

Sylvia Flato - Speech for Official Opening – 8th April 2011

The Hon. Jay Weatherill, Ms Rachel Sanderson, Mr. Gary Johansen, Mr. Gino DeGennaro, Mr Greg Petherick, Ms Kerry Dolman, former school leaders, distinguished guests, students, families and staff – welcome here today.

I would like to extend a particularly warm and special welcome to the Honorable Kelly Vincent, member of the Legislative Council and past student of the Regency Park School Link program at Unley High School. Thank you for your commitment to and advocacy for **all** people with disabilities in our state.

As the principal of Regency Park School it has been my privilege to work with the students, families, councillors, staff, broader school community and DECS to establish what it was we believed would best serve the educational needs of our current students and also the students who would attend Adelaide West Special Education Centre in the next 30 years.

We imagined what education and the world might be like. We wanted our new school to serve the students, staff and school community as well as Regency Park School had served its school communities over the previous 32 years.

We envisaged a school that would be world-class and leading edge. A school that was bright, colorful and sensitive to the needs of our students. One that offered a variety of learning spaces and play spaces, both indoors and outdoors.

We imagined sensory gardens, space for our children to plant a garden, space to play, ride bikes, use walkers, enjoy the sun or shelter from it.

We wanted our teenagers to have an opportunity to develop their skills and become more independent, to have a space of their own.

We needed a gym where the children could still play balloon soccer.

We wanted our students to have ready access to reception and the staffroom, to be able to move freely through corridors and doorways.

We needed sheltered bus and taxi areas that could accommodate a variety of vehicle heights and configurations and be flexible enough to allow for any future changes to vehicle design.

It was imperative that the students' personal care requirements were met with dignity and safety for all.

We imagined specially designed and equipped sensory rooms and a first rate library.

We wanted our students learning to be enhanced by the latest technology.

But most importantly we wanted our school to be located next to a school, with students of a similar age to ours.

Adelaide West Special Education Centre certainly lives up to our hopes and dreams.

When you first arrive at Adelaide West you can sense that there is something very special about this school. The foyer has a real WOW factor. On her first visit, Nicolette, one of our students, commented that it was just like an airport or a hotel lobby!

When we show visitors this gym they never fail to be impressed. This wonderful space has meant that students have an all weather area large enough to come together and enjoy performances or recess and lunch activities.

Students can ride bikes, watch DVDs on the massive screen, listen to music, practice walking, shoot goals, play balloon soccer and so much more. It is a wonderful teaching, learning, recreation and leisure space. It has been the central hub of the school since we first moved here on November 1st 2010.

Our teenagers love the Independent Living Unit. It is used to hold student meetings, play games, access the internet and stream video clips. Classes use the area for cooking sessions too. Students love this space.

The classrooms are filled with natural light and have an Interactive Whiteboard which can be raised and lowered for student access. Some students really enjoy using the Interactive whiteboards independently to problem solve, play games, write, draw and for cause and effect.

The smaller withdrawal rooms are all used quite differently by classes. Some are used for individual or small group work, some are used as special play areas and others are used for whole group learning.

The overhead hoist system is the first of its kind to be installed in this way in a school. It has provided a different type of learning experience for some of our students who are usually unable to move freely. One student enjoys being suspended over a tub of marbles and objects. His bare feet are able to feel different sensations. For a child who does not walk and does not ever feel pressure through his feet or legs this is quite a pleasurable and unique experience.

The overhead hoist system has allowed students to be moved easily and safely from the classroom to the personal care areas. Students enjoy the ride – another new sensation!! Less time is spent on personal care which allows more time to be spent in the classroom for teaching and learning. The personal care areas have under floor heating to ensure student comfort.

The two sensory rooms provide students with yet other learning spaces. One is bright red and is a more active space while the other is a calm blue for gentler, more sensory activities.

Students enjoy going to the library, listening to stories and borrowing books and toys. It is a beautiful bright space.

The playground provides many different learning and leisure opportunities, including new play equipment, a trampoline, a tunnel and water features.

Students have already stewed apples picked from our trees and enjoyed strawberries from the garden. The sensory gardens offer a range of different smelling herbs and different textured plants. The magnolia trees have already bloomed.

The amphitheatre is ideal for outdoor performances.

At Adelaide West Special Education Centre learning is centred around individual student goals. However we ensure that all students have one goal which encourages the development of communication and one goal which encourages physical wellbeing and movement.

Through programs such as the Intensive Interaction program and the Mobility Opportunities Via Education program students grow in their awareness of themselves and others.

At Adelaide West we have ample space and diversity to successfully pursue these goals for all of our children.

We are fortunate to have a highly skilled, talented and dedicated staff, for which I am very grateful.

Whilst this school is absolutely spectacular in so many ways, the best part about being here is being right next door to another school community with students who are the same age as ours and the contact and friendship that that will bring.

I invite you to view a short DVD made by the students and staff in class 6 about our move.

Thank you to the students and staff from class 6.

Thank you to Carol van Der Wijngaart, Niki Takos and all staff, past and present, for your input, suggestions and tireless work during the relocation and the establishment of this school.

Thank you to Leon Morrish and members of the Governing Council for your ongoing guidance and support.

Thank you to our families for entrusting us with your beautiful children. We are privileged.

Thank you also to the people from DECS, Pinnacle, Spotless, and Hansen Yuncken, who have worked so hard to get us where we are today.

Thank you for our beautiful school – you have fulfilled our vision.