## When your child has special needs

## Tips for your school visit

- Learn about a school's resources: Make sure the school has the resources and staff your child requires. Important resources for them may include an academic counselling, a learning resource, or a health and wellness centre. Visit these places, ask their staff questions, and find out what support they offer. Your child may also benefit from onsite support staff such as academic advisors, guidance counsellors, tutors, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and reading intervention specialists. Speak to the staff members whose support your child will need the most.
- 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 go through a full day at the school)? Here are some things to look for: What is the student-to-staff ratio? Are there any additional in-class support staff like educational assistants or resource teachers? Do teachers differentiate instruction, tailoring it to each student's unique learning needs? How much and what kinds of one-on-one support do they provide?
- Talk to students at the school: It's important to find out what other students' think of the school, especially those with special needs. Here are some questions you might pose: What kinds of struggles have you had? How has the school supported you and have you felt adequately supported? If this isn't your first school, how does your experience here compare with other schools? Are you doing better academically and socially? Do you have any significant concerns with or anything you're unhappy about at the school?

## Questions to ask schools

- In-class staff: In addition to regular teachers, do you have educational assistants or resource teachers? What about special education staff?
- Special education: Do you have full- or part-time dedicated special education classes?
- In-class adaptations: 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: Do you have academic counselling, learning resource, psychology, or health and wellness centres or departments?
- Out-of-class staff: 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)?
- Class sizes: What are your class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios?
- Curriculum: What curriculum do you use? Is it mainstream or alternative? What subjects do you teach and how do you teach them?
- **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 like organization, planning, following instructions, and independent and collaborative learning?
- Social skills: How do you help students with their social skills like cooperation, sharing, listening, respecting personal space, communication, reading body language, and empathy?

Notes