

In brief

Our approach in a child's early years to parent-teacher talks about starting education

Purpose Our aim is that all children are able to develop well on both a personal and educational level from starting kindergarten. To achieve this, it is beneficial for a specialist in early years development and parents – as well as other people who spend time with the child – to sit together to assess the child's current level of understanding and experience in the context of their starting education.

This evaluation follows a particular procedure. This helps the specialist in early years development and the parents to identify the most important issues together, to share experiences and to identify what is needed for the child to get off to a successful start at kindergarten.

Here we describe the most important steps in the procedure in brief. For more detailed information on these talks («Schulische Standortgespräche»), visit www.vsa.zh.ch/ssg

When do talks about my child's current level take place? Talks to evaluate a child's current level for starting education take place when the child is likely to require special educational arrangements or special needs education in mainstream classes from kindergarten, ie if:

- special educational arrangements need to be considered, such as integrated special needs education for which the mainstream school is responsible; integrated special needs education for which a special school is responsible; advice and support for physically or visually impaired children or a special day or residential school
- special needs education in mainstream classes should be considered, such as speech and language therapy, psychomotor therapy, services for hearing impaired children, preparatory lessons or lessons to integrate learners into the mainstream class (inclusive education).

Who takes part in the talks? Those people who are key to clarifying the situation should take part. The specialist in early years development and the carer (father and/or mother) always take part.

How long do the talks last? On average, the talks last an hour.

Who leads the talk? On the whole, the specialist in early years development takes the lead in the talks.

Who invites everyone to the talks? In general, the person who will lead the talks sends out the invitations.

How can I prepare myself for the talks? Everyone concerned prepares for the talks by completing a specially designed preparation form («Persönliche Vorbereitung eines Standortgesprächs»). The form helps to identify which key issues should be jointly discussed.

How do I complete the preparation form?	<p>Complete the form by providing a personal description of the current situation: «What difficulties do we face currently, what is special? What do I believe to be the most serious problem? What are my child's strengths?»</p> <p>Following this, go over the form again and for all the points consider whether these are areas of strength or problems for your child. One area is called «Handling tasks and demands», for example. If you think your child's level is the same as friends of the same age, place a cross in the middle box. It may be difficult to place just the one cross. In such cases, please feel free to put a cross in more than one box. There is enough space for further comments on the right.</p> <p>You may keep your completed form. Following the talk, you can take it home.</p>
How much time does it take to complete the form?	<p>Take no more than 5 to 10 minutes. You should just provide a preliminary evaluation that will help during the talks.</p>
Do I have to complete everything?	<p>No. If you think «I can't evaluate that» or «I'd rather not go into that», please leave those areas blank.</p>
How are talks about my child's current level structured?	<p>During the first part of the talk, the participants consider the child's evaluation as described in the forms. («In which areas has everyone evaluated the child in the same way? Are there areas in which evaluations differ?») Then a joint decision is made about which areas (1-2 areas) should be discussed in more detail. All participants can contribute by discussing their observations/experiences.</p> <p>Finally, the following question is at the centre of the discussion: «Should special educational arrangements in a special school or in mainstream education be considered for my child?»</p>
Is there a report of the meeting?	<p>Yes, a short report is completed.</p> <p>If a decision is made to assess your child's need for special educational arrangements from starting education, this is also documented. All those who attended the talk receive a copy of the report.</p>
What are the next steps following talks about my child's level?	<p>If everyone involved agrees to assess the need for special educational arrangements in a special school or special needs education in mainstream classes, they fill in a form entitled 'Application to assess the need for special educational arrangements when transferring from early years education to school'.</p> <p>The completed form as well as the report from the talks is sent to the parents' local education authority.</p> <p>If special educational arrangements are being considered in a special school, the local education authority together with the school governing board make the necessary arrangements with the relevant educational psychology service.</p> <p>If special needs education in mainstream school is being considered, the local education authority together with the relevant school management arrange a meeting with the parents. Depending on the needs of the child, the school management invites teachers and specialists to the meeting. The school management also agrees with parents in advance any necessary assessments by the school's special needs teachers.</p> <p>If no special educational arrangements are being considered, then no further action needs to be taken following the talks about starting school.</p>