



Research on Universal Design of Shared Educational Campuses in Ireland

The aim of this work was to carry out research into national and international best practice in relation to Shared Educational Campuses and to engage with key stakeholders in order to investigate how Universal Design can inform the planning and design of such campuses in Ireland for people of any age, size, ability or disability.

The research adopted the following broad definition of a Shared Educational Campus:

A shared educational campus exists when two or more schools share an existing or new site and facilities in a meaningful manner. Typically, the site or facilities will also be shared with, or co-owned by the local community.

Considering the nature of a Shared Educational Campus, it is likely that people of various ages, sizes, abilities, disabilities and educational needs may share the campus at any one time. Therefore a Shared Educational Campus must respond to this complexity and meet a multitude of user needs. Consequently a Shared Educational Campus will benefit from a Universal Design approach which will create an environment that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Adopting a **Universal Design approach** to design for diversity and inclusion for students, staff and local community will provide a valuable contribution to the national dialogue, and inform the implementation of government policy for Shared Educational Campuses that fully consider **human diversity**. Campus layout, size and scale should be child friendly and create a sense of community, while **architectural form and materials** should reinforce the child-friendly nature of the Shared Educational Campus.

Highlights from the research

Internationally the concept of sharing educational facilities on one campus is gaining momentum. Findings from the literature review, stakeholder engagement and case studies reveal many advantages in Shared Educational Campuses for the diversity of users including greater integration across age groups, and between mainstream and special educational needs. There are also efficiencies achieved through the integration of various educational and community facilities on one site.

A Shared Educational Campus should be centrally located and well integrated within the community it serves. Local context and community needs should be carefully considered before a Shared Educational Campus approach is adopted. Bringing together different educational or social communities on one campus has challenges and it will require new management structures, which must be carefully considered in the planning and design process of a Shared Educational Campus.

The Universal Design process should be used to frame an integrated response to the above issues in terms of strategic planning at the national/regional level, master planning at the community level, and the design of specific site features at the campus/school level. Part of this process is the full engagement of key stakeholders from across all sectors of the community in the long term strategic and integrated planning and design phases.

Background

In Ireland 'The Programme for Government 2011-2016' promotes the Shared Educational Campus approach in areas of demographic growth. The 'Fingal Schools Model' provides an integrated strategy for the delivery of enhanced education and community facilities. Beyond these specific models there are many existing and recently completed school sites which combine a number of schools and often provide the community with facilities such as a sports hall or rooms for evening classes.

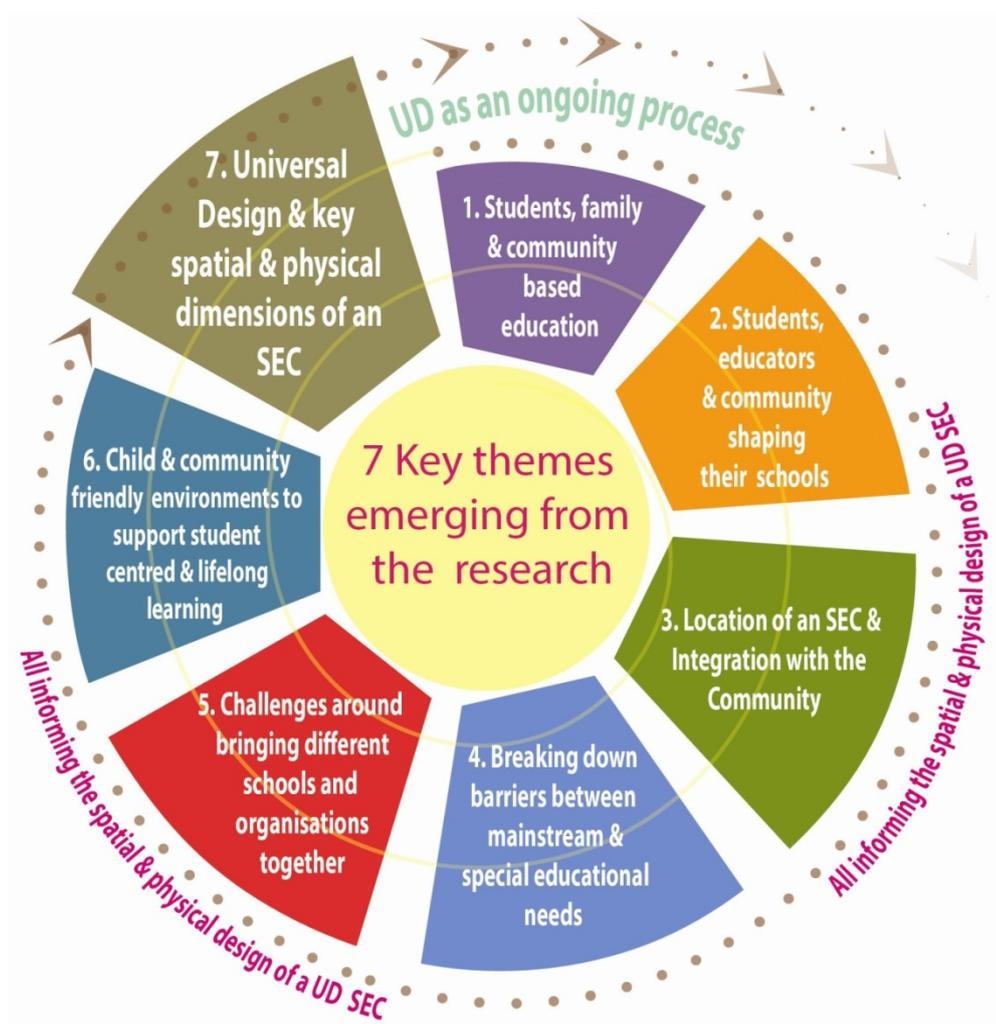
Internationally, Northern Ireland has seen the establishment of Shared Educational Campuses and there is a proposal to build a further ten Shared Educational Campuses. In the UK, the Department for Education and Skills has developed a model where primary and secondary schools are funded to provide extracurricular services to students and the wider community. In the USA, the Full Service Community Schools programme combine after school services, real world learning opportunities, early childhood education, and health services for children and adults in the community. Also in the USA, multiplex Schools or co-located educational facilities involve a number of smaller schools sharing a site where each school is operated independently and has its own principal and staff.

A summary of the key findings and recommendations

Following a review of international and national literature, stakeholder interviews, workshops, and the examination of various case studies, 7 key themes were drawn out from the research process. These themes were organised in a sequence that progress towards, provide objectives for, and underpin the seventh and final theme titled ‘Universal Design & key spatial and physical dimensions of a Shared Educational Campus’. This last theme outlines the main planning issues and a range of practical design features that should be examined as part of a Universal Design Shared Educational Campus.

7 Key themes from the Research.

This diagram shows the 7 Key Themes from the Research. Further information on the Key Themes is shown on the next page.



Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations

For student, family and community-based educational provision, schools should first and foremost serve the **best interest of the child, the family and the community**, while facilitating age-appropriate, student-centred and lifelong education that is an extension of the home and a preparation for life.

It is recommended to use the **Universal Design** process as a participatory framework for stakeholder engagement including a **'briefing process'** to provide a structured approach to ensuring that key school and community needs and preferences are identified and integrated with each other. Stakeholder participation throughout the planning and design process includes specific roles for community forums, student, parent, staff and design champions.

The **geographical location** of a Shared Educational Campus in relation to the catchment area is critical to its success. Generally it should be located centrally within the community to ensure community integration and ease of access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. **Discussion and agreement with the local community** is required about where to locate schools and how best to integrate them into the community in a meaningful and sustainable way. The benefits of locating schools within a compact, mixed-use and diverse community, in terms of residential lifecycle and the associated lifecycle of schools, must be considered. Consideration can be given for the Shared Educational Campus to provide facilities that are lacking in the community, while at the same time utilising community services or resources for educational purposes.

At a **local authority level**, suitably located sites with appropriate site conditions should be identified as a development priority. All relevant school location guidance pertaining to local authority **Development Plans, Local Area Plans**, or those contained within the various national urban design or planning guidelines, should be fully implemented. If necessary, additional measures should be put in place to enforce these policies.

To break down barriers between mainstream and special educational needs, both schools should be located on the one campus, or in close proximity, to encourage greater integration.

This would be enhanced by an **overall management structure** with a shared vision and objectives for the campus to ensure the maximisation of key resources and provide shared play and social spaces.

It must be recognised that there will be challenges around **bringing different schools & organisations together**, and around the introduction of new management structures. There will also be the challenges around different age groups sharing facilities. It will be important to identify **appropriate new structures** for overall campus management and integration, while maintaining individual school identity and autonomy. **Legislation** around litigation, liability, and insurance issues that impact on a child's freedom in terms of physical activity and natural play should be examined.

In summary

This research has shown the benefits of considering the planning and design of a Shared Educational Campus at national and regional levels. It should also be considered at the community and campus /school level to include access, understanding and usability for all people regardless of their age, size ability or disability. Critical to its success will be an appropriate location with access for the entire community. The campus approach, boundary conditions and entry points should encourage integration with the community, whilst a balance must be struck between security and safety, and community integration.

Universal Design planning and design should be considered in relation to campus size, campus layout, key external spaces and architectural design. The research shows the benefits of providing shared external spaces between mainstream and special schools on the campus in helping to break down barriers and enable greater integration. Dedicated, carefully designed spaces must be provided for the inclusion of specific users, and to ensure that moving around the campus is easy for all people. This can be achieved by providing circulation routes that are accessible, easily understood and usable regardless of age, size, ability or disability. An integrated approach to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is essential, and in terms of sustainable design, using the economy of scale associated with the Shared Educational Campus approach will help to fully exploit sustainable energy technologies.

The study also supports the development of national Universal Design guidelines for the planning and design of Shared Educational Campuses in Ireland that may form part of the Department of Education and Skills School Design Guidance documents. The Universal Design guidance should refer to issues such as: stakeholder participation and the briefing process; suitable site, sustainable location and site conditions; community access; approach, boundary conditions and entry/exit; campus size, layout and design of external spaces; campus circulation; ICT; and sustainable design.

Research methodology

The research methodology set out to address all key issues through direct engagement with a diverse range of users, designers, providers, managers and regulators. This helped to inform and ground the entire research process. The key components to this research project include:

- **A review of the literature:** This research required a cross-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach which examined pedagogical practice and educational guidance. It also had to consider national and international best practice educational design in conjunction with strategic and integrated planning, paying attention not only to sustainable planning practices, but also to national, regional and local planning guidance. To comprehend these issues, the literature included peer-reviewed material from textbooks, journals, and conferences (approximately 80 documents), and non-peer-reviewed material (over 140 sources) such as design guidance documents, reports or government policy.
- **Case studies of Shared Educational Campuses or similar in Ireland and internationally:** The Irish case studies were visited as part of the research while the international case studies were drawn from the available literature.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** A central component of the research was the engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. This was to ensure that the research and recommendations addressed the actual needs of people who would use a Shared Educational Campus and to understand the complex issues associated with these campuses. This involved one-to-one interviews with a wide range of individuals and key stakeholder organisations. The findings from the literature review and the interviews were presented at stakeholder workshops to inform attendees about the main issues and capture feedback.

This research was undertaken by TrinityHaus, Trinity College Dublin and A&D Wejchert & Partners Architects, on behalf of the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA).

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