



Speech by

# Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard Tuesday, 6 June 2006

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Prep Year

**Hon. RJ WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (9.59 am): Our government is building a modern, responsive education system that equips our young people for the challenges of the 21st century. One of our most significant reforms is the introduction next year of the prep year. This will ensure that Queensland children have the same educational opportunities as children in other parts of Australia.

Starting full-time education is a big step in a child's life. It is also a big change for mum and dad, so it is not surprising that we have had many queries from parents. When we introduce prep next year universally across the state, children born between 1 January and 30 June 2002, that is, turning five in the first half of next year, will be eligible to attend prep in 2007. Those children who were born in 2001, that is, turning five this year, are the final group of Queensland students attending preschool this year. They will go straight into year 1 next year.

There are some parents of children born in the latter half of 2001, that is, whose children turn five in the latter part of this year, who feel that their child could be better suited to stay a year in prep next year rather than start year 1. Parents' opinions are important to us and we will certainly take that into account as a key consideration in deciding whether their child enters year 1 next year or their entry is delayed and they have a year in prep.

Parents may want to talk to their preschool, creche, kindergarten and early education teachers about the best educational path for their child. Let me reiterate that there is no need for parents to seek costly opinions from professionals. However, we will take into account any advice from preschool teachers or other professionals familiar with the child's development. We have asked parents, particularly those who want to delay their child's entry into year 1, to meet with their local school principal as soon as possible and complete an application process. We want to receive these applications by 20 June to ensure that there is ample time to assess the best education option for the child. A final decision will be made by the end of August and it will be discussed with parents so they have certainty about the appropriate educational pathway for their child next year.

I am also aware of reported concerns about the possibility of composite prep and year 1 classes. I can advise that of the 96 schools involved in our prep year trial so far, 16 have been running composite prep-year 1 classes. Only one of these schools is in the Brisbane metropolitan area. These decisions about whether a prep class will be combined with another year level will be made at the school level based on what approach optimises the educational opportunities of students. Some school communities positively believe that composite classes are a distinct benefit for some students. Indeed, at Kimberley Park State School, in the electorate of the ever-diligent member for Springwood, the parents certainly believe that their prep-year 1 class trial has been an outstanding success and a real advantage for their students.

We will not know of every situation where composite prep-year 1 classes are likely to occur until all enrolments for 2007 are completed in February next year. Nevertheless, I can assure all honourable members that in any situation where a composite prep-year 1 class is likely to occur, principals and teachers will ensure that no child is disadvantaged.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. R Welford titled 'Prep Year'.