



Speech By  
**Tim Mander**


**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Record of Proceedings, 19 April 2016

**MOTION: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

**Early Childhood Development Programs**

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (6.00 pm): I move—

That this House:

1. notes the importance of early childhood development programs in providing an education to students with a diagnosed or suspected disability in the years before prep; and
2. commits to allowing parents and students the ability to access both the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the state funded Early Childhood Development Program beyond 2020.

The Early Childhood Development Program is a program that provides specialised support for children with special needs in their kindergarten year. It is an incredibly effective program that has been a godsend for desperate families for many years. For many families it has been the support mechanism that they have so desperately required. For others it is the early intervention model that enabled their child to transition to mainstream education which was impossible before entering this program. Unfortunately, this program's future is doomed under this government. The minister has announced that this program will be phased out as the NDIS is implemented. This decision by the minister will have disastrous consequences. Let me outline those.

Children who have a diagnosed disability will be picked up by the NDIS. It will provide support for these children in mainstream kindergartens. Parents tell me that whilst they welcome the NDIS they want their children to continue to attend an ECDP—an environment that is staffed by professional specialists and providers. It also provides a safe and comfortable learning experience for their children. Mainstream kindergarten is not a realistic option for them no matter what support they get from the NDIS.

The second major impact is that there are many children in this program who have undiagnosed learning difficulties or a suspected disability which may not be detected for years. There are a large number in this program who will not be picked up by the NDIS. Hundreds of children who are in this category and currently receiving the benefits of ECDP will fall through the cracks and will have no place to go for their kindergarten year. NDIS will provide therapeutic benefits to eligible children, but it was never meant to fund the education of these same children. This is a state government responsibility.

The response from parents to the cutting of this program has been simply overwhelming. Over 30,000 people have signed a petition calling on the minister to keep the ECDPs even after the NDIS has been fully rolled out. Many of them no longer receive the benefit from ECDP but they want to speak up for the future families that will need it.

Even the Labor member for Ipswich West recognised what a great program this was and tweeted a link to the petition. Of course, that tweet did not last long once, I imagine, the minister's staff found out about it.

The Minister for Education has blamed every man and their dog for the cutting of this program. She has and no doubt will shortly blame the former LNP government, the current federal government and the NDIS program. What this minister fails to acknowledge is that she is the Minister for Education. The future of this program falls totally under her control. The authority to continue this valuable program rests entirely in her hands.

A number of statements have been made by the minister guaranteeing that ECDPs will continue until 2020 when the transition to the NDIS will be complete. These statements have caused confusion not clarity and an enormous amount of angst for families.

There are a number of unanswered questions that these parents want answers to. Can the children who receive NDIS support packages in the future continue in ECDP? Will ECDPs be taking new enrolments from next year? Does the minister recognise that parents with children with special needs believe that this is the best place for the education of their children? These people have faced many challenges in their life. The last thing they need now is another kick in the guts.

*(Time expired)*