



State and Territory Education Systems

Defence Member and Family Support

This resource can support families navigating a change in location and schooling for Defence children.

Families relocating are encouraged to contact their local Defence Member and Family Support (DMFS) Education Liaison Officer (EDLO). EDLO's have extensive knowledge about education systems and individual schools and are a great resource at any point in your child's education journey. EDLO's can help with:

- Providing information about local schools and education systems
- Connecting your family with education providers and resources
- Work with you, your children and teachers to manage the transition to a new school
- Work with schools to ensure a supportive educational environment for Defence children
- Connect your family to other services and supports relevant to your families needs.

For connection to your local EDLO call or email the Defence Member and Family Helpline. The Helpline is available 24/7 to provide families with support, information and connection to community services.

Defence Member and Family Helpline

📞 **1800 624 608** If overseas, call **+61 2 6127 1600**

✉ MemberAndFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au

How to use this resource:

The table on page 2 highlights the differences between education systems in Australia by state/territory and grade/year group. For more information on anything in this resource, visit the state/territory education department's website (see page 12) or contact your local EDLO.

		ACT	NSW	TAS	VIC	SA	WA	NT	QLD
All years	General information	The school year in Australia goes from late January until mid-December. It is divided into four terms with two half-year periods (semesters). Each term is approximately 10 weeks in duration. At the end of each term there are school holidays.							
		National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) annual assessments done in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.							
		Either Government (also known as public schools) or privately funded (also known as independent, faith-based schools) entities can operate schools in Australia.							
		Government school based funding for children with special needs is State and Territory specific. Private school funding for children with special needs is school specific.							
	Government School Catchment / Enrolment Policy	Divided up into Priority Enrolment Areas (PEAs). Students can apply to enrol into a school outside their PEA, however a place is not guaranteed due to the school's capacity. There may be more than 1 schooling option within a PEA for students.	NSW Department of Education provides online school finder maps. Families have the option of applying for out-of-area placement.	Students attend 'in-area' local school but can apply through the school for consideration of 'out of area; enrolment if they meet the criteria.	Student's attend schools in their residential catchments, but can enroll out of area if the school has capacity. Government school catchment zones are enforced primarily in parts of Melbourne.	Students are enrolled based on zones by location. Schools can consider out-of-zone enrolments if the school have capacity.	Schools are enrolment managed. Schools can consider out-of-area enrolments if they have capacity.	Schools are enrolment managed. Individual schools have the authority to accept out of catchment enrolments depending on the school's student population size & the school's capacity.	Schools are enrolment managed and take students from catchment areas. Out of area applications may be considered at schools discretion and if there is capacity. There is no guarantee of placement.
		Independent schools complete own enrolment depending on capacity and eligibility.							

Primary School & Early childhood	Pre- compulsory school age:	ACT	NSW	TAS	VIC	SA	WA	NT	QLD
	4 years	When can my child/children start school?							
		Each state and territory in Australia has a different name for both pre compulsory year and the first formal year of schooling in their region.							
		Prep/ Foundation: If your child turns 5 years old by 30 April.	Kindergarten: If your child turns 5 years old by 31 July.	Kindergarten: If your child turns 4 years old by 1 January. Prep: If your child turn 5 years old by 1 January.	Pre- compulsory preschool: If your child turns 4 years old by 30 April. Foundation: If the child turns 5 years old by 30 April. Enrolment is compulsory from age 6.	In term 1: If your child turns 5 years old by 1 May. In Term 3: If your child turns 5 years old from 1 May – 31 October. Special consideration for ADF families only: If your child turns 5 years old before 31 July of that year, they can start school at the start of the year.	Non- compulsory Kindergarten (3 days/ week): If the child turns 5 years old by 30 June. The WA government is piloting a 5- day week program in some schools from 2026.	Pre- compulsory preschool: If the child turns 4 years old by 30 June. Year 1: If they turn 5 years old by 30 June.	Year 1: If your child turns 5 years old by 30 June. If your child turns 5 years old by 31 July, they may be eligible to apply for early entry into Prep. The Principal must be satisfied the child is ready.
	Compulsory school age:	What is the first year of compulsory schooling?							
	6 years	The compulsory school age is 6 however most children begin pre-school at 4 years old and start Kindergarten/Reception/Foundation/Transition at 5 yrs.							
		Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Prep	Foundation	Reception/ Foundation	Pre-Primary	Transition	Prep

	School subjects	ACT	NSW	TAS	VIC	SA	WA	NT	QLD
		Primary schools in all states and territories base their subjects on the eight core learning areas of the Australian Curriculum: English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), The Arts, Languages, and Technologies. Within these areas, schools focus on developing literacy, numeracy, and general capabilities, allowing for flexibility to tailor programs to local community needs.							
	Children with special needs	Individual schools cater for students with special needs, please check with the school who will advise you of their special needs support framework they implement. For students with physical disabilities, it is advisable to contact the Department of Education directly to discuss schooling options in that state or territory.							
	Handwriting standards	What is the state mandated handwriting font? Each state and territory have their own official version of modern cursive, it is advisable to check with the school about the differences in fonts used.							
		NSW Foundation Style	NSW Foundation Style	TAS Modern Cursive	Victorian Cursive	SA Modern Cursive	No mandated handwriting style in WA.	Victorian cursive	QLD Beginner Font and QLD Modern Cursive

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Secondary School (Year 7-10)	Subject structure	What subjects will my child learn in the secondary/high school? School subjects in lower high school are based on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) framework. High schools offer core subjects that all students must complete and elective subjects to cater to the student's learning interest. – Elective subjects may differ between schools. Each state and territory is responsible for developing and implementing its own syllabus structure & content.							
	Years 7 & 8	Students study subject areas across the 8 strands English, Maths, Arts, Science, Humanities, Technologies Health/PE, and Languages. Study pathways and options are available for students with special needs & disabilities.							
	Year 9 In years 9 to 10 students choose their electives (options and number of electives can differ between schools depending on a student's education pathway).	Year 9 & 10: Students study, 5 compulsory subjects & 4 electives. Compulsory Subjects: English, Mathematics, Humanities, Social Science or equivalent Geography/ History, Health & Physical Education. Electives: May differ between schools.	Year 9 & 10: Students study 6 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, History, Geography Personal Development Health & Physical Education. Year 9: Students can choose 2 to 3 elective subjects, although options can vary as electives are often studied over Year 9 and 10 and may have different hour requirements.	Students study 5 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, History, Health & Physical Education (HPE). Students typically study 3 elective subjects per semester or year to complement their core subjects. Elective subjects depending on school offers.	Year 9 & 10 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities. The number of Elective study options can be up to 4 subjects.	Students study English, Mathematics, Science, and Health and Physical Education (HPE), school have autonomy in teaching additional subjects Geography, History, and other learning areas. Students can choose up to 5 electives depending on the school & their educational interests	Students study 6 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities, Social Sciences (HASS), Physical Education & a Language. Schools may add a compulsory Health component and can vary the specifics and number of elective choices from 3 to 6 subjects.	Students study compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities & Social Sciences, Health & Physical Education (1 semester & an elective subject, which can vary by school). Students can study 3 or 4 elective subjects depending on the course length (year/ semester) & school offerings.	Students study compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities & Social Sciences, Health & Physical Education. Student elective choices can be classified as units or elective subjects. Students select options that gives them 12 units per year or 2 elective subjects per semester.

	Year 10	ACT	NSW	TAS	VIC	SA	WA	NT	QLD
	Students start electives in term 4 for year 11 study pathways in senior school and or vocational education.	Students must have completed compulsory subjects for progression to Year 11 & 12. ACT offers an integrated curriculum for senior years therefore year 10 students do not need to complete prerequisite subjects for years 11 & 12.	The school will advise on subject selection for progression to year 11 & 12 depending on learning pathway student wants to take.	Compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, History, Health & Physical Education, The Arts & technologies. Students select electives to prepare for progression to learning pathways in year 11 & 12.	Complete a minimum of 4 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science & a Pathways Wellbeing program, plus electives & their Personal Learning Plan (PLP). The number of electives chosen depends on the student's learning pathways in year 11 & 12.	Students study Compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, History, Exploring Identities and Futures, a South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) subject & electives that prepare them to pursue an academic or Vocational education & training (VET) pathways in Year 11 and 12.	Compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities, Social sciences (HASS), Physical education & 3 elective choices that prepare them to pursue an academic or Vocational education & training (VET) pathway in years 11 & 12.	4 compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, History or Personal Learning Plan & 2 electives.	Compulsory subjects: English & Mathematics. A number of electives to make up the required subject load depending on their educational pathway in year 11 & 12.
Completion of year 10 is a requirement for progression to year 11 & 12.									

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Senior Secondary School (Year 11 & 12)	Learning pathways	What are the learning pathways for students studying in the senior school years 11 & 12? There are 3 Educational pathways in year 11 & 12: tertiary, accredited and vocational education training (VET). Students will have already made subject selections in year 10 as prerequisites to their study pathways for year 11 & 12. Important: check with the school to confirm if a study pathway for year 11 and 12 begins in term 4 in the previous school year.							
	Higher School Certificate (HSC)	Demonstrates a student has successfully completed their senior secondary education and is eligible for further study or employment. Subjects can be a combination of Tertiary subjects, Vocational subjects & non-tertiary subjects depending on the student's study pathway they have chosen.							
	Tertiary Courses designed for university entrance requires an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score.	The ATAR is calculated from scaled study scores obtained in Year 12, which are then aggregated and compared to all other students in the same age cohort. Scaled scores: Individual subject marks are "scaled" to account for the competitiveness of different subjects and the average performance of other students in that subject. Aggregate score: The student's best results (a certain number of units/subjects) are then added together to create a total scaled score. Percentile ranking: This aggregate score is compared against all other students in your age group, and your ATAR is assigned based on where you sit in that comparison.							
	Accredited	Non-tertiary courses leading to the workforce or TAFE.							
	Vocational education training (VET) Industry-based courses leading to qualifications.	Students studying VET (Vocational Education and Training) receive nationally recognised Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) certificates such as a Certificate II, III, or IV, depending on the course completed. Students also get a Statement of Attainment for completed units of competency if the full qualification isn't finished, and these qualifications are listed on their school qualification documents, such as the HSC.							
	International Baccalaureate	There are a number of schools across the states & territories who have been authorised by the International Baccalaureate organisation to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) as an alternative to the Higher Senior certificate. A two-year course of study for Year 11 & 12 students providing a stringent curriculum that provides students with a globally recognised qualification for university entry.							

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Senior Secondary School (Year 11 & 12)	Study options	What study options are available for students in year 11 and 12?							
	The Australian Curriculum sets out the national expectations for what all students should learn. The implementation of these expectations, including subject choices, is overseen by the education system in each state and territory.	The Senior Secondary Certificate for completing their studies, A Tertiary Entrance Statement for university entry, or A Statement of Attainment or VET Certificate for vocational qualifications. These certificates are issued by the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS), which accredits courses & manages the assessment process for students in years 11 & 12.	The Higher School Certificate (HSC), which is the highest secondary school qualification, or A Record of School Achievement (RoSA) if the student does not complete the HSC. Additionally, students can gain nationally recognised qualifications through TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) courses, leading to a Statement of Attainment for individual units or a full VET qualification.	The Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE), the state's main senior secondary qualification & a gateway to further study or employment. Alongside the TCE, students can earn various VET qualifications, such as a Certificate III or Certificate IV, which provide skills for specific job roles & are recognised nationally. Students can earn credits for university-level units & can receive an ATAR if they meet the TCE standards & subject score requirements.	The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) includes the VCE Vocational Major (VM) and the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC). Students can also undertake VET courses at the same time, leading to Certificates II, III, or IV, or Diplomas, as part of their senior secondary studies.	The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), which is the senior secondary certificate and qualifies students for university entry through an ATAR score. Additionally, through VET or TAFE (Technical and Further Education), students can also obtain a nationally recognised Certificate III or IV in a vocational field, often in conjunction with their SACE studies.	The Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), which is a nationally recognised qualification. Students can also receive a Certificate II (or higher) VET qualification as part of their WACE requirements, which can lead to further studies or employment. These certificates are awarded upon successful completion of senior secondary schooling and demonstrate a student's academic and vocational achievements.	NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET), which is the standard senior secondary qualification. In addition to the NTCET, students can also obtain various vocational certificates, such as a Certificate III or Certificate IV qualifications, through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or other VET programs, with some specialised options including childcare, beauty therapy, and automotive technology.	Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) by completing a set amount of learning at a set standard. Alongside the QCE, students also receive a Senior Statement or Statement of Results from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and an ATAR from the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) if they are applying for university.

		ACT	NSW	TAS	VIC	SA	WA	NT	QLD
Senior School Years 11 & 12	Special needs and mental health support	What support is available for students with special needs and mental health needs in year 11 and 12?							
	Each state and Territory offers support for students with Special Needs, which may include specialised programs, modified courses of study or inclusion support with a mentor.	All schools in Australia are legally required to teach students with a disability by providing access to and participation in education on the same basis as students without disability. This obligation stems from the federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005, which mandate that schools make reasonable adjustments to teaching, learning, and assessment to accommodate individual needs.							
	Special needs support is offered dependent on the school's resources and the student's learning needs.	Families can contact the relevant state/territory Education Department and ask about programs & support available for children with special needs or mental health needs. It is advisable to check with the school for supports available to students who have ADHD or are on the Autism spectrum or have other additional needs.							
	The Department of Education provide funding to schools for students with special needs to assist them with obtaining the necessary resources in providing that support.	Students with special needs can access various courses, including specialist colleges for moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, and support programs within mainstream high schools/colleagues. For post-school education and skills development, there are service providers who offer life skills, independent living, and	Students with special needs can study subjects based on the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Life Skills subjects, which are tailored for students with an intellectual disability and cover a wide range of subjects, including English Life Skills, Mathematics Life Skills, Science Life Skills, Creative Arts Life Skills, and PDHPE Life Skills. Students can also enrol in VET courses, such as through TAFE,	Students with special needs can study subjects acquiring the TCE, which can be tailored to their individual requirements by working with their college or the Department for Education, Children and Young People to determine appropriate courses and potential support services. The TCE recognises a range of skills & capabilities, allowing for flexible learning pathways.	Students with special needs can pursue subjects through the VCE VM or the VPC, which offer individualised programs focusing on literacy, numeracy, work-related, & personal development skills. Students can also choose standard VCE subjects like English, Humanities, or Science, with modifications & special provisions like extra time, or incorporate VET subjects that provide	Students undertake learning pathways in the SACE pathway, which offers a broad range of subjects. Students must complete compulsory Stage 1 (Year 11) and Stage 2 (Year 12) requirements, with flexibility to choose subjects based on their interests, abilities, and career goals. Students can discuss their specific needs with their school's special education	Students can study subjects aligned with the Western Australian Curriculum, including English, Mathematics, Science, Technologies, The Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Humanities and Social sciences. Students with special needs can often access subjects & pathways that achieve the WACE or alternative VET qualifications, with options	Students with special needs in Darwin can access subjects through the NTCET pathway, which includes NTCET courses, VET, and Community Learning. Modified subjects available for students with significant intellectual impairment, and VET programs, which can help students, transition to work. There are specific schools that offer VET and	Students with special needs can access various supports, including in-school adjustments such as reasonable adjustments for assessments & specialist support services, alternative pathways such as the QCIA pathway, and vocational programs such as work experience & traineeships to prepare for employment. Students can access disability-specific

		vocational programs. The ACT Government provides resources and pathways through the Disability Education website and the Disability Gateway.	which can count towards their HSC or ATAR, depending on the student's abilities and needs, with appropriate adjustments for assessments.	Students can explore vocational courses, general subjects, & personalised learning plans to meet their needs and work towards completing Year 12 or other approved training.	practical skills for careers	coordinator or SACE teacher to select appropriate subjects, which may include vocational training, work placements, and personalised learning plans.	available through their school's School Education Directorate or the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA).	specialised programs such as Centres for Excellence.	services, including assistive technology from LifeTec Queensland, and alternative school settings like special assistance schools and the Barrett Adolescent Centre for students with complex needs.
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Defence Member and Family Support – Education Contacts

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

The Australian Education System

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australian-education-system-foundation.pdf>

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

ACT Government – Education and Training

<https://www.act.gov.au/education-and-training>

New South Wales (NSW)

NSW Department of Education

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/>

Tasmania (TAS)

Department for Education, Children and Young People

<https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/>

Victoria (VIC)

VIC Government - Education

<https://www.vic.gov.au/education>

South Australia (SA)

Department for Education

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/>

Western Australia (WA)

Department of Education WA

<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/>

Northern Territory (NT)

Department of Education and Training

<https://education.nt.gov.au/>

Queensland (QLD)

Department of Education

<https://education.qld.gov.au/>

To access DMFS support services or products:

 1800 624 608

 MemberAndFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au

 www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families

 @DefenceMemberandFamilySupport

 @dmfs_ausdefence

 www.forcenet.gov.au

