

Ready for the carnival

Shireen Khalil

IT might not be the Olympics, but it's still very special.

Every year, for the past three years, Ben Howard, 9, has waited in anticipation for the country's largest sporting carnival for students with autism.

Ben, who has mild to moderate autism, nags his mother Victoria in the lead-up to the event.

"He lives for the sports carnival. He holds his breath all day," Victoria said.

"He sits on the edge of his seat and says, until it's his turn, 'Is it my turn yet?'"

Victoria said it was a great event for her son to be involved in, both for his physical and mental

wellbeing.

"He absolutely loves it. He participates in the 50m sprint and in the first year he came first place, the second year he came in second position and this is his third year so we will wait and see how he goes."

Ben, who attends the satellite unit of Aspect South East Sydney at Belfield, said he enjoyed running and was pretty good at it.

"I'm very, very fast," he said.

"I also used to play rugby league for the Strathfield Raiders in the under-7s and under-8s."

But Victoria said that once it got competitive she had to pull him out because he kept running off the field to give her a hug.

The combined athletics carnival will bring together students from Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) metropolitan and regional schools for the first time to compete, have fun and participate.

About 450 students aged between four and 17, with hundreds of staff, parents and volunteers, are expected on the day.

The carnival will be held at Sydney Olympic Park's hockey field on Friday.

Aspect is a not-for-profit organisation that relies on the support of the community. To make a donation visit autismspectrum.org.au or call 1800 288 476.



Ben Howard, of Belfield, loves his sport and is handy with a football.

Picture: PHIL BLATCH