

Pain & School

– by Jo Turner

Some tips and troubleshooting from a parent

Challenges that may present for a child in pain (in alphabetical order)

Abbreviations at end

Absences: Includes tardiness due to morning stiffness, effects of medication, or longer routine, early departures or interruptions during school day due to appointments. CT needs to encourage attendance even through pain or fatigue (using appropriate medication, aids, or equipment), and find ways to engage student or allow other tasks to encourage inclusion each day. Equally important to recognise the effort it can take just to make it to school!

Access: Does the child have a valid and current RMS permit? Is there a designated disabled parking space adjacent to or on school grounds, or spot in staff carpark to allow safe arrival and departure? Is there a ramp to allow wheelchair access around any steps/stairs? Are all areas of the school buildings and grounds accessible (e.g. amenities, playground, canteen, school sick bay or office)? Does the school have a lift (and does it require a key or code to operate)? Are classrooms on ground floor (also consider access for parent/caregivers for special events)? Who handles any funding application for any modifications required on DEC property?

Amenities: Is there a disabled toilet or can student use a ground floor or staff bathroom? Is it unlocked or does it need a key? Is this the case for any excursions or camps? Are there handrails, steps, specialised toilet seats, lever or sensor taps, adequate hand drying facilities to prevent spread of germs across staff and student body)? Do they bubblers or drinking facilities allow for easy access and use?

Assembly: For longer gatherings (including special ceremonies, concerts, and Awards days) can the student sit on a chair as opposed to the floor/ground? Can they move if needs be during the presentation? Are they still near their peers, or segregated?

Assessments: For any special projects or assessment tasks, can they have extra time if needed, or assistance in completing if in the classroom (may require SLSO or Scribe)?

Awareness: Is there literature that the school can be given to advise the staff about condition and its management? Need to ensure that the CT has a copy at the start of each school year, and kept on file for continuity/handover. Can the entire student body be informed of the condition in question if 'rare' to minimise risk of fear or bullying? Are there fundraising opportunities through the SRC for charities that support this condition?

Bullying: Does the school have an anti-bullying policy in place? Do all staff know their roles and responsibilities? Are other students adequately educated to reduce the risk of bullying? Does the child feel confident that there is someone they can talk to if they feel they are being targeted (e.g. P/DP/AP, CT, SLSO, LAST or School Counsellor)? Does the school provide 'Social Groups' if there is a problem within a certain peer group or Stage?

Carnivals (Athletics/Swimming): Can the child participate? What is the access for the site? How are they transported to/from? Are modifications allowed or alternative tasks arranged to ensure inclusion on the day if they cannot compete (e.g. timekeeper, messenger)? Will they have SLSO or require parent assistance?

Classroom: Where are they seated? Do they need direct line-of-sight to the board (for any neck/spinal issues)? Do they have enough space and can they move if stiffness or pain sets in? Is there a 'quiet place' in the classroom for them to rest if needed, without disturbing/distracting other students? Does the classroom have a SmartBoard or other technology that allows the CT to Print Screen for any lengthy note-taking or homework? Is the child being engaged and – just as important – recognised for their input (consider Merit Awards, or other reward programs)? Do the CT and SLSO/LAST work effectively together to provide the correct level of support?

Communication: Is there a Communication Book to note any concerns or new information from parent to teacher (and vice versa)? Is the message system adequate for urgent notices during school hours (or on overnight excursions)? Is there email or SMS access provided for out of hours contact? Are all contact details (school, staff, and caregivers) current? What is the continuity process for handover from year to year? Is age-appropriate language being used to address any concerns or encourage child to speak for themselves to request assistance?

Confidentiality: What practices are in place to ensure privacy of information? Are all staff members—including temps and casuals—inducted in proper procedure? How much information is the child/family comfortable with being given to general school community (**also see Awareness and Bullying**)? Does the child feel confident enough to raise issues of a private nature with their CT, SLSO, or School Counsellor? How is the information disposed of after the child leaves that school?

Distance (also see Access): How far from car park/ bus stop to classroom, playground, school office, hall, toilet block, canteen, library or specialised rooms (e.g. music, art, IT, food technology)? Is there enough time to move from space to space? Does the child have an SLSO to assist with any areas of challenging access?

Equipment: Do they need splints, slope boards, specialised seat cushions (e.g. Move n Sit/wedge), foot stool, handrails, or extra trays at seated height for easy book access? Do classroom taps have lever handles? Are any doors easily opened? Does the child need scissors, pencil grips or other specialised stationery (OT can advise)? Are there lockers at school to keep a second set of text books? Can they use a roller bag to prevent back or arm strain of carrying heavy bags?

Emergencies: Does the child have correct ID—including any Medi-Alert bracelets, cards, or chains? Are the parental and medical contact details up-to-date? Is there an emergency contact person on record if parent/carer is not reachable? Is there record of any medication the child takes to avoid any contraindications of emergency administration? Are they on any Clinical Trial or Study (if so, is there should be a contact card provided outlining medical personnel involved)? Are all staff and volunteers up-to-date with First Aid procedures – are there any modifications that need to be in place for first aid emergencies (e.g. fits or seizures, splints or bandaging, reaction to heat or cold)? Also consider any allergies (e.g. latex).

Exams: Allow extra time to complete, rest breaks, a Reader/Writer or Scribe (can be arranged ahead of time through P/DP/AP), may need a review of integration funding support.

Excursions: What is the distance from home/school in case of emergency? How early are they leaving or how late returning home? What is the mode of transport? How is access at the venue- are there steps/stairs or great distances to be covered? Is there a shady spot to rest if fatigue sets in? Will they have an SLSO or extra assistance if required? Do they need travel sickness medication or have to sit in a certain spot for travel?

Extra-curricular activities: Are they all-inclusive for students with special needs? Are there other options if not? (e.g. school band, GATS program, library/environmental teams, monitors, SRC) Is the child given every opportunity to represent their class/Stage/school at events off school premises (e.g. Zone/Regional carnivals, debates, speech, spelling bees)? Does the child feel they can safely attend any dances or disco?

Fatigue: “Bad nights”, early starts, and the toll of disease activity and its treatment (medication + therapy) can tire a child out. Is there understanding that some days they just can’t move as quickly? Is there a space to rest/relax/sleep if required? Also consider handwriting fatigue- lengthy writing passages and exams can cause pain or fatigue in wrists/arms/shoulders/neck/back.

Furniture: Check placement, suitability, and comfort (allow for cushions, footstools, or extra storage alongside for books, equipment, etc). Will school allow/arrange an OT to site check for correct height and ergonomics/postural support? Can equipment be purchased or provided if and as required (e.g. slope boards, air or foam wedges)? Is the CT, SLSO, or LAST aware of any reminders that need to be given regarding seated posture, use of equipment, etc?

Funding Support: Does the child meet criteria for integration funding (e.g. physical disabilities still have individual funding ‘attached’ to child)? Does this allow for SLSO, LAST, or other support as needed (e.g.– classroom, playground, excursions and carnivals)? Do they have an IEP/PLP in place? How often is it reviewed? What modifications need to be applied for (e.g. access issues)? What is the timeframe for any applications (NB: for Transition)? Who is the contact person that parent or medical personnel can contact regarding any changes to level of support?

Homework: Will the CT allow extra time or alternate ways of completing (e.g. send home via email, print screen off SmartBoard etc, allow use of laptop/tablet or other technology)? Is there flexibility or allowances given for times of illness or flare-up of symptoms (i.e. will the child be penalised if they do not complete all their work)? Does the IEP/PLP ensure that any delays in or absence of task completion due to medical condition is acknowledged in the student’s School Report?

Illness: Have a system in place for school to inform parents of any contagious illness or infections (e.g: chickenpox, slapped cheek/fifth disease, scarlet fever) – vital for children on immune suppressing

medications. A Special Notice section in school newsletter can be a regular reminder to other parents to provide notice of same.) Does the school have & follow an Exclusion Policy for infectious diseases?

Medication: Does the school allow self-administering or is there an allocated 'nurse' or SAO? Is their training relevant and current? What is the process regarding paperwork for storage of medicines? Is the school aware on correct handling/disposal of same? Have the parents ensured that the script is up-to-date and not expired?

Mobility: Are they ambulatory or need a wheelchair or walking aid? Are all areas accessible for these? Does the child need extra time to cover distance between classes and other school facilities? Are they allowed to walk behind or ahead of large groups to avoid being jostled or knocked over? Do they have a RMS permit and appropriate parking access for transport needs? Is the nature of their condition unpredictable and likely to change on any given day?

Parental Support: Is there a support network for parents of special needs children in the school? Is the school and P&C/P&F committee approachable with any concerns, i.e. do they support all considerations for the entire student body with no discriminations? Are there social occasions (some charities/organisations have annual or regular events) to which families with special needs can be invited?

PE/Sport: Are there SLSOs to provide assistance with access, carry bags or equipment, reduce risk of falls, and prompt use of sunscreen/hat? Can the activity be modified? Is there time/space for rest if required? Are there sufficient suitable sporting programs (e.g. swimming)? Are there alternative tasks that the child can carry out to still allow participation (e.g. timekeeper)? Are all instructors (including 'outside' staff that may come into contact with the child) aware of the condition and any limitations? Do they treat the child with respect, not expect too much, and acknowledge efforts?

Sunscreen policy: Is it a SunSmart School (do they follow Cancer Council guidelines for sun safety during peak periods- playground time, PE/sport, carnivals, excursions etc)? Are hats provided and reminded? Will the CT or SLSO monitor application of sunscreen (especially important for children on immunosuppressant medication which increases risk of photosensitivity or melanoma)? Is there adequate hydration throughout the day (some children have dry mouth or similar symptoms from medication)?

Teachers: Need to have Health Care Plan in place – with photo– in office or staffroom to allow for casuals, replacements, prac students and interns to identify child and level of assistance. Are CTs provided with any relevant literature outlining condition or its management that may be helpful? Is there an Open Door policy for parents to approach school or teacher (and vice versa) and discuss any concerns?

Technology: What technological support is available? Is a laptop or tablet available as an option for note taking or homework? Does the child receive adequate IT education and support to utilise same? Is there the option to Print Screen for any lengthy notes from the classroom SmartBoard, or can the child capture an image of non-computerised boards to copy down at a later time? NB: an OT can advise if this is necessary, and funding support can be considered to purchase necessary equipment.

Therapy: Can the child's allied health team access the school for any on-site therapy (include any OT site checks)? Is there flexibility in the school schedule to allow for off-site appointments (physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, hippotherapy)? There needs to be clear communication between parent/carer and school to ensure minimal disruption to learning. Has the need for any such therapy been noted on IEP/PLP? Is there the opportunity to stretch or do exercises during class time or the school day if stiffness is an issue?

Time: Is there enough time allowed to cover distance required (e.g. classroom, library, canteen, playground, office, toilets, computer room, hall, sport/PE area)? Is there understanding/flexibility on days where the family is late due to pain, appointments, or fatigue? Is the child allowed extra time on handwriting tasks?

Transition: What procedures are in place for transition from preschool – infants – primary – secondary – tertiary education? Who handles applications for integration funding support? Is the Allied Health team included in any site checks? Is there a school counsellor to help mediate between parents and schools, and provide advice for student on selection of campus? Is there a school career advisor to help plan pathways to further education? Is there a Buddy System (for infants/primary schools) or Mentoring program in place (for High Schools)?

Transport: How does the child get to & from school? Is there safe access in a car park? Are there traffic lights/marked pedestrian access and/or 'crossing guards' for any roads that need it? What transport is used for offsite activities (e.g. sporting carnivals, representative events, excursions, Presentation Days)? Is parent transport required?

Uniform: Is it comfortable and easy to get on and off (consider changing for Sport or PE)? Is the fabric likely to cause irritation or allergy (if so, is there an alternative material available)? Is there a hat for sun coverage? Are the shoes light and supportive enough? Do they allow for orthotics if needed? Consider time to 'break in' new shoes before school term starts.

**Abbreviations:*

AP = Assistant Principal

CT = Classroom Teacher

DEC = Department of Schools & Communities

DP = Deputy Principal

GATS = Gifted & Talented Students

IEP/PLP = Individual Education Plan / Personalised Learning Plan

LAST = Learning And Support Teacher

OT= Occupational Therapist

P = Principal

P&C/P&F = Parents and Citizens / Parents & Friends Associations

RMS = Roads & Maritimes Services (formerly RTA)

SAO = School Administration Officer

SLSO = Student Learning Support Officer

SRC = Student Representative Council

Handy websites or fact sheets:

School support roles

<http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-centre/school-careers/school-support-roles>

Supporting students with disability in regular classes

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/what-we-offer/education-and-training/disability-support/every-student-every-school/eses-pc-factsheet.pdf>

Role of Learning And Support Teacher

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/every-student-every-school/last-role.pdf>

DEC Public School s Every Student, Every School FAQs (funding support)

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/how-we-operate/national-partnerships-program/every-student-every-school/faqs.pdf>