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Queensland's Plan for New Special Schools Faces Backlash

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Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Rosemary Kayess, has called on the Queensland Government to abandon its plan to build six new special schools, arguing it contradicts commitments to inclusive education. This article explores the controversy surrounding the state's education budget, highlighting concerns from disability advocates and the push for mainstream school investment.

The Queensland Government's recent budget allocated funds for six new special schools in South East Queensland, designed to accommodate 800 students with disabilities. Education Minister John-Paul Langbroek defends the move, citing "clear demand" for specialized facilities, particularly as some schools have seen enrollments nearly double in five years. However, this decision has sparked outrage among disability advocates,

who argue it entrenches a discriminatory, segregated system. Kayess, in a letter to the Premier and Education Minister, expressed “deep concerns,” noting that the plan undermines Australia’s National Roadmap for Inclusive Education, which all states, including Queensland, endorsed. This roadmap prioritizes equal access to mainstream education, emphasizing that inclusive settings yield better academic and social outcomes.

Critics, including the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE), warn that segregated schooling sets students with disabilities on a path to limited opportunities, with data showing an 85% higher likelihood of ending up in sheltered employment or group homes. “Segregated schooling leads to segregated lives,” Kayess stated, urging investment in mainstream schools to provide proper staff and facilities for inclusivity. The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) also recommended phasing out special schools, though its commissioners were divided, with some advocating closure by 2051 and others favoring stronger ties between mainstream and special systems.

Supporters of the government’s plan, like Andrew Thompson of the Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders, argue that special schools address real needs and parental concerns about closures. Yet, advocates like Kathy Cologon from All Means All counter that segregation reflects a failure to reform mainstream schools, not a parental preference for exclusion. With Queensland’s \$21.9 billion education budget under scrutiny, the debate underscores a broader question: should the state double down on separate facilities or prioritize an inclusive future for all students?