



**Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders  
Leading Linking Learning**

**QASEL POSITION BRIEF: NOVEMBER 2021**

**Subject: Infrastructure in Special Education**

The Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders (QASEL) is the peak professional association for special education leaders across Queensland. QASEL members are Principals, Deputy Principals, Heads of Special Education Services, Heads of Curriculum/Department and other leaders and aspirants, who support students with disability, across all sectors of education in Queensland. Some members are based in special schools, many support students with disability and diverse learners in primary, secondary and early childhood settings.

This brief seeks to clarify QASEL's position in relation to a range of infrastructure issues that impact on students supported in special education settings in Queensland State Schools.

**Background:**

- Special schools have experienced significant enrolment growth in recent years. In addition to new buildings in existing special schools, three new special schools have been built in recent years:
  - Lee Street State Special School (opened 2020)
  - Palmview State Special School (opened 2021)
  - Coomera State Special School (opening 2022)
- Since the introduction and implementation of the Department of Education's *Inclusive Education Policy* many primary and secondary schools have significantly changed the way in which they utilise their designated Special Education Program buildings.

**Position:**

- QASEL commends the Queensland State Government's commitment to building new special schools, and upgrading existing special schools to support enrolment growth.
- QASEL recommends that the Queensland State Government commissions both a scoping study for special schools and location profiles for special schools, as was completed by Urbis Pty Ltd in 2013, as it appears those studies were essential to build all but one of the recommended special schools.
- QASEL strongly recommends the development of a design standard for special schools that sets out the minimum standard and inclusions for the refurbishment or building of new facilities or schools. This design standard should address issues such as:
  - GLA size, layout, ICT requirements and room data sheets (differentiated for early years, middle and senior schooling).
  - the provision of green space, shade coverage, outdoor learning areas and play spaces.
  - adequate facilities to support access and inclusion throughout the school for students, staff and visitors beyond the Australian standard (e.g., ramps, ceiling

- hoists, pathways between buildings and play spaces, door widths and automation, tactile markers, lighting, acoustics and appropriately sized lifts).
  - emergency access and exits that support emergency action planning for SWD.
  - specialist teaching and learning areas for music, art, HPE and hospitality on the same basis as state primary and secondary schools.
  - flexible learning areas including halls, libraries, indoor and outdoor sports courts and undercover areas.
  - location and layout of student and staff toilets and amenities.
  - swimming pools and hydrotherapy.
  - safe and accessible administration buildings that support school leadership teams.
  - location and provision of teacher and teacher aide preparation and collaborative meeting spaces.
  - infrastructure provisions that reduce the need for restrictive practices.
  - safe transition areas for buses, taxis and parent pick up and drop off.
- QASEL members commit to actively engaging in the process to collaboratively develop these design standards.
- QASEL also recognises that State School Disability and Inclusion branch have also developed a set of design principles and standards that could be critical in informing this work.
- QASEL supports the prioritisation of extensive renewal and upgrades to special schools that are no longer fit for purpose. Historically, infrastructure funding opportunities have provided smaller funding packages to many schools. QASEL believes that this approach has failed to address urgent infrastructure needs in some of our special schools. Instead we support the notion of a more targeted approach that delivers greater impact to a smaller number of schools to bring these schools up to standard.
- QASEL supports the introduction of a collaborative process to identify the real site capacity of every special school in Queensland, and an early planning process which includes community consultation to identify a way to respond to schools that are over or near capacity.
- QASEL supports the provision of dedicated and purpose-built, flexible space/s to support the inclusion of all students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools. These spaces should support the ability of school leaders to make localised decisions, based on the use of school facilities, and consistent with their current and developing model of inclusion.
- QASEL supports the prioritisation of extensive renewal and upgrades to all schools that are no longer fit for purpose for people with disability to ensure they meet current requirements for accessibility.
- QASEL supports school facilities planning for students with disability in all schools that is informed by evidence-based research, best practice, and the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#), and the [Disability \(Access to Premises – Buildings\) Standards 2010](#)
- QASEL supports the provision of infrastructure planning that aligns with over-arching policy and legislation to ensure safe, supportive learning environments for all students.
- QASEL supports the inclusion of ECDP facilities in the infrastructure planning and funding model.

**Summary:**

QASEL believes that the provision of appropriate infrastructure for students with disability in all settings has a direct and significant impact on student learning, engagement and wellbeing, as well as staff and community safety and school culture.

QASEL recognises that the provision of facilities to support inclusive education is a complex challenge given that primary and secondary schools offer a range of models and are at different stages on the inclusion journey. QASEL supports the provision of infrastructure that is informed by evidenced-based research to support the inclusion of all students in primary and secondary schools.

Further, we recommend the development of a design standard for special schools. Once developed, this standard could be used to assess and prioritise works in special schools, and inform the construction of new special schools and special school buildings.

QASEL appreciates the size, costs, complexity and competing priorities surrounding school infrastructure and remains committed to proactively contributing to ongoing discussions.

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