

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services



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 learning and school activities. They assist schools to make adjustments to enable students to engage in learning, achieve and belong in the school.

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 and equipment used, as well as support students to learn and practice new skills.

What is occupational therapy?

The focus of occupational therapy is to promote wellbeing, improve function and independence. In schools, occupational therapy means helping students with disability to participate in all the activities that occur in a school day. These activities include learning, playing, 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 therapy and physiotherapy services are based on the needs of each student and the goals set by school teams. Occupational therapists and physiotherapists work with school teams to make adjustments to:

- 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 staff to build 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.



Occupational therapists and physiotherapists in state schools apply the best evidence and practices. They also work with other service providers and professionals from the department and other agencies.

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

Where do occupational therapists and physiotherapists provide services?

Most of the time, services are provided at school where the student undertakes the activity (for example the classroom, stairs, lunch area, sports fields, library, bathroom or playground). This includes other learning places such as worksites, school camps or in the community.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services provided by the department are not delivered in the same way as in private practice. Most of the time, the student will not participate in one on one therapy sessions.

Who receives occupational therapy and physiotherapy services?

The target group for occupational therapy and physiotherapy services is students with disability who need significant education adjustments.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services may be available for:

- students identified through the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) as needing significant education adjustment due to disability
- students enrolled in special schools
- students with disability enrolled in Prep who require significant education adjustments related to autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical impairment, speech-language impairment and/or vision impairment
- children who are registered for an early childhood development program (ECDP) or service.

Regional staff make decisions about providing services for students whose disability does not meet the criteria for the Education Adjustment Program.

Students need different support services at different times and in different situations. Services are prioritised for students who require occupational



“Occupational therapists and physiotherapists help us to understand the student.”

Teacher, Darling Downs South West Region

therapy or physiotherapy to access and participate in learning and other school activities. Occupational therapists and physiotherapists work with school teams to decide what services should be requested as each student’s need for support changes.

How are occupational therapy and physiotherapy services requested?

Teachers or school teams identify that a student could benefit from occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. Parents are consulted to enable them to understand the need for support at school and to give them the opportunity to speak with the class teacher about their child’s needs. Students can also talk to their teachers if they think occupational therapy and physiotherapy services could help them at school.

Schools then make a request for services through the principal by completing a request form.

Who is responsible for consent?

The parent or carer and in some cases the student, must provide consent for 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.

If the occupational therapy or physiotherapy service is not provided for an individual student (for example providing information to a teacher to support planning for all students), then consent is not required.

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 to schooling so that a student is able to participate and learn on the same basis as all other students.

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

