

Managing externally funded service providers as visitors in ACT public schools

Who is a *visitor* to schools under ACT government policy?

A *visitor* is an external service provider receiving payment to provide a service for a student in school. For example, a parent might request to engage and pay for an external service provider to support their child during school time (such as a private occupational therapist or psychologist). The term *visitor* applies whether the service provider is paid for privately or by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The [Volunteers and Visitors \(Interim\) Policy](#) applies to all external service providers.

Has the NDIS impacted the role of visitors in schools?

As a consequence of the introduction of the NDIS, more families are accessing private therapy services. Principals may receive additional requests for therapeutic supports to be delivered during school hours. The NDIS recognises the importance of education in the life of students with disabilities and encourages families to work with schools to ensure that service providers support schools to work consistently on agreed goals and do not duplicate or detract from the educational program. Families/carers cannot use NDIS funding or privately fund a Learning Support Assistant to support their child at school.

Who approves the request for visitors to provide therapy services in school time?

The principal has final approval for requests from parents/carers to allow external service providers to work with a student during school hours and/or on school premises.

Who needs to be involved in making the decision?

The principal ensures that a holistic decision making process occurs when considering the provision of a paid service by a visitor to support students during school time. It is important for the principal, parents/carers, student (if appropriate) and service provider to discuss an appropriate way to manage the expectations of all parties in relation to the benefit, responsibilities and payment of an additional service to support a student.

What duty of care obligations need to be addressed?

Duty of care is the responsibility imposed on the Directorate to exercise reasonable care to protect the safety of any student under their care against injury that should reasonably have been foreseen. The supervision and management of educational programs involving visitors is an important aspect of the daily function of school staff and is integral to the duty of care responsibilities of staff.

The Principal is primarily responsible for making and administering arrangements for adequate school and student supervision and ensuring that the duty of care is met. When a visitor is in a classroom, the class teacher has duty of care and the visitor must follow the teacher's instructions.

What framework can be used for decision-making?

[The Working With Children and Young People – Volunteers and Visitors \(Interim\) Policy](#) and [Interim Guidelines for Principals and Staff Managing Volunteers and Visitors \(2013\)](#) can be used to support principals in making decisions about visitors providing services in school. There is no obligation on a principal to either accept or decline a request. It is important to ensure first and foremost that the service is in the best educational interest of the student whilst taking into consideration the needs of other students and school staff, using the following considerations as a guideline.

What process should a principal follow to decide whether a visitor should provide services during school hours?

Step One: Initial Considerations prior to the commencement of the service

The principal may choose to discuss these considerations with the parent/carer and the service provider:

- Is the school the best site for the delivery of this service?
- Is there any potential impact on other students or the staff?
- How does the proposed arrangement fit with the student's educational program at the school?
- Is the service short term, and if so is it:
 - classroom observation and teacher discussion?
 - equipment review or prescription?
 - assessment?
- Is the service long term, such as ongoing therapy sessions? What is the potential impact of the service for the student in terms of their access and participation in their learning? (For example, is the request to remove the student from the classroom for individual therapy or to assist the teacher in integrating supports?) [The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) discourages families and service providers from withdrawing children from education to undertake one-on-one therapy on an ongoing basis].
- Is the service provider registered with the NDIS? If not, is the service evidence based?
- Is there likely to be any conflict of interest with the service provider delivering the service?
- Who has responsibility for ensuring that the visitor undertakes the services as contracted?

These conversations will need to be documented and maintained on the student's file.

Step Two: Provision of documentation prior to the commencement of the service

Once Step One has been completed, a meeting may be arranged with between the service provider and principal/school business manager. Each individual therapist is responsible for providing the following documentation:

Parents/carers provide to school:

- Parent/carer consent in writing for the visitor to carry out the service at school.
- Agreement that the parent/ carer will contact the visitor if the student is absent from school.
- The goals/ learning outcomes for the service provider will work on with the student.

Individual visitors provide to school:

- Documentation outlining the intended learning outcomes and timeline of the services.
- Copy of ACT Working with Vulnerable People Card (where applicable).
Note that health professionals, registered with Australian Health Professional Regulation Agency (AHPRA) are not required to register under WWVP. Instead, they should be asked to show their AHPRA card with a current registration date.
- Emergency contact details.

Visitor (or organisation) provide to school:

- Current insurance documentation, including public liability, professional indemnity insurance and workers compensation and personal accident cover.
- NDIS registration number or registration letter from NDIS.

School provide to visitors (and each individual therapist to sign):

- Relevant induction regarding Directorate policies and procedures including;
 - [Visitors nomination form](#)
 - [Code of Conduct Volunteers and Visitors](#)
 - [Confidentiality undertaking](#)
 - [Attendance/ sign in agreement](#)
 - [Summary of insurance arrangements](#)
 - [Supervision of students on school sites.](#)

The above documentation must be signed, copied and maintained on the student's file and renewed yearly.

Step Three: Physical arrangements to be finalised prior to the commencement of the service

Prior to the visitor's first appointment, the principal/ class teacher confirms agreement regarding:

- time and day for the provision of the service.
- provision of a suitable space for the service provider to work if required.

- responsibility for the provision of materials for the service (for example, access to photocopying, computers or office supplies).
- activities/ goals for service from both family/carer and visitor.
- responsibility for contact if student/ visitor is to be absent.

Only after all the above steps have been completed should a visitor commence work in the school.

Step Four: Delivery of the service

It is the responsibility of the visitor to provide regular reports on student progress to parents and class teachers (either verbally or in writing). Ideally this is provided after every visit. This may be negotiated among the parents/ carers, class teacher and visitor. The principal, parent/carer and/or visitor may request a review of the service at any time, but it must be done at least yearly/at the NDIS plan review.

Forms, links and further information

Volunteers and Visitors in Schools Policy

http://www.det.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/509484/VOLUNTEERS-AND-VISITORS-POLICY-2.pdf

Interim Guidelines for Principals and Staff Managing Volunteers and Visitors

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/files-go/pdf/GuidelinesforPrincipalsandStaff2015.pdf>

Index information on Volunteers and Visitors

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/school-services/visitors-and-volunteers.html>

Summary of Insurance Arrangements for Visitors

http://www.det.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/509472/Insurance-Arrangements-for-Volunteers.pdf

Visitors nomination form

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/sites/default/files/folders/Volunteers%20and%20Visitors/Volunteers-Nomination-Form2.pdf>

Visitors code of conduct

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/school-services/files-ss/pdf/volunteers-and-visitors-policy.pdf>

Confidentiality undertaking

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/sites/default/files/folders/Volunteers%20and%20Visitors/ConfidentialityUndertaking.pdf>

Attendance/ sign in agreement

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/sites/default/files/folders/Volunteers%20and%20Visitors/FormR-VolunteersWITHregistrationDailySign-in.pdf>

Supervision of students on school sites

<https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/files-go/word/supervision-of-students-on-schools-sites-guidelines.docx>