



Speech by


Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Tuesday, 25 October 2011

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Early Years Education

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Minister for Education and Industrial Relations) (9.48 am): Labor understands the importance of education, particularly in the early years of learning. It is Labor that is currently rolling out a massive program to make kindergarten available to all Queensland children by 2014, investing up to \$321 million to build up to 240 new kindies across the state. It is Labor that is striving to better meet the needs of working parents by funding quality kindergarten programs in long day care centres. It was Labor that introduced full-time prep in 2007, making an extra year of formal learning available at the start of a child's educational journey before they enter their first year of school at year 1.

The early years of learning continue to be a top educational priority for the Bligh Labor government. The *A flying start for Queensland children* white paper, released in June, flagged the government's intention to recognise prep as the first year of school. I am pleased to confirm to the House that prep will be recognised as the first year of schooling in all state schools from 2012. This means that, when a student enrolls in a state school, they will be required to do prep as their first year of formal education. By confirming this approach we are making it clear to all parents that it is our ambition that all Queensland children should benefit from 13 years of schooling—from prep to year 12. This is particularly important given that the new Australian curriculum is due to come into effect from 2012. The Australian curriculum includes prep and it is vital that Queensland's children do not miss out on this important foundation year of their education.

I would like to note that prep will continue to be non-compulsory as we already have a state-wide participation rate of more than 97 per cent of eligible five-year-old children. This figure is higher than the enrolment rate in Tasmania, which is the only state that makes prep compulsory. Obviously, prep enrolments will be closely monitored and if they start to fall the government will reconsider the issue of compulsory enrolment. The recognition of prep as the first year of school continues this government's focus on education in the early years. Our initiatives in prep and kindergarten will ensure that all Queensland children continue to receive the best possible start to learning and life. It is Labor that is the party of equality and opportunity for all Queenslanders, particularly children.