

# When your child struggles academically

## Tips for your school visit

- **Check out a school's resources:** Make sure the school has the resources and staff required to support your child. Important resources for your child may include an academic counselling and a learning resource centre. Find out whether a school has any other special school resource centres. For instance, does it have a health and wellness centre? How about a tutoring centre?
- **Observe a class in action:** Ask if you can observe a class. If your child is old enough, ask if they can sit in on a class or even have a shadow day (where they experience a full day at the school)? Here are some things to look for: How do teachers interact with students? Do they offer whole-class instruction, and if so, how much? Do they differentiate instruction, tailoring it to each student's unique learning needs? Is independent learning encouraged? Do teachers provide much one-on-one support? Is there much interaction and collaboration between students? Is there a lively and dynamic "vibe" in class?
- **Talk to students at the school:** It's important to find out what other students' experiences at the school have been like, especially those who've had academic struggles. Here are some questions you might ask them: What kinds of struggles have you had? How has the school supported you, and have you felt fully supported? If this isn't your first school, how does your experience here compare with other schools? Are you doing better academically? Do you still have significant areas of challenge? Is there anything about the school you're unhappy about?

## Questions to ask schools

- **In-class staff:** What in-class staff do you employ? Do you have educational assistants or resource teachers? What about other special education staff?
- **In-class accommodations:** Do you offer custom in-class accommodations, and if so, which ones? Do you offer extra time for assignments, note-taking assistance, ability-grouping, assistive devices, or duplicate notes? How about quiet workspaces, preferential seating, flexible seating, and private rooms for tests?
- **Out-of-class resources:** Which out-of-class resources do you offer? Do you have an academic counselling, learning resource, psychology, or health and wellness centre?
- **Out-of-class staff:** Which out-of-class staff do you employ? Do you have academic advisors, guidance counsellors, social workers, or psychologists? How about tutors or subject-specific support staff (such as reading or math specialists)?
- **Curriculum:** What curriculum do you use? Is it mainstream or alternative? What subjects do you teach and how do you teach them?
- **Class sizes:** What are your class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios?
- **Differentiated instruction:** Do you differentiate instruction according to each student's unique learning needs?
- **Learning skills:** How do you help students with their learning skills such as organization, planning, following instructions, and independent and group learning?
- **Special education:** Do you have dedicated special education classes?

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