




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNELL

Record of Proceedings, 2 May 2018

MOTION

Early Childhood Education and Care Services, Federal Funding

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.25 pm): I move—

That this House calls upon the federal government to provide long-term funding certainty in next week's federal budget for the early childhood sector to ensure a great start for all Queensland children.

Mr Speaker, if I could just digress for one second and send my condolences to the family of the great Terry Mackenroth, his wife, Mary, and his two daughters. I know exactly what they are going through, having just recently lost my own beloved father, Salvatore Farfaglia.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to giving all Queensland children a great start. This includes universal access to high-quality kindergarten for all Queensland children in the year before school, regardless of their background or where they live. We know that children who participate in a quality kindergarten program will go on to have improved school results and better health and employment prospects.

Even the latest Gonski report, which was released this week, highlights that high-quality early childhood education sets children up for success at school, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Even though early childhood education was not in the terms of reference in Gonski, he could not but report on the benefits of early childhood education—even going further to say that investing in early childhood education is generally more effective and economic than trying to close the developmental gaps later.

That is why the Palaszczuk government is focused on ensuring Queensland children can access kindergarten, whether they live in Coolangatta or Coen, Maleny or Mackay, Birdsville or Brisbane. I am pleased to report that in 2017 more than 95 per cent of Queensland children were enrolled in a kindergarten program in the year before school. We have come a long way since 2009, when 29 per cent of Queensland children attended kindergarten in the year before school. This increase is truly one of the great public policy success stories of the past decade and it has happened because of the foresight and courage of a federal Labor government.

It was the federal Labor government which, in 2009, struck the first national partnership agreement with the states and territories to provide universal access funding for kindergarten of 15 hours per week. To continue to improve these results, we need the current federal Turnbull government to step up and fulfil its responsibilities for the early childhood sector.

At the moment, we are facing a triple whammy of funding and policy neglect from the federal government: there is no long-term national partnership funding agreement for universal access for kindergarten, there is no ongoing funding commitment for regulation of the early childhood sector, and the federal government is going ahead with child-care subsidy reforms from 1 July that will leave

low-income Queensland families out of pocket. In the federal budget next week, we need to see a long-term funding commitment for early childhood in this country. This was the No. 1 recommendation of *Lifting our game* released earlier this year as a blueprint for early childhood policy. Unfortunately, we will not be holding our breath.

In February this year the federal government announced a further one-year extension of the national partnership agreement for universal access funding for the 2019 calendar year. This is the fifth—I repeat: the fifth—short-term rollover of the national partnership agreement for universal access funding since 2009. This is no way to run a critical sector for the future of our children.

In all my discussions with stakeholders across the sector—Goodstart, C&K, Lady Gowrie, United Voice—this has been the one issue they ram home to me. We need long-term funding certainty. We cannot operate kindergarten services year to year. The sector cannot plan ahead and retain qualified and experienced staff without funding certainty.

I call on the federal government to put their money where their mouth is. This is investing in the right area. Do the right thing and fund this sector. We know it has benefits. Invest in our children as early as possible and we as Australians will reap the benefits. I urge members of this House to support the motion and once again call on the federal government to fund early childhood education.