

### LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT WITH THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY ASSESSMENT SERVICE: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/CARERS

#### Who is the Students with Disability Assessment Service?

The Students with Disability Assessment Service (SwD-AS) is delivered by MAX Health. We are an independent company that assesses students to support schools with applications for the Program for Students with Disabilities and Disability Inclusion. The service is provided at no cost to the school or family through a contract with the Department of Education (the department).

#### Why has my child been referred for assessment?

Your child has been referred for an assessment because there are concerns about their learning which may be due to a language disorder. Some children have difficulty with speaking and/or understanding instructions, words and sentences, which may make it difficult to learn and interact with others at school. If the language disorder is severe your child may need extra support for their learning.

For the assessment we will:

- look at receptive language or your child's ability to understand the meaning of what other people say
- look at expressive language or your child's ability to use words and sentences to say what they want to say
- sometimes look at thinking and problem-solving skills using a cognitive assessment, which will help us understand why your child may be having difficulty at school
- ask about your child's history, such as their speech and language development, how long they have been speaking English, any hearing difficulties and any previous assessments and/or early intervention
- talk to you and other people who know your child well.

A small number of children have complex communication needs which means they have little or no speech, or speech that is very hard to understand. One example is a severe speech sound disorder due to Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS), which affects a child's ability to speak clearly and communicate with others. If a speech assessment is needed, we will look at your child's ability to make speech sounds and put sounds together to make words. We will also look at how your child's speech muscles move and work. CAS is different from the speech problems many children have, and is quite rare.

#### The referral process

Your child's school has contacted us to make this referral. We need to get some information from you and the school to see if a speech pathologist from our service is the best person to do the language assessment.. The school can help you fill out the forms if needed. If we think it will be better for someone else to assess your child, we will let the school know.

## The assessment

We will organise for your child to have a language and/or speech assessment. A speech pathologist has special training and is the most qualified professional to assess your child's language and speech skills. Sometimes we will also organise for your child to have a cognitive assessment. A psychologist will complete the cognitive assessment to look at your child's thinking and problem solving skills. In some cases, only do a language assessment if the results of the cognitive assessment meet the criteria set by the department.

The school will let you know when a time is made for these assessments to take place, and invite you to come to the school to speak to the speech pathologist or psychologist after the assessment. Parents/carers are not usually present for the assessment. If an interpreter is needed, the school will organise this. Sometimes we will phone you to check some information before the assessment.

It is usually best for children to be told about the assessment in a relaxed way without using the word "test". These are not assessments your child can practice or prepare for. On the day of the assessment, it is important that your child is well and has taken any regular medication.

There are different tools that our assessors use to assess children. All the assessment tools we use measure similar things and are accepted by the department.

## After the assessment

The speech pathologist and psychologist will give you information about the assessment and things you and the school can do to help your child. The speech pathologist will usually be able to tell you if your child has a language and speech disorder, but may sometimes need more time to make this decision. In some cases, another assessment session may be needed. If you cannot come to the school after the assessment to talk to the speech pathologist, they will phone you. The school will organise an interpreter if needed.

We will send the assessment report(s) to the school within three weeks of the assessment. The school will give you a copy of the report(s), which will include some ideas to help your child. When you receive the report(s), you can call us on 9678 5100 if you have any questions. The school can also help answer any questions you have.

## What happens if my child has a language disorder?

If your child has a language disorder or complex communication needs, the school will continue to teach them and help them learn. They will make changes to their learning program where needed and will start an Individual Education Plan. A Student Support Group will be set up to talk about your child's needs and progress. The assessment reports will give information that will help you and the school support your child's learning. If your child also has a high level of support needs across a range of areas, the school may apply for extra resources through the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) or Disability Inclusion (DI). School staff will talk to you about the program that is running in your school's area. Other services might also be able to help your child, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

## What happens if my child does not have a language disorder?

If your child does not have a language disorder with high needs, the school will continue to teach them and help them learn. The assessment reports will give information that will help you and the school support your child's learning. There are a range of programs available to schools to help children with language or learning difficulties, such as the Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program or other Disability Inclusion supports. You can talk to the school about how they will support your child.

## Key terms

Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD): The PSD provides government schools extra funding to help them support students with disability and high needs.

Disability Inclusion: Disability Inclusion will increase support for students with disability and will be introduced in Victorian government schools through a staged roll-out over five years from Term 4 2021. The new Disability Inclusion Profile will be used to help schools and families understand students' education and support needs. Your child's school will let you know when Disability Inclusion starts at your school.

Language disorder: Difficulty understanding what another person says and/or difficulty putting thoughts into words and sentences to communicate.

Receptive language: The ability to understand the words, sentences and meaning of what other people say.

Expressive language: The ability to put thoughts into words and sentences to communicate.

Cognitive assessment: An assessment conducted by a psychologist that looks at a person's thinking and problem solving skills needed in order to learn.

Complex communication needs: The needs of a person who has little or no functional speech, or speech that is difficult to understand, so may need other ways to help them communicate e.g. key word sign, picture symbols, communication books and speech generating devices.

Speech sound disorder: Difficulty saying the sounds that make up spoken words.

Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS): A rare type of speech sound disorder which affects ability to organise the movements of the muscles used in speech.

Psychologist: A professional with special training in testing and identifying strengths and challenges in thinking skills.

Speech pathologist: A professional with special training in language and communication skills, including testing and identifying language strengths and challenges.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): An IEP helps the teacher plan for and support a child's learning needs.

Student Support Group (SSG): A group, including teachers and family, that works together to identify a student's needs, develop an IEP and monitor a student's progress.

Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program: Provides schools with extra resources to support teaching and learning programs for students with autism, dyslexia, language or other learning disabilities.