

Special Education Teacher interview questions

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What to expect

Special education teacher interviews are usually run as a panel, often including the principal or deputy, a learning support or inclusion coordinator, and sometimes a classroom teacher or parent representative. Panels tend to focus as much on judgement and collaboration skills as on formal qualifications, since they're assessing whether you can be trusted with complex student needs from early in your placement.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about how you've handled real situations with students, families or colleagues in the past, usually answered using a STAR structure.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical classroom situations, often involving behaviour escalation or conflicting needs, testing how you'd think and act under pressure.
- **Technical/curriculum:** Questions about how you adapt curriculum content, write IEPs, or use assessment data to set and track learning goals.
- **Collaborative/stakeholder:** Questions about working with parents, allied health professionals and mainstream teachers, since the role depends on coordinating across several people.
- **Tools and technology:** Questions about experience with AAC devices, IEP software or learning management systems used to support and document student progress.

Panels typically open with background and motivation questions, move into scenario and behavioural questions that probe judgement and collaboration, then often include a practical task such as reviewing a sample IEP, describing how you'd adapt a specific lesson, or occasionally demonstrating part of a lesson. They usually close with questions about registration, Working with Children Check status and availability.

1. Tell me about a time you adapted a lesson or assessment for a student with a significant disability.

Why they ask

This checks whether you can differentiate curriculum content rather than just simplify it, which is core to the role.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the student's needs and the situation, the task you were set, the specific adaptation you made to the lesson or assessment, and the result in terms of the student's engagement or progress.

Example answer

"I had a student with a significant intellectual disability in a Year 5 science class studying the water cycle. Rather than excluding her from the topic, I broke the lesson into a hands-on sorting activity using picture cards for each stage, paired with a simplified worksheet using symbols instead of text. I worked from her existing IEP goals around sequencing and matching. By the end of the unit she could correctly order the stages independently, which was a goal we then carried into her next term's plan."

2. How would you approach writing an Individual Education Plan for a new student with limited information about their needs?

Why they ask

IEP development is a core, recurring task, and panels want to know you have a repeatable process rather than relying on guesswork.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your process step by step: what information you'd gather first, who you'd consult, how you'd set goals, and how you'd review and adjust the plan.

Example answer

"I'd start by reviewing whatever records exist, previous school reports, medical or allied health assessments if available, then arrange to observe the student in class before setting anything in writing. I'd meet with parents early to understand their priorities and, where possible, speak with any allied health professionals already involved. From there I'd draft two or three specific, measurable goals rather than a long list, share the draft with parents and relevant staff for feedback, and set a review point, usually end of term, to check progress and adjust."

3. A student with a behaviour support plan becomes escalated during a group activity and refuses to move to a quiet space. What do you do?

Why they ask

Behaviour management under pressure is a daily reality of the role, and panels want evidence of calm, plan-consistent decision-making rather than improvisation.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your immediate priorities in order: safety first, then de-escalation, then following the documented plan, then what you'd do afterwards to review and report.

Example answer

"First I'd check the safety of the student and the rest of the class, moving other students away if needed rather than forcing the escalated student to move. I'd follow whatever de-escalation strategy is in their behaviour support plan, usually giving space and a calm, low-demand instruction rather than repeating the request. If they still refused, I'd call for support from the learning support coordinator as per the plan rather than trying to manage it alone. Afterwards I'd document the incident and flag it with the team so we could review whether the plan needed adjusting."

4. How do you differentiate curriculum content so a student working well below year level can still access the same topic as their peers?

Why they ask

This is a technical question testing whether you understand differentiation as adjusting complexity and format, not just giving easier work disconnected from the class topic.

How to structure your answer

Explain your general approach with a concrete example: how you keep the topic connected, what you change (content, process, product or environment), and how you check understanding.

Example answer

"I try to keep the student working on the same broad topic as the class but adjust the entry point. For a persuasive writing unit, a student working well below year level might use picture prompts and sentence starters to build a simple opinion statement while the rest of the class writes a full essay, but they're still learning persuasion, not doing an unrelated worksheet. I check understanding through short verbal or visual checks rather than relying only on written output, since that's often the barrier, not the thinking itself."

5. Describe a time you disagreed with a parent or allied health professional about a student's goals or supports.

Why they ask

Collaboration with families and allied health professionals is built into the role, and disagreements are common, so panels want to see respectful, evidence-based conflict resolution.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: outline the disagreement, what was at stake for the student, how you handled the conversation, and what the outcome was.

Example answer

"A parent wanted their child moved out of small-group literacy support because they felt it was holding him back socially, but I'd seen in his assessment data that he was still well below the expected benchmark. Instead of pushing back directly, I set up a meeting where I shared his recent progress data alongside the social benefits he'd need to maintain, and proposed a trial where he kept some small-group time but joined the mainstream class for other subjects. The parent agreed to the trial, and after a term we reviewed the data together and adjusted the balance again."

6. What experience do you have with AAC devices or other assistive technology, and how do you make sure they're used consistently across the day?

Why they ask

Assistive technology is a named tool for this role and panels want to know you can operate it and embed it in daily practice, not just introduce it once.

How to structure your answer

Describe your hands-on experience first, then explain the practical steps you take to keep the technology in consistent use across staff and settings.

Example answer

"I've introduced AAC devices for non-verbal students and trained classroom staff on their use, since a device only helps if everyone interacting with the student knows how to prompt it. I usually create a simple one-page guide for other staff and specialist teachers covering the core vocabulary the student is working on, and I check in with the family to keep the device's vocabulary consistent between home and school. I've found participation improves noticeably once the device is used the same way in every setting, rather than just during my lessons."