.

Source of funding

Victorian State Government

CECV schools

A similar process of interview, assessment, reports, writing of individual learning plans and submission to obtain funding is followed by Catholic schools.

Many children with Down syndrome experience success despite lower levels of funding.

Use of funding

- The Catholic system differs from the State system in that funding is not linked directly to your child but rather the CECV considers all the submissions from a particular school and then makes an inclusive funding grant to that school for their integration program. The Principal and other relevant school personnel decide how best to use these funds to support the program in conjunction with other resources and staffing within their school.
- The CECV submissions cover much the same areas of ability assessment as the State schools.

Levels of funding

As stated above, your child is not individually funded by the CECV, but as a guide Catholic schools receive approximately one third to one half of the state government schools level of funding.

- There are two rounds of new applications the closing dates of which are: Round 1 – early October; Round 2 – early February. For the Archdiocese of Ballarat, Round 1 closes about one month earlier than above. On-going applications are due late August.
- An application has to be completed annually. The application may be viewed at www.cecv.catholic.edu.au and follow the resources link

Source of funding

- Commonwealth government
- Supplemented by the CECV

Independent (AISV) schools

Independent schools may include schools under the auspices of religious organisations other than CECV or schools that follow a particular educational philosophy e.g. Steiner

A similar process of interview, assessment, reports, writing of individual learning plans and submission to obtain funding is followed by independent schools. Parents should approach individual schools to source documentation and to arrange assessment as each independent school is a separate entity For further information go to www.ais.vic.edu.au and follow the links to special education.

Use of funding

Monies are forwarded to these schools to use as they determine best.

Levels of funding

- Four levels

Level 1	\$1,700
Level 2	\$2,800
Level 3	\$3,900
Level 4	\$5,000 (available only to independent special schools which generally do not cater for children with Down syndrome)

- Applications are due by early September. A second round of applications, for new enrolments and Preps only, is due in February

Source of funding

- Commonwealth government
- A small amount from the State Government supplements Visiting Teacher Service (hearing impaired, vision impaired, physically disabled) and speech pathology (Prep – Year 4)

Note

Because your child receives less funding in a non-government system does not necessarily mean that your child will not succeed as well as in a state school. Successful inclusion is more dependent on aspects such as a positive school attitude, inclusive school culture and appropriate pastoral support. Many children with Down syndrome experience success despite lower levels of funding.

Down Syndrome Victoria – Educational Support Service (ESS):

If your child is attending a mainstream school Down Syndrome Victoria offers a support service, staffed by a trained special education teacher, for the child, school and family. Details of this service are available at www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au



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Ian is an education consultant at Down Syndrome Victoria and provides educational support for mainstream schools around Victoria. The Education Support Service assists schools with teaching strategies, curriculum planning, behaviour management and other needs that arise as a student with Down syndrome passes through primary and secondary education.