



# Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations

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Mr Michael Berkman MP  
Member for Maiwar  
Email: [maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Mr Berkman *Michael,*

Thank you for your letters dated 29 April and 7 May 2020, regarding community access to the Vera Street Community Garden, grounds of the Queensland Academy of Science, Mathematics and Technology (QASMT) and proposed fencing.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to strengthening relationships between schools and their local communities and has a long-standing and successful practice of making its facilities available to the community for use outside of school hours, when not required for school purposes.

## **Vera Street community gardens**

On 22 April 2020, access to the community garden was temporarily restricted following concerns from local residents about groups of people congregating in the gardens during the current COVID-19 pandemic, in light of the health advice and social distancing measures in place. The temporary restrictions were a precautionary measure in the interests of student, staff and community safety and wellbeing.

I am advised that on 8 May 2020, the temporary restrictions to the community garden were lifted and community members can access the garden via the Vera Street entrance. Community members are encouraged to practice social distancing in accordance with the current health guidelines.

## **School expansion project**

The Department of Education is expanding QASMT to include all secondary year levels of education. In addition to delivering the Northern Learning Centre and the Eastern STEM hub, works are underway to reinstate facilities that existed prior to the commencement of the construction project. I have been advised these reinstatement works include landscaping, the construction of new pathways and the reinstatement of fencing. These works commenced in May 2020 and are due for completion by mid-2020.

The works to replace the fence along the Miskin Street frontage of the school will install a new fence to replace the one removed to facilitate construction access during the project. The department has taken the opportunity to design the new fence in a way that will separate pedestrian and vehicle movements into the school grounds and provide a new pathway for pedestrians to improve safety, and to also provide landscaping beautification works.

The department is required to reinstate the Miskin Street fence in order to meet the department's obligations under the Ministerial Designation granted for the expansion project.

I would like to clarify that the Miskin Street fence is not a security fence, as some members of the community have claimed. The fence is simply replacing 'like-for-like'.

**Recent security issues**

As you may be aware, throughout the duration of construction, there has been a significant increase of unauthorised entry and illegal activity on the QASMT site. Since 1 July 2018, the department is aware of:

- 28 instances of unauthorised persons on site;
- seven vandalism events, including a high-cost incident where construction equipment had ignition switches removed;
- two graffiti occurrences; and
- an arson event which caused significant damage to the newly constructed buildings.

The safety of staff and students at schools is paramount, and the department is working with the school to consider strategies to maintain the safety of staff, students and facilities, while supporting the maximisation of community use of its facilities.

I have been advised that no security fences will be installed at QASMT until construction of the current expansion works has been completed and the community has been consulted on the future use of the school-owned green space.

Further, I have instructed the department to ensure that there will be no restriction to public access to the green space surrounding the school.

The department has a range of programs and strategies in place to manage security at schools, which may include installation of a security fence. Pending any outcomes of community consultation, if recommendations advise a security fence is required, it will be designed in a way that facilitates public access to community green space.

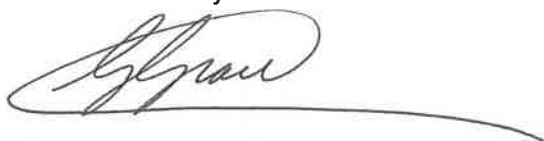
Please be assured the department will continue to monitor the situation at the school and will determine the appropriate strategy to respond to specific issues in consultation with the school and the community as required.

I acknowledge the high level of local interest in the expansion project. The department is committed to strengthening relationships between schools and their local communities and promotes community use of school facilities outside of school hours, when not required for school purposes. School principals negotiate with their local communities to ensure the community use does not interfere with the school purpose and education delivery.

If you require additional information or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact me directly or alternatively your staff can contact Ms Sharon Durham, Chief of Staff of my office, on (07) 3719 7110.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



**GRACE GRACE MP**  
**Minister for Education and**  
**Minister for Industrial Relations**

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