



MEDIA RELEASE

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CABOOLTURE SCHOOL AT CAPACITY AS DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENT SECTOR RISES

A special assistance school in Caboolture is at capacity and in desperate need of new premises, highlighting the growing demand for Independent schools that provide inclusive and relevant education for young people who have not suited mainstream schooling.

Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment has outgrown its buildings and has more than 120 young people on its waiting list for this year. A critical shortage of teachers is also straining the college and schools across the state.

Enrolments at Independent schools in Queensland increased 22% between 2018 and 2023, with more than 13% of school students in Longman attending an Independent school. Enrolments in special assistance schools have surged across Queensland by 280% since 2018, from 1,520 enrolments to 5,773 in 2023.

Horizons College opened in 2014 and supports young people from grades seven to 12 who have disengaged from education for a range of reasons.

Principal Jane Robinson said the school, which is on the site of the former Caboolture Butter Factory, is at capacity.

“Mainstream school isn’t meaningful or the right fit for every student, which is why it’s important to have schools like ours to offer an alternative, positive experience that can support young people to reach their full potential,” she said.

“There are lots of students we could be helping. We have 50 students on the waitlist for year 10 alone. The demand is high, but unfortunately we only have capacity for 220 students. If we are able to secure a new location, we could increase our capacity to help more students.”

“Our students have enjoyed learning in a space that doesn’t look like a typical school and, while we have made the space work for over 10 years, we need to be in a new premises by 2026. Time is of the essence.”

Ms Robinson said she was also concerned, for the first time, about filling teaching vacancies at the school, due to the shortages across the state.

“We wish to fill three vacancies by term three and I’m concerned we might not be able to.”

“Our school works hard to maintain a positive school culture and supportive environment for staff. We have small class sizes, which means our teachers and support staff can develop strong relationships with their students. There is an overarching emphasis on both student and staff wellbeing at Horizons College.”

“I would encourage teachers and teaching students to consider working at a special assistance school because it can be a very rewarding experience.”

Stephen Grant has three kids enrolled at Horizons College. His children, in grades 8, 10 and 12, have thrived since starting at the school, where his eldest is a vice captain.

“This school has been amazing for my kids. They have excelled here. It’s an enormous change from falling through the cracks in public schooling to wanting to come to school and achieving goals,” he said.

Mr Grant said the smaller classroom sizes and support staff, including youth workers, had helped his children perform well.

“The school actually cares about the students, not just a number. If there are any issues, they help as much as they can. It’s that guidance that makes the kids feel like they matter.”

Special assistance schools provide alternative educational settings for students with high-level social and emotional needs and cater for students who are at risk, have behavioural difficulties, or whose needs are better met by flexible learning structures that may not be available in all mainstream schools.

The number of special assistance schools in Australia has almost doubled in the past decade and enrolments have almost tripled. There were 48 schools in 2014 and 96 schools in 2023.

Member for Longman, Terry Young MP, said “It’s important to have a range of educational options so families and young people in our region can choose the school that’s right for them.”

“Special assistance schools make an important contribution to our growing community by providing an alternative educational setting and responding to the needs of their students.”

Independent Schools Australia Chief Executive Officer Graham Catt said special assistance schools play an essential role in Australia’s education system.

“Specials assistance schools such as Horizons College are an example of the ability of the Independent school sector to adapt and innovate to meet the needs of their students. There is a lot of demand for these schools, as Horizons has experienced.”

“Special assistance schools have low fees or often charge no fees at all, so they depend on support and funding to continue to be able to deliver on their important work,” Mr Catt said.

“Funding for teaching students while they are on placements is an important initiative to assist people entering the profession. There is an opportunity to dedicate some of this

funding to encourage and support students to complete their placement in a special assistance school.”

Mr Catt said ISA would continue to work with the Australian Government to ensure Independent schools are supported to deliver strong learning outcomes and serve their communities.

Key facts

- Over the past 50 years, the Independent sector enrolment share has risen from 4% to 18%
- There are more than 110,000 students enrolled in 143 Independent special and special assistance schools across Australia that cater to students with disability and other needs
- 1 in 6 students are enrolled in an Independent school
- The median fee for an Independent school in 2022 was approximately \$5,500, and the majority of Independent schools charge annual fees of less than \$6,000
- 1 in 3 Independent schools are located outside capital cities

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