

Fact sheet

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services

Information for parents

What do occupational therapists and physiotherapists do in schools?

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists working in Queensland state schools support students with disability to achieve the best outcomes from their education. They help students to access and participate in all areas of school life.

Each discipline's specialised knowledge and skills contributes to the team's understanding of a student's abilities and assists them to:

- learn
- follow routines
- interact with others
- organise and look after themselves
- participate in physical activities
- be safe at school
- manage emotions and behaviour.

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists often work as a team. Each offers something different, however both professions work with school teams, including students and their parents or carers, to make changes to the environment, equipment used, and support students to learn and practice new skills.

What is occupational therapy?

In schools, the focus of occupational therapy is enabling students with disability to participate in all the activities that occur in a school day. These activities include learning, play, using objects and technology, writing, interacting with others and looking after themselves.

What is physiotherapy?

Physiotherapy helps people with movement, posture and wellbeing. In schools, physiotherapists help students work in the classroom, move around the school, play during breaks and participate in physical education classes and physical activities such as swimming.

How are occupational therapy and physiotherapy services delivered?

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists work with schools to adjust:

- how students are taught (the teaching process, learning activities and routines)
- how students show what they have learnt
- learning environments.

Services may include:

- providing information or coaching to staff to develop their skills, plan and solve problems



- supporting the use of and advising on assistive technology, equipment or other personalised resources
- changing students' learning activities or classroom environment
- supporting students to participate in school activities.

Students and school teams may receive support from occupational therapists, physiotherapists or both.

Where do occupational therapists and physiotherapists provide services?

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists either visit the school or meet with the student and/or teachers and teacher aides by telepractice.

Most of the time services are provided in classroom environments. This assists the school team to use the best supports for students in school activities and routines.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services provided by the Department of Education are not delivered in the same way as in private practice or hospitals. Most of the time, the student will not participate in one-on-one therapy sessions. The services often involve collaborative problem-solving with school staff.

Who receives occupational therapy and physiotherapy services?

To be responsive to the learning needs of all students, occupational therapists and physiotherapists provide services to schools and students.

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists provide services that:

- support whole school planning,
- give targeted education and skill building for school staff,
- will meet the needs of student groups, or
- are to design specific supports for an individual student.

Student needs can often be met without an individual service. Individual services are prioritised when:

- a child/student cannot safely attend their school or ECDP
- a student needs highly personalised support strategies to participate in schooling
- a school needs support to prepare for a child registered for an ECDP to begin Prep.

How can I get occupational therapy and physiotherapy services?

Teachers or school teams identify needs that occupational therapy and physiotherapy services could help with.

Parents, or the student, can speak with the class teacher if they think occupational therapy and physiotherapy services could help them at school.

The principal of the school will then liaise with the occupational therapy and physiotherapy team to agree on the services that will be provided. Often they will make a plan for services that will be reviewed during the year.

Is consent needed?

The parent or carer, and in some cases the student, must provide consent for individual occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. The school is responsible for talking with parents or carers about requesting a service and asking them to complete and sign the consent form.

Parents, carers or students do not have to give consent if they do not want occupational therapy or physiotherapy services. They can change their mind about the services provided by talking to the occupational therapist, physiotherapist, teacher or principal.

Consent is not required if the occupational therapy or physiotherapy service is provided for a whole class and not the individual student (e.g. providing information to a teacher to support planning for all students).

Is there a cost for families?

The department provides occupational therapy and physiotherapy services at no cost to the family. This is because the service is focused on supporting reasonable adjustments so the student can participate and learn.

How can feedback be provided?

Contact the occupational therapist, physiotherapist or the school principal to provide feedback about the service.

Further information

Visit qld.gov.au/SchoolOTandPhysio