



Standard 8: Categories and Definitions of Exceptionalities

The purpose of the standard is to provide details of the range of placements provided by the Board, and to inform the public that the placement of a student in a regular class is the first option considered by the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

There are five categories of exceptionality recognized in the *Education Act*. For some of the categories, the Ministry has defined additional sub-categories.

In order for a student to be identified as exceptional, they must meet the requirements for at least one of the categories listed in this section.

Behaviour

Definition¹

A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance, and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following:

- An inability to build or to maintain interpersonal relationships;
- Excessive fears or anxieties;
- A tendency to compulsive reaction; or
- An inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof.

Criteria for Identification

- The need for identification is based on longstanding difficulties.
- Children who are candidates for formal identification have severe behavioural and social-emotional difficulties. These behavioural concerns have lasted for a significant duration of time and the previous efforts of school-based and system-based personnel have met with limited success.
- As part of these supportive efforts, an investigation of the student's academic or learning skill profile has occurred, with an examination of how various demands (e.g., academic, learning, environmental) may impact the student's behaviour.
- In many cases, children who are candidates for formal identification have severe behavioural and social-emotional difficulties and they may have received a diagnosis by a member of the College of Psychologists or medical practitioner regarding their profile of needs.
- The student's profile of needs is not better described under another exceptionality category.

¹ Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12* Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*

Communication: Autism

Definition²

- A complex neurobehavioural disorder that includes impairments in social communication and social interaction combined with restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities.
- The diagnosis of Autism covers a large spectrum of symptoms, skills, and levels of impairment, but difficulties are frequently noted early in development and across multiple contexts and environments.

Criteria for Identification

- A diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder has been provided by a member of the College of Psychologists or by a medical practitioner.

Communication: Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Definition³

An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.

Criteria for Identification

- A permanent hearing loss, substantiated by an audiological assessment (within the previous twelve months) by a registered Audiologist, which results in a need for accommodations and/or modifications to the classroom environment and/or program.

Communication: Language Impairment

Definition⁴

A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication, which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

- Involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication; and
- Include one or more of the following:
 - Language delay or disorder;
 - Dysfluency;
 - Voice and articulation development which may or may not be organically or functionally based.

² Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*

³ ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*

⁴ ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*

Criteria for Identification

- A language impairment that, based on an assessment by a qualified Speech-Language Pathologist or a diagnosis of a language disorder by a member of the College of Psychologists which results in a need for accommodations and/or modifications to the classroom environment and/or program.

Examples, But Not Limited To

- A student whose specific learning disability is related to language and/or communication.
- A student who is functionally non-verbal and requires an augmentative/alternative communication system (such as an iPad, or GoTalkNow) to be programmed with routine classroom requests in order to demonstrate their knowledge of the curriculum.

Communication: Speech Impairment*Definition⁵*

A disorder in language formulation that:

- May be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors;
- That involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages; and
- That may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress.

Criteria for Identification

- An impairment or disorder in articulation, voice or fluency that significantly interferes with communication, social interaction and academic progress to the extent that, based on an assessment by a qualified Speech-Language Pathologist, an augmentative/alternative communication system may be required.

Examples, But Not Limited To:

- A student with a developmental apraxia of speech (motor planning) who is so unintelligible that picture communication symbols or other augmentative/alternative systems are necessary to supplement oral communication.
- Student whose stuttering is so severe during oral presentations in the classroom or in other interactions that written communication or other media styles becomes more effective.
- A student with a cleft palate whose speech is so unintelligible due to resonance difficulties that an augmentative/alternative communication system is programmed with routine classroom requests.

Communication: Learning Disability*Definition⁶*

⁵ [Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*](#) [Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*](#)

A learning disability is one of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:

- Affects the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are *at least* in the average range;
- Results in:
 - Academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range), and/or;
 - Academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support.
 - Difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills.
- May typically be associated with one or more cognitive process such as:
 - Phonological processing;
 - Memory and attention;
 - Processing speed;
 - Perceptual-motor processing;
 - Visual-spatial processing; or
 - Executive functions (e.g., self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, planning, organizing of thoughts and activities, prioritizing, decision making).
- May be associated with:
 - Difficulties in social interaction (e.g., difficulty in understanding social norms or the point of view of others;
 - Various other conditions or disorders diagnosed or undiagnosed; or
 - Other exceptionalities.
- Is *not* the result of:
 - A lack of acuity in hearing and/or vision that has not been corrected;
 - Intellectual disabilities;
 - Socio-economic factors;
 - Cultural differences;
 - Lack of proficiency in the language of instruction;
 - Lack of motivation or effort; or
 - Gaps in school attendance or inadequate opportunity to benefit from instruction.

Criteria for Identification

- An individually administered measure of general intellectual ability (e.g., Wechsler Scales, Stanford-Binet) has been completed. Although the cognitive results may vary from the Low Average to Very Superior range of functioning, the overall estimate of intellectual ability would fall at least within the broad Average range.
- A discrepancy is evident between assessed intellectual ability and current standardized assessment of academic achievement. This academic achievement is below a level

⁶ Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8

appropriate for their intelligence and age. The academic achievement is manifested in at least one of the following academic areas:

- Word recognition/decoding;
- Reading fluency;
- Reading comprehension;
- Written language;
- Mathematics; or
- Work habits and learning skills.
- In some cases, a discrepancy may not be evident between the student's intellectual ability and academic achievement, but the academic achievement can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support.
- Within the assessment, there has been an attempt to identify the student's profile of processing skills and learning strengths and needs. In most cases, psychometric tests will identify processing deficits or areas of learning need connected to Below Average academic performance.
- The academic weaknesses are not solely due to physical, environmental (e.g., a lack of opportunity or insufficient instruction or intervention), social-emotional, or cultural factors and are not better described under another exceptionality category.
- Related learning difficulties, however, may be apparent in social skills, emotional maturation, and classroom behaviour.

Intellectual: Giftedness

Definition⁷

An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

- The Canadian Cognitive Abilities assessment is administered to Grade 3 students at all schools within the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB). ~~CCAT-7 replaces the previous process that included assessment using the Insight Cognitive Abilities assessment.~~
- CCAT 7 is a group-administered assessment which provides information about cognitive, thinking and reasoning skills that are strongly related to high academic achievement. The cut-off score for exceptionality is determined statistically and reflects those students who demonstrate the highest level of intellectual ability and who will most likely benefit from the principles and practices of gifted education. On the CCAT 7, a General Ability score at or above the 99% percentile would indicate that a student is eligible for identifications as Exceptional Student-Gifted.
- For individual students who are assessed outside the Grade 3 CCAT 7 group-testing, the following criteria is adopted as basis for identification as Exceptional Student – Gifted.
- Two sub-tests of the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-Third Edition (WIAT-III) are administered:

⁷ ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ [Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*](#)

- Reading Comprehension
- Math Problem-Solving
- On the WIAT-III, if both scores are at, or above, the 50% percentile and one score is above the 84th percentile, then a referral may be made by the school team to Psychological Services for further assessment.
- On the WISC-V, if the Full Scale Score or General Abilities Index is at or above a standard score of 130 (98% percentile), then the student meets the criteria for identification as Exceptional Student-Gifted.

Intellectual: Mild Intellectual Disability

Definition⁸

A learning disorder characterized by:

- An ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service;
- An inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development; or
- A potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

Criteria for Identification

- An individually administered measure of general intellectual ability (e.g., Wechsler Scales, Stanford Binet) has been completed. Although the results may vary, the overall estimate of intellectual ability would fall within the Borderline range of functioning.
- The student exhibits well below average academic achievement and requires extensive curriculum modifications and/or alternate specialized programming.

Intellectual: Developmental Disability

Definition⁹

A severe learning disorder characterized by:

- An inability to profit from a Special Education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of a slow intellectual development.
- An ability to profit from a Special Education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development.
- A limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

Criteria for Identification

⁸ ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ [Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*](#)

⁹ ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ [Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*](#)

- An individually administered measure of general intellectual ability (e.g., Wechsler Scales, Stanford Binet) has been completed. Although the results may vary, overall estimate of intellectual ability would fall within the Extremely Low range of functioning.
- The student exhibits well below average academic achievement and requires extensive curriculum modifications and/or alternate specialized programming.
- An assessment of the student's adaptive functioning in the home, community, and/or school setting has been completed. The student exhibits significant adaptive skill deficits that limit their conceptual, social or practical adaptive functioning.

Physical: Physical Disability

Definition¹⁰

- A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of students without exceptionalities who are of the same age or developmental level.

Criteria for Identification

- An ongoing physical or medical disability or condition as identified by a medical practitioner which results in a need for accommodations and/or modifications to the classroom environment and/or program.

Physical: Blind and Low Vision

Definition¹¹

- A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that even with correction affects educational performance adversely.

Criteria for Identification

- Results from a Medical Eye Report completed by an ophthalmologist, optometrist, or an orthoptist indicating a diagnosis of the students visual functioning which may be described by one (or more) of the following:
 - a visual acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after correction;
 - a visual field of 20 degrees or less;
 - any progressive eye disease with a prognosis of becoming one the above; or
 - a visual problem or related visual stamina that is not correctable and that results in the students functioning as if their visual acuity is limited to 20/70 or less.
- Results from a Functional Vision/Tactile Assessment completed by an Itinerant Vision Resource Teacher from the TVDSB Vision Services Program (consistent with diagnosis outlined in Medical Eye Report) indicating visual functioning which may require:

¹⁰ [~~Ministry of Education document Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001~~ Ministry of Education document Special Education in Ontario K-12](#)

¹¹ [~~Ministry of Education document Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001~~ Ministry of Education document Special Education in Ontario K-12](#)

- the need for alternative format(s) textbooks and curriculum materials to conventional print (i.e. large print, e-text, braille);
- the need for accommodations in areas of Instructional, Environmental, and Assessment; or
- the development the of alternative program area(s) of the Expanded Core Curriculum (i.e. braille instruction, assistive technology, orientation and mobility).

Multiple

Definition¹²

- A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities, that is of such nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one (1) or more teachers holding qualifications in Special Education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities.

Criteria for Identification

- Student meets the criteria for identification in two (2) or more exceptionalities with supporting documentation and/or assessment provided by the appropriate practitioners.

¹² ~~Ministry of Education document *Special Education, A Guide for Educators 2001*~~ Ministry of Education document *Special Education in Ontario K-12*