

Cognitive assessment with Assessments Australia: Information for parents

Who is Assessments Australia?

Assessments Australia is an independent company conducting assessments with students to see if schools are able to apply for extra support for them at school. We are contracted by DET, and the service is provided at no cost to the school or family.

Why has my child been referred for assessment?

Your child has been referred for a cognitive assessment because there are concerns about their learning, and the school wants to understand whether this may be due to an intellectual disability.

For the cognitive assessment we will:

- look at a number of thinking and problem solving skills needed for learning, which is an important part of working out why your child may be having difficulty with learning
- look at your child's adaptive behaviour
- ask about your child's history, such as developmental milestones, kindergarten and school progress
- talk to you and other people who know your child well.

This assessment will help us better understand your child's learning needs. Many children have difficulties at school, but only a very small number will have an intellectual disability. If you have questions about this, please contact the school or our office on (03) 9678 5100.

The referral process

Your child's school has contacted us to make this referral. We need to collect some information from you and the school to see if an Assessments Australia psychologist is the best person to do the 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

One of our psychologists will phone the school and make a time to see your child. Psychologists have special training and are the most qualified professional to assess for intellectual disability. The school will let you know when this will be, and invite you to come to the school to speak to the psychologist after the assessment. If an interpreter is needed, the school will organise this. The psychologist may also phone you to check some information before the assessment. The assessment will usually take place within three weeks of us receiving the completed forms.

It is usually best for children to be told about the assessment in a relaxed way without using the word “test”. This is not an assessment 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 and ways that our psychologists assess children. Sometimes the assessment will be on an iPad, sometimes it will be on paper, and sometimes a combination of these. All the tools measure similar things, and all are accepted by Department of Education and Training (DET).

After the assessment

The psychologist will give you information about the assessment and things you and the school can do to help your child. The psychologist will usually be able to tell you if your child has an intellectual disability or not, 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 psychologist, they will phone you. The school will organise an interpreter if needed.

We will send the psychologist’s report to the school within three weeks of the assessment. The school will give you a copy of the report, which will include some ideas to help your child. When you receive the report, you can call us on 9663 6622 if you have any questions. The school can also help answer any questions you have.

What happens if my child has an intellectual disability?

If your child has an intellectual disability, 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 school can put in an application to the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) which may give the school extra funding for your child’s learning program. 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 an intellectual disability?

If your child does not have an intellectual disability, the school will continue to teach them and help them learn. There are a range of programs available to schools to help them meet the needs of all students, not just those with an intellectual disability. The psychologist’s report will give information that will help you and the school support your child’s learning. You can talk to the school about how they will support your child.

Key terms

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

Intellectual disability: A disability that affects the way a person learns, solves problems and manages day to day activities.

Adaptive behaviour: How a child manages day to day life.

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

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.

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