

# The Importance of Current Assessment Results

The provision of current assessments is crucial in the Yarra Me School referral process as the results of assessments provide valuable information about the learning needs of the student, and the appropriateness of the intervention.

Referrals to the Yarra Me School intake programs (Preston) require the following assessments:

- a current cognitive assessment (Full Scale IQ 75 and above)
- a current speech and language assessment
- a current sensory profile completed by an occupational therapist (ASD only)

An assessment is considered to be current if it has occurred within the past two years.

Results from assessments provide valuable information as cognitive ability and language deficits can have significant impact on a student's presentation and ability to take part in and absorb information presented within the Yarra Me curriculum.

Assessment results for students with perceived behavioural difficulties are particularly important because of the high number of students with undiagnosed language or cognitive issues. Additionally, the most current research in Autism shows around 30% of students with ASD are likely to have a comorbidity and therefore comprehensive educational assessments may also indicate difficulties such as: ADD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, Pathological Demand Avoidance.

Unidentified and under-resourced students with intellectual disability or severe language disorders can potentially become disruptive students who struggle with literacy and learning in primary school. This issue may influence attendance and school retention rates, as these students are more likely to become school truants and/or drop out during secondary education.

## *Behaviour and children with an Intellectual Disability*

Children who are diagnosed with an Intellectual Disability have the ability to learn, but will do so at their own pace. It is also likely to take them longer to learn new skills than their typically developing peers. This inability to understand information quickly and the need for significant repetition to be provided is difficult to address within the classroom without a full cognitive assessment and ongoing understanding of the underlying difficulties. It also therefore makes it difficult to understand any resulting behaviours.

Students with an intellectual disability, may sometimes present with the following behaviours:

Difficulty with self-regulation, behaviour and emotions, including:

- Poor emotional intelligence

- Understanding emotions of themselves and others
- Angry outbursts, impulsivity, mood swings
- Socially and emotionally less mature than peers
- May be passive or aggressive
- Frustration at not being able to express their needs/have their needs met

Difficulty with social skills, including:

- Making and maintaining friendships
- Understanding social and nonverbal cues
- Understanding things from another person's perspective
- May prefer to play with younger students, or by themselves

Difficulty with organisational skills, including:

- Organising work materials and belongings
- Sequencing and ordering information

Learning difficulties, including:

- Slower rate of learning
- Difficulty with abstraction and forming ideas/concepts
- Difficulty generalising skills and learning

Difficulties with attention span and completing tasks, including:

- Short attention span, easily distracted
- Difficulty initiating and completing tasks
- Limited understanding of risk, easily manipulated

### *Behaviour and children with a Severe Language Disorder*

Children with poorly developed language skills are more likely to display challenging behaviours, have social difficulties and be at risk of future mental health issues. Alarmingly, up to one third of primary school age boys referred for psychological services because of challenging behaviours have significant but previously unsuspected oral language deficits, and approximately 50% of young male offenders have significant undiagnosed language impairments.

Teachers, psychologists and others should therefore consider the adequacy of the language skills of children who display behavioural problems prior to referring to Yarra Me School. It is essential that children with a diagnosed language disorder receive speech pathology support to assist the development of their oral language, as well as the provision of teacher support in implementing strategies and curriculum modifications within the school setting. Oral language difficulties can also have a significant effect on literacy development and students will require the use of evidence based structured synthetic phonics programs to support this area.

Behavioural issues of children with speech and language deficits may include:

- an apparent failure to listen when spoken to
- poor conversational skills, such as a lack of ability to take turns or maintain a topic

- challenging classroom behaviours such as procrastination, disorganisation, frequent misplacement of materials, inattentiveness, poor concentration, a lack of perseverance, and/or general disruptiveness
- difficulty following verbal instructions
- short attention span
- anxiety or depressed mood
- frequent displays of frustration
- anger management issues
- difficulty making and keeping friends
- withdrawal from peers.
- academic difficulties

In the absence of current assessments, it will be difficult to determine if other factors or developmental disorders may be impacting the student's behavior and achievement (e.g. cognitive ability, auditory processing issues, sensory difficulties, memory issues, language disorder).

Referring schools are therefore strongly encouraged to develop a comprehensive learner profile for a student exhibiting challenging behaviours as this will assist the school in better understanding the student's learning needs, and therefore what the most appropriate intervention needed.

It is the referring school's responsibility to undertake cognitive and speech assessments through DET Student Support Services, school based allied health staff or private practitioners.

Sensory Profile assessments for students with a diagnosis of Autism, needs to be undertaken by an Occupational Therapist.

Referring schools are requested to liaise directly with families regarding these assessments.

#Source:

Assessments Australia

Snow, P. S., Language competence: A hidden disability in antisocial behaviour. In Psych. The bulletin of The Australian Psychological Society Limited, Vol. 35 Issue 3, June 2013

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