

Occupational Therapy in schools

Occupational therapists work in schools to support students with disability to participate in their school life.

Allied Health professionals are not part of the medical, dental or nursing professions, but are university qualified practitioners with specialised expertise in preventing, diagnosing and treating a range of conditions and illnesses.

What is occupational therapy?

Occupational therapists (OTs) focus on promoting health and wellbeing by enabling people to participate in the everyday occupations of life. The term 'occupation' is used to describe the everyday things that we do in our life roles and that make us who we are.

An OT can support a student's well-being, participation and success across their school life from building skills for concentration, fine and gross motor skills, and supporting behavioural needs.

There are two

Parent funded services for individual students:

A student with a disability may be eligible for an OT service funded by the NDIS. In most cases, this service will be funded out of the student's NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) plan.

School initiated and funded services for small groups, whole of class/school and staff professional development:

Schools can use OT services to meet the specific and individual needs of students with disability that affect what they need to do at school. They may engage OT services to support identified groups of students or to provide professional development to their staff.

Who does an occupational therapist work with?

The list below provides some examples of who an OT support

- Children and young people with developmental disabilities including, but not limited to: *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Downs Syndrome, specific genetic disorders* and birth injuries or *birth defects*.
- Children and young people with learning and/or behavioural difficulties including, but not limited to: *ADHD, executive functioning difficulties, dyspraxia, sensory processing differences, Oppositional Defiance Disorder* and *anxiety as a consequence of underlying skill deficits*.
- Children with injuries that will require temporary supports such as *post-surgical conditions, burns and injuries*.

Occupational therapists may also work with parents, carers, teachers and others in support roles to provide training, professional development and mentoring.

Existing Resources

For school initiated and funded services, schools may use the Department's Specialist Allied Health Scheme to identify and engage pre-qualified allied health providers.

[Externally Funded Service Providers information hub.](#)



What services can a school engage an occupational therapist to deliver?

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When working with students, we aim to develop their skills so they can learn and safely and independently access the school environment.

Assessments

- Assess and analyse a student's movement, sensory needs and cognitive and psychosocial skills to determine a treatment and support plan
- Assess the school or classroom environment to identify modifications that improve a student's safety and independence of access and navigation
- Assess suitability of existing available lifting equipment for a student's specific needs

Supports

- Support students with both fine and gross motor difficulties such as pencil grip (fine) and hand-eye coordination (gross)
- Support the setting up of equipment to support students in completing their class work more comfortably and efficiently (e.g. setting up an iPad mounted to a student's wheelchair)

Recommendations

- Designing tasks and environments to support the student to achieve improved participation in their education
- Identify personalised adaptive equipment that may be necessary for a student's school attendance, for example change tables, shower and toileting arrangements and any required modifications

For teachers and school staff

OTs work with teachers and school staff to provide expertise and training and ensure that they are equipped to best support students with specific needs. This can include:

Training and education:

- Providing training in *mobility support, positioning, manual handling* or use of *lifting or other adaptive equipment*.
- Work collaboratively to develop and implement a student's *Personalised Learning and Support Plan*.
- Specific education on specific needs ie. *Understanding sensory processing disorders*.

Team teaching and classroom support:

- This form of service delivery can also provide support and upskilling opportunities for the classroom teacher.

How are services delivered?

Depending on the therapist, there are a number of ways in which services can be delivered.

Delivery mode:

- Face to face
- One on one
- Virtual consultations which can be effective for low intensity and ongoing support, or can be used to supplement face to face services. Providers may use:
 - Virtual/video conferencing
 - Online platforms
 - Phone
 - Email
- Small groups
- Classroom and whole of school
- Training workshops and webinars - one off and ongoing
- Collaborative planning and strategic workshops

Delivery frequency:

- One off session
 - Ongoing - for example weekly sessions for the period of a school term or year
 - Educational/professional development programs - series, short and long
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