

NDIS: Assistive technology, aids and equipment

Fact sheet for schools

This fact sheet aims to help schools understand their obligations regarding assistive technology for students with disability in the context of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

What is assistive technology?

Assistive technology is 'any device or system that allows individuals to perform tasks they would otherwise be unable to do or increases the ease and safety with which tasks can be performed' (World Health Organisation, 2004).

In this fact sheet, assistive technology is used as a broad term for a diverse group of products, aids, equipment and technologies. This broad definition of assistive technology includes the full range of information and communication technologies (ICT), positioning and mobility equipment, as well as traditional aids like specialised furniture, modified implements or tools, and consumables such as continence products. The NDIS uses the same broad definition.

In schools, assistive technology is any tool, no matter how simple or complex, that enables learning. This fact sheet does not cover assistive technology for transport provided through the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP).

The NDIS will provide functional disability supports, including assistive technology

The NDIS is a new way of supporting people with disability to have greater choice and control over the supports they need to achieve their goals. The NDIS will fund reasonable and necessary supports that address the functional impact of disability on eligible participants' daily living.

Some school aged children and young people with disability will be eligible for the NDIS.

Once a person becomes a participant in the NDIS, they will have a plan that provides an individualised package of supports that relates to their goals. The plan takes account of support provided to all Australians by mainstream services, like education, health and transport. The plan may also include funding for assistive technology, if considered reasonable and necessary.

Types of assistive technology the NDIS may fund include:

- consumables such as continence products and equipment that supports eating and drinking
- mobility aids and self-care equipment, such as wheelchairs and shower commodes
- communication devices, such as hearing aids and speech generating devices
- home and vehicle modifications
- repairs and maintenance of NDIS-funded items.

The NDIS may fund supports that enable children to attend school where these supports are also required at home and in community (e.g. communication devices and mobility equipment, such as wheelchairs). Assistive technology needs will be considered as part of the NDIS planning process for each participant of the scheme.



The NDIS will not fund assistive technology that is needed primarily for educational purposes

The NDIS will not fund assistive technology that is needed to access the curriculum, such as modified computer hardware, educational software and Braille textbooks. It is also not responsible for building modifications and fixed or non-transportable equipment in schools that enable a student to access education (e.g. ceiling hoists).

Schools remain responsible for assistive technology that supports curriculum access

Under the **Disability Standards for Education 2005**, schools are responsible for making reasonable adjustments to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. This includes providing or enabling students to access assistive technology, where appropriate.

These responsibilities have not changed with the introduction of the NDIS. They apply to all students with disability, whether or not they are an NDIS participant.

Education is responsible for assistive technology where it supports students to access the curriculum and participate in learning. This includes:

- equipment that supports the delivery of personal care in school, such as change tables and hygiene products (i.e. gloves, aprons and wipes)
- equipment for mobility and positioning while at school
- technology for learning, including ICT hardware and software, and peripheral devices (e.g. Braille))
- specialised school furniture.

Schools are not expected to provide equipment that is a student's primary means of communication or mobility across all life domains.

Decisions about assistive technology in school should be informed by collaborative discussions

As with all personalised learning and support, school staff should consider assistive technology needs in consultation with students and their families, and other professionals (e.g. therapists) where appropriate. Led by the school learning and support team, an assessment of a student's need for assistive technology should aim to develop a shared understanding of:

- the student's abilities and needs
- the environment/s the student spends time in
- the tasks the student needs to be able to do at school or to complete homework.

This information can help determine the right tools that need to be put in place and who is responsible for providing those tools. This approach is based on the **SETT (Student, Environment, Task and Tool) Framework** developed by Joy Zabala (2005).

Schools can help parents identify their child's broader assistive technology needs

If a parent or carer asks for advice ahead of an NDIS planning meeting, school staff can help them identify goals and appropriate supports outside the school environment, including assistive technology. This may include aids and equipment they already access from other providers, such as Enable NSW, including continence products and feeding tubes. Arrangements for repairs and ongoing maintenance of equipment should also be considered.

Managing assistive technology in NSW public schools is shared across the department

Schools manage the cost of generic equipment, such as printers, standard software and consumables, within their budget.

Where it is not possible to meet the costs of assistive technology through the school budget, NSW public schools can request equipment or additional support through School Services.

School Services can assist with:

- equipment for personal care, mobility and positioning (e.g. change tables, walkers, hoists and standing frames)
- technology to enable access to the curriculum (e.g. communication devices or software, IT hardware and specialised software, peripheral devices).

In School Infrastructure NSW, asset management units can assist with:

- specialised school furniture (e.g. height adjustable tables, slope boards, gas operated chairs, chairs with arm rests and cut outs)
- fixed items and modifications to school buildings or grounds.

The assistive technology advisor in state office provides additional support and advice to schools and external providers to ensure students' needs are met.

EnableNSW will still provide some disability supports

Since 2011, EnableNSW has provided assistive technology for communication, mobility, respiratory function and self-care for eligible people with permanent or long term disability or a chronic health condition, living at home in the community.

Funding for some of this equipment and support will move progressively to the NDIS as it is rolled out. This includes equipment that provides the primary means of communication or mobility (e.g. wheelchairs, prosthetic limbs, and electronic communication devices) and some consumables (e.g. continence and home enteral nutrition products).

Funding for respiratory consumables and equipment is unchanged and will continue to be available through EnableNSW.

EnableNSW will continue to support children and young people until they become NDIS participants and their plan is in place. At that time, funding for assistive technology, including repairs and maintenance, will become the responsibility of the NDIS.

EnableNSW is also an NDIS registered provider and can continue to coordinate assistive technology needs outlined in NDIS plans.

Where can schools get more advice and support about assistive technology?

Key sources of advice and support for NSW public schools include:

- School Services teams, who can source specialist training, assessment and advice on assistive technology if needed
- Assistant principals (hearing/vision) and itinerant support teachers (hearing/vision)
- Asset management units in School Infrastructure NSW
- Assistive technology advisor in Disability, Learning and Support
- NDIS Coordinators for NSW public schools.

More information

NDIS

1800 800 110

<http://bit.ly/NDIS-operational-guideline>

(Section 4 of the NDIS Operational Guideline on Including specific types of supports in plans)

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/housing-and-living-supports-and-services/providing-assistive-technology>

EnableNSW

1800 362 253

www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au

School Services

<http://bit.ly/school-services-contacts>

(DoE staff only)

Disability, Learning & Support (state office)

(02) 7814 3879

disability.support@det.nsw.edu.au

<http://bit.ly/doe-disability>

School Infrastructure NSW – Asset Management Units

<http://bit.ly/doe-amu> (DoE staff only)

NDIS Coordinators for NSW Public Schools

Susanne Andrews – Campbelltown Education Office

Wendy English – Dubbo Education Office

Angela Hay – Warilla Education Office

Rachel Pregnell – Coffs Harbour Education Office

Fran Tinley – Nirimba Education Office