



## Petition

Registration No.	29
Title	Develop a dedicated special needs Middle & High School for residents of Palmerston Rural Area
Presented on	14 March 2024
Presented by	Member for Katherine
Referred to	Minister for Education and Public Accounts Committee
Assembly debate	If the Committee recommends the Petition be debated it will appear on the Notice Paper
Date referred	14 March 2024
Response due	20 June 2024
Response received	29 May 2024
Response presented	

### Petition

**To the Speaker and the Members of the Legislative Assembly of  
the Northern Territory**

#### **WE THE UNDERSIGNED RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH**

We the undersigned respectfully urge the Northern Territory Government to develop a dedicated special needs Middle & High School for residents of Palmerston Rural Area, with infrastructure and services equivalent to the Henbury School in Darwin.

#### **YOUR PETITIONERS THEREFORE HUMBLY PRAY THAT**

The Northern Territory Government and Members of the Legislative Assembly commit to the development of a dedicated special needs Middle & High School for Palmerston and the rural area for the reasons below:

- 1) There is one dedicated Special Needs High School in the Greater Darwin region – the Henbury School in Tiwi, which is a purpose built facility.
- 2) Henbury officially only accepts students who are domiciled in the City of Darwin Local Government Area (population 84,000).

- 3) There is no Henbury equivalent for residents of Palmerston and the rural area (approximately 70,000 residents).
- 4) The only option for Palmerston\Rural special needs students entering middle/high schooling are Special Education Centres (SECS) which are makeshift facilities annexed to Palmerston College and Taminmin College.
- 5) These SECS provide Palmerston and the rural area with in equitable infrastructure, programs and services.
- 6) Palmerston SEC has been operating with enrolments exceeding capacity:
  - a. The Palmerston SEC (10 to 12 campus) has capacity for 68 students, while the 7 to 9 campus has capacity for 10.
  - b. Current enrolments of 110 clearly exceed this capacity.
- 7) This poses risk for both the special needs and mainstream students, including but not limited to:
  - a. Some special needs students are serial absconders, and require a secure environment which a mainstream school site cannot accommodate.
  - b. Insufficient withdrawal and flexible learning spaces for student with complex and severe emotional and sensory regulation needs.
- 8) Engineered plans have been developed and land set aside to extend the Forrest Parade special needs primary school in Palmerston, to add Middle School capacity.

**AND YOUR PETITIONERS AS IN DUTY BOUND, WILL EVER PRAY.**

## **Response**

In Budget 2024-25, the Northern Territory Government has committed funding to undertake a feasibility assessment and concept planning for the expansion of secondary schooling and special educational capacity in the Palmerston Growth Area.

Special education in the Palmerston and rural area is serviced through a number of specialist settings, including special education centres at Palmerston College, Taminmin College, Woodroffe Primary School and Humpty Dao Primary School. Forrest Parade Primary School operates as a Special School where individualised and specialised educational programs are provided for students with disability in Preschool to Year 6. Through Forrest Parade, a number of satellite classes are hosted in mainstream schools where students with disability access a specialised learning program. Planning for the expansion of the Forrest Parade School in Palmerston to incorporate infrastructure to further support students with additional needs is being considered in light of relevant recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission).

Establishment of new specialist educational facilities was addressed by the Disability Royal Commission with 2 alternative recommendations:

- 7.14 recommended phasing out segregated education with no new facilities and a gradual transition away from specialist schools to allow capacity building in mainstream schools, to be finalised in 2051.
- 7.15 recommended co-location of any new non-mainstream schools, partnerships and maximising inclusion and participation with the mainstream school.

The Department of Education is continuing to work through the whole of government response to the Disability Royal Commission recommendations. This process is being led by the Office of Disability in the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.