

## Education – The Primary & Secondary School Years



Successful integration of a child with Spina Bifida and/or Hydrocephalus in mainstream education can only be achieved through a genuine interest and understanding of their needs physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially.

Schools should effectively identify the needs and subtle differences in learning styles or difficulties with perceptual or motor skills.

The procedure for integration to mainstream school should start as early as possible with parents making investigations as to the appropriate primary school for their child as early as 12 months before their child is due to start.

A child's success in life depends upon support from many people—parents, teachers, peers and community members. Children with Spina Bifida already have a medical team in place, a group of professionals who work together to ensure optimal health. Equally important is an educational team, made up of teachers, parents, SNA's, NEPS, SENO's, (see *Education Supports and Provisions on this page for more information about SNA's NEPS and SENO's*) occupational therapists and even peers, to ensure optimal learning conditions.

Any intervention plan should cover all aspects of a child's school life: class, breaks, school trip, assembly and extracurricular activity. "Special education" need not be a physical place to which a student is assigned. Rather, it's a full spectrum of compensations, accommodations, modifications and strategies.

### Special Needs Education

You are a person with special educational needs if your capacity to participate in and benefit from education is restricted due to an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability. The policy is to provide special needs education in mainstream settings as far as possible. The EPSEN Act 2004 provides that children are to be educated in an inclusive setting unless this would not be in the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for other children in mainstream education.

Education for children with special needs may be provided in ordinary classes in mainstream schools, in special classes in mainstream schools or in special schools.

Special needs education means the special educational arrangements which are in place for people with disabilities. All children – including children with disabilities and children with special needs – have a constitutional right to free primary education. Children with special educational needs have the right to free primary education up to age 18. In

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the Irish Constitution there is information about the role of the State in providing education and the rights of parents. For further information visit [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/education/the-irish-education-system/constitution\\_and\\_education](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/education/the-irish-education-system/constitution_and_education)

### Parents & Teachers

Developing positive relationships between parents and teachers is a key part of integrating a child with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus into a classroom. Most parents have had to become experts as they've dealt with their child's medical, educational, social and emotional needs. Recognizing and validating their knowledge about their child's intellectual and social abilities helps create open lines of communication, through which a child's strengths and weaknesses can be honestly discussed.

### Overview for Learning

Physically a child with Spina Bifida and/or Hydrocephalus can be ambulant, may use calipers and walk with an aid e.g. crutches or be a wheelchair user. A child with Hydrocephalus may be as ambulant as any other child in the classroom. Children with Hydrocephalus create a good initial impression and may relate extremely well with you due to their pleasant, charming personality and very verbose (fluent use of language).

Difficulties pertaining to academic learning become apparent only on better acquaintance and may not always be recognised as being part of the condition Hydrocephalus, sometimes referred to as the "Hidden Disability". Some of the difficulties such as poor concentration, forgetfulness, clumsiness, may be overlooked or go unrecognised because they are similar to those experienced by other children. However, unlike other children who will 'grow out of' these difficulties children with Hydrocephalus need to have more attention paid to these areas. They will need specific education plans put in place to assist with learning tools which will allow them to either overcome or use other tools to support their development in these areas.

When difficulties with writing, drawing and number work are observed it may be difficult for teachers and SNA's to understand because in other areas of learning the child performs competently.

Since the difficulties in various systems of cognitive learning are as a result of Hydrocephalus, the difficulties will remain persistent and can only be improved with specific attention and understanding.