



catholic education commission of victoria ltd  
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# Parent Guide to Program Support Groups



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Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd  
James Gould House  
228 Victoria Parade  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

**[www.cecv.catholic.edu.au](http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au)**

**Correspondence to:**

The Company Secretary  
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd  
PO Box 3  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 8002

Email: [secretary@cecv.catholic.edu.au](mailto:secretary@cecv.catholic.edu.au)

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## Foreword

### 'Flourishing Catholic school children, families and communities living life to the full' – (CECV 2015).

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 'has a strategic role in ensuring that Catholic schools are of high quality, committed to continually improving their effectiveness in both academic pursuits and in the preservation and enhancement of the distinctive identity and character of Catholic schools' (CECV 2015, p. 6). This publication and the accompanying resources have been developed to assist Victorian Catholic schools to plan for and conduct Program Support Group (PSG) meetings. It reflects the values of Catholic education across the four dioceses and recognises our commitment to authentic partnerships with families.

The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are a foundational incentive in developing educational approaches to welcome families. In seeking to bring harmony to life, Jesus modelled a transformation of the human spirit through collaboration, encouragement and building strong relationships. Catholic schools enact his example through the care for all students, but particularly those with diverse needs and their families.

Catholic schools value diversity and are committed to providing equitable access and opportunity for all learners through the implementation of inclusive practices. Foundational to this is the development of authentic partnerships with students, families and the broader community.

As the first educators of their children, parents and carers have a depth of knowledge that can make valuable contributions about additional practices and processes that will support their child. Nurturing and respecting this relationship will support optimal outcomes for the student.

I commend this resource to you and am confident it will support collaboration.

Yours sincerely

+ *T. R. Curtin*

**Most Rev. Terence Curtin DD STD BEd**

Chair, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd

This guide provides you – parents, carers and guardians – with information about the Program Support Group (PSG), including what the PSG does and the role of participants. Throughout this guide, the term ‘parents’ is used to refer to one or more parents, carers or guardians.

Catholic schools value diversity. They strive to provide equitable access and opportunity for all learners. They do this through inclusive practices, including high-quality instruction and quality differentiated teaching practices adapted to meet the needs of students. Some students also require adjustments and interventions to address academic, social, emotional, behavioural, cultural, health and/or wellbeing needs.

Catholic schools recognise the importance of working in collaboration with families. For students with diverse needs, such partnerships between family and school are critical in supporting the student. As parents, you have a depth of knowledge and can make valuable contributions about additional practices and processes that will support your child at school.

For students with diverse needs, the main way that schools and families work together is through the PSG.

*“For students with diverse needs, the main way that schools and families work together is through the PSG.”*

## What is a PSG?

A Program Support Group (PSG) brings together key people involved in your child's holistic education. It is a partnership between you and your child, school representatives and, where relevant, invited professionals. The PSG works together to guide the planning and implementation of inclusive educational practices for your child.

The members of the PSG meet on a regular basis to develop plans, adjustments and interventions that reflect a common understanding of your child's needs.

It is fundamental to the success of the PSG that all participants adhere to the following meeting protocols:

- meetings are collaborative in decision-making
- meetings are respectful and positive in tone
- there is an opportunity for all voices to be heard.

## Which students have a PSG?

A school will establish a PSG where there is a need to guide the planning and implementation of inclusive educational practices for a student. This may be due to academic, social, emotional, behavioural, cultural, health and/or wellbeing needs of the student.

A PSG may be established for your child:

- if your child is receiving extensive adjustments/interventions to their education program
- if your child is receiving less extensive adjustments/interventions to their education program, but this program still requires monitoring and evaluation
- when there have been unexpected and critical changes to circumstances in your child's life
- when there have been unexpected changes to your child's learner profile (including how they learn)
- in response to needs identified by you or the school
- in response to needs diagnosed by a medical or allied health specialist.

A PSG may be established when your child is first enrolled at the school or at any time when the need arises.

## What does the PSG do?

The members of the PSG (including you) work together to develop plans, adjustments and interventions for your child's education program.

As part of designing the education program for your child, the PSG may:

- identify your child's needs
- use data and information (e.g. from school assessments or reports from health professionals) to plan adjustments, interventions, supports and strategies
- provide advice to the principal about the educational needs of your child and the types of resources required
- review your child's progress towards previously agreed goals
- establish future goals and actions
- seek independent specialist advice to clarify your child's needs and appropriate adjustments.

The PSG may develop and review educational and other plans for your child including: Personalised Learning Plans, Behaviour Support Plans, Safety Plans, Medical Management Plans, Health Plans and/or Cultural Plans.

## Who attends a PSG meeting?

The PSG is made up of core members and (where relevant) invited guests. The PSG meeting is chaired by the school principal or the principal's nominee (usually a senior member of staff such as the deputy principal or learning diversity leader).

### Core members

The core members of a PSG are:

- the principal or principal's nominee
- you (as parent, carer or guardian)
- your child (where appropriate)
- your child's classroom/homeroom teacher.

If your child attends two schools (i.e. has dual enrolment), the PSG will be held by the school where your child attends most of the time. In this case, the principal (or principal's nominee) of your child's other school will also be a core member.

### Invited guests

Invited guests may attend the PSG meeting on some or all occasions. All invited guests should be nominated prior to the meeting and attend following consent from the principal/principal's nominee. Invited guests may include:

- consultants (e.g. health professionals)
- other school staff (e.g. learning diversity leader if not the chair, learning support officer, wellbeing coordinator)
- a case worker or case manager
- an interpreter (provided by the school as needed)
- a support person/advocate.



## What are the roles of PSG participants?

All participants of the PSG work collaboratively to develop plans, adjustments and interventions for your child's education program. Further information about each role is provided below.

### Core members

#### Principal or principal's nominee

The school principal is the chair of the PSG. The principal may appoint another staff member as the principal's nominee, to act on their behalf as chair. This will usually be a senior member of staff, such as the deputy principal or learning diversity leader. When acting as the principal's nominee, this staff member has the same level of authority in relation to the PSG as though they were the principal.

The principal/principal's nominee convenes and chairs the PSG meetings and is required to be present at all PSG meetings. The principal/principal's nominee is responsible for ensuring that the meeting follows the agenda and for supporting participants to take part during the meeting.

Consent must be obtained from the principal/principal's nominee prior to the PSG meeting for any invited guests, including consultants, other school staff, interpreters and parent advocate/support persons.

The PSG plays a critical role in planning and advising on the adjustments, interventions and supports to assist your child. In general, adjustments will be able to be implemented by the school but, in some situations, the school may need to consider whether an adjustment is reasonable in the circumstances. The final decision about the reasonableness of any such adjustments (including whether they are financially viable for the school) is that of the school principal. The school is not required to make unreasonable adjustments.

#### Parent, carer, guardian

As a parent, carer or guardian, you play a vital role in the PSG by providing knowledge and experience that may influence decisions about your child. Your input can help the school better understand and meet the needs of your child. You may be able to provide information on the effectiveness and practicality of strategies and programs. You may also have knowledge about previous events and what has worked in the past.

You are encouraged to share your knowledge and contribute to the goals and strategies that will support the education, health and wellbeing of your child.

#### Student

It may be appropriate for your child to participate in the PSG meeting and the development of their program. This will depend on a range of factors including your child's age, cultural background, social and emotional needs and severity of disability.

Regardless of whether your child attends the PSG meeting, the preferences and interests of your child should be considered by the PSG when planning programs.

### Classroom/homeroom teacher

The teacher (or teachers) with key responsibility for your child will generally be the classroom or homeroom teacher. In some cases, this may be another teacher such as a year level coordinator or house leader.

The role of this teacher is to provide the PSG with relevant information about your child and their progress, for example:

- current assessment results
- work samples
- details of classroom achievements
- feedback on social and academic engagement.

The teacher may also draft plans as relevant to your child, taking into account the collaborative input of the PSG, health professionals and specialised reports and assessments, for example:

- Personalised Learning Plans
- Behaviour Support Plans/Safety Plans
- Medical Management Plans/Health Plans
- Cultural Plans
- risk assessment documentation.

The teacher is also responsible for implementing the classroom content of any plans for your child and coordinating other staff (e.g. learning support officer/s) who are supporting your child.

### Invited guests

#### Consultant

The principal or principal's nominee may invite/approve relevant consultants to attend a PSG meeting. A consultant is a person with knowledge of the student or with information relevant to the academic, social, emotional, behavioural, cultural, health and/or wellbeing needs of the student.

A consultant may be, for example:

- a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, speech pathologist, physiotherapist or occupational therapist
- a medical or paramedical practitioner
- a staff member from the Department of Health and Human Services, Child and Youth Mental Health Service, Bapcare, Anglicare, Family First or other relevant organisations
- a staff member from a Catholic education office.

A consultant may assist the PSG in its consideration of adjustments, interventions, support and strategies and the formulation of relevant plans. Information provided by consultants will be taken into consideration by the PSG. However, the consultant does not have a role in the final decision-making process of the PSG.

#### Other school staff

Other school staff may be invited to attend some or all PSGs as relevant. Such staff may include the learning diversity leader (if they are not already attending as the principal's nominee), a learning support officer (LSO) or wellbeing coordinator.

LSOs frequently work with students who have diverse needs. The LSO works under the supervision of teachers who have specific responsibility for the student's program. In most cases, teachers will integrate the LSO's knowledge of the student to supplement teacher feedback at the PSG meeting. In some cases, an LSO may be invited to the PSG meeting to, for example, provide specific feedback regarding a student with complex health, sensory and/or physical needs.



### Case worker

If your child has a case worker (or case manager), whether through the Department of Health and Human Services or another organisation, the case worker may be invited to attend the PSG. Depending on the circumstances, the case worker may have knowledge of your child's social, emotional, behavioural, cultural, health and/or wellbeing needs and experience in various interventions and supports.

### Interpreter

You may need an interpreter in a language other than English, including Auslan, to assist with your participation in the PSG meeting and/or to understand any documentation. The school will engage and pay for a qualified interpreter through an interpreting service. Depending on your needs, the interpreter may be an invited guest for all or some PSG meetings.

The interpreter is not a member of the PSG and cannot influence or contribute to the decision-making process.

It is not appropriate for a child of yours (including a sibling of the child who is the subject of the PSG) to act as an interpreter or to sign PSG documentation on your behalf.

### Support person/advocate

You may wish to be supported by a support person or an advocate, to assist with your full participation in the PSG meeting. A support person/advocate may be a friend, supportive community member, member of your family or a formal advocate. A support person/advocate is not to be in receipt of a fee from you or any member of the PSG, either for attending the PSG or for services more broadly.

The support person or advocate cannot act in place of you and your child and cannot make decisions for you or your child.

The support person or advocate may:

- give you emotional and other support before, during and after the meeting
- help you to understand information, terminology and processes
- encourage and assist you to share your knowledge and understanding of your child
- discuss difficulties, issues or misunderstandings that you may have
- support the development of a positive working relationship between all parties.

The role of a support person/advocate is a constructive, supportive and enabling one. It is important that a person in this role understands and acts in accordance with the collaborative nature of the PSG.

## How do PSG meetings function?

In most cases, the school will hold a PSG meeting once per term. Meetings may be held more frequently if the school determines this is necessary. You may also request a PSG meeting if you have a particular concern.

In general, PSG meetings will be held face-to-face at the school. If your child has dual enrolment, the meeting may be held at the school where your child attends most of the time. In some circumstances, meetings may be held over the phone or via videoconferencing.

### Prior to the meeting

The school will usually provide all participants, including you, with an agenda prior to the PSG meeting. You will have an opportunity to propose any additional items to be included on the agenda.

The school may also provide you with documents to read before the meeting, for example, a draft Personalised Learning Plan or a draft Behaviour Support Plan that will be discussed at the meeting.

If you have any specific questions about agenda items or documentation, it may be helpful to write these down ahead of time.

### During the meeting

The principal/principal's nominee will chair the meeting and ensure the agenda is followed.

It is fundamental to the success of the PSG that participants adhere to the following PSG meeting protocols:

- meetings are collaborative in decision-making
- meetings are respectful and positive in tone
- there is an opportunity for all voices to be heard.

With the above in mind, it is important to:

- share your knowledge to help the school better understand and meet the needs of your child. For example, you may explain your experiences of what works for your child and what does not work
- listen with an open mind, understanding that other people in the group may offer different ideas about how to meet your child's learning and support needs
- ask questions about anything you are not sure about. This is a good way to check your understanding and it can help make sure that everyone is on the same page
- provide positive feedback to let the group know what is working well and to contribute to a shared understanding of your child.

A member of staff will take minutes during the meeting. In general, the minutes will not be a word-for-word account of the meeting but will record the decisions and agreed actions.

### After the meeting

At the end of the meeting, or soon afterwards, you will be provided with the meeting minutes to review and sign. If you have any concerns about the minutes you can raise these with the school.

## Frequently asked questions

### What if I cannot attend a PSG meeting?

If you cannot attend a PSG meeting, advise the principal/principal's nominee as soon as practicable.

If sufficient notice is provided, the school may be able to reschedule the meeting to enable you to attend.

If insufficient notice is provided, the school may proceed with the meeting for programming purposes and you will be noted as an apology. In this situation, the school will provide you with the meeting minutes and any relevant documentation after the meeting.

Where the purpose of the meeting was to share with you assessment results or a report from an external consultant, the school will attempt to reschedule the meeting or otherwise explore alternate methods of communicating with you (e.g. by phone call or videoconference).

### Can I arrange for someone else (e.g. family member or friend) to attend the PSG meeting instead of me?

If you cannot attend a PSG meeting and would like someone else to attend in your place, you must notify the principal/principal's nominee in writing and specify who you would like to attend. The principal makes the final decision regarding the attendance of invited guests.

### Can I bring someone with me to the PSG meeting?

You may bring an advocate or support person with you to the PSG meeting as long as that person is not being paid by you or any other member of the PSG. As with all invited guests, you will need to notify the principal/principal's nominee prior to the meeting. The advocate/support person may only attend with the consent of the principal/principal's nominee.

### Can I choose who from the school attends the PSG meeting?

The principal/principal's nominee is the chair of the PSG and is required to be present at every meeting. If you have any concerns about the attendance of school staff members, please raise these with the principal/principal's nominee.

### What if I need an interpreter or other assistance?

If you need an interpreter or other forms of assistance, please raise this with the principal/principal's nominee. The school can arrange for an interpreter.

If you wish to have an advocate or support person attend the meeting with you, please advise the principal/principal's nominee.

### What if I am separated/divorced from my child's mother/father?

In relation to PSGs, wherever possible, a mutually acceptable arrangement should be sought. If you have concerns, contact the principal to discuss further. Depending on the circumstances, parents may attend meetings together or, in some instances, they may require separate meetings. Your child's school will discuss with you how to proceed.

### What if there are parenting orders or court orders that may be relevant?

If there are parenting orders, court orders or any concerns relating to you or your child, contact the principal to discuss further. Depending on the circumstances, parents may attend meetings together or, in some instances, they may require separate meetings. Your child's school will discuss with you how to proceed.

### Do I need to do anything to prepare for a PSG meeting?

Review the agenda and any relevant documentation and consider whether there are any additional items you wish to raise.

Advise the principal/principal's nominee of any invited guests, including your advocate or support person, if relevant.

Prepare a list of any questions or matters you wish to discuss in relation to the agenda or relevant documentation.

### How long does a PSG meeting go for?

The duration of a PSG meeting may vary depending on the situation. As an approximate guide, the following applies:

- initial PSG meetings that may require a longer discussion time: 45–60 minutes
- PSG meetings where a specialist report is tabled: 45–60 minutes
- regular and review PSG meetings: 30–45 minutes.

### Can schools conduct PSG meetings via phone or videoconference?

Yes, this is an option and may suit some families, for example, if your child's school is a long way from your home or you find it hard to get to the school. If this is relevant to you, please contact the principal/principal's nominee to discuss arrangements.

All practices and protocols for PSG meetings should still be followed, including who attends the meeting. As with face-to-face meetings, PSGs conducted by phone or videoconference must not be audio- or video-recorded by the school or any other participants unless consent is first obtained from all participants.

**Am I required to provide the PSG with relevant or new information regarding my child (e.g. medical reports)?**

Parents are encouraged to share relevant information about their child with the PSG so that the school can meet their duty-of-care obligations in relation to your child, and make any necessary reasonable adjustments for your child. The school enrolment policy will generally stipulate what information parents are required to provide.

**What if I disagree with the minutes provided by the school?**

It is important to remember that the minutes are not a word-for-word account of the PSG meeting. It is, however, preferable that you and the school agree on what decisions were made during the meeting and what actions arise from the meeting. You are encouraged to raise any concerns with the principal/principal's nominee.

If agreement is not reached on the final copy of the minutes, you may amend your copy and sign and return this to the school.

**What if I have a concern or complaint?**

If you have a concern or complaint, please raise this with the principal/principal's nominee. Alternatively, you may follow the school's complaints procedure, which will generally be available on their website or from the school office.

**What does the principal consider in determining if an adjustment is reasonable?**

An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students. An adjustment is reasonable if it achieves this purpose while taking into account the student's learning needs and balancing the interests of all parties affected, including those of the student with the disability, the education provider, staff and other students. The principal must consider all parties affected in making a balanced decision. The principal will explain their decisions to the PSG.

**What if I have a question that is not in this guide?**

If you have any further questions about PSGs, please contact the school.



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