



Speech By  
**Meaghan Scanlon**


**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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Record of Proceedings, 4 September 2018

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Early Childhood Education**

 **Ms SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (2.10 pm): I spoke in this House during my first speech about my passion for fairness, equality and social justice. I, like many of my colleagues on this side of the chamber, believe that education is one of the most powerful tools to remove inequality. A child's destiny should not be dependent on their parents' income, their postcode or their background. I am incredibly proud to be a member of a Palaszczuk government that believes that every child should have access to quality education.

We know that the early years are critical when it comes to brain development, which is why we are making a \$270 million investment in early education and care. This includes universal access to high-quality kindergarten for all Queensland children in the year before school. There is almost no end to the research that proves that children who participate in quality kindergarten programs will go on to have improved school results and better health and employment prospects. Our investment is working with over 95 per cent of Queensland children enrolled in a kindergarten program in the year before school as at 2017 in comparison with only 29 per cent of children in 2009. This increase is truly one of the great public policy success stories of the past decade. It has happened because of the foresight and courage of a federal Labor government supported by a Queensland Labor government that in 2009 struck the first national partnership agreement with the states and territories to provide universal funding for kindergarten of 15 hours per week.

To continue to improve these results, we need the current federal government to step up and fulfil its responsibilities and provide long-term funding certainty for the early childhood sector. This was the No. 1 recommendation of *Lifting our game*, released earlier this year as a blueprint for early childhood policy. At the moment the situation with the funding uncertainty means that a family with a child who is one or two does not have any guarantee of access to universal funding for kindergarten due to funding expiring next year. For some Gold Coast children, this 15 hours of kindy each week is the only time their family can afford.

As the member for Macalister pointed out during the last parliamentary sitting week, long day care rates are often over \$85 or \$100. Even with childcare subsidies, this is often out of the reach of families doing it tough in electorates like mine. Having worked in the outside school hours sector, I have seen multiple cohorts of new prep students come through. What was always clear was the difference between kids who had exposure to the social, emotional and behavioural benefits of kindy or prep readiness programs compared to those who did not. My concern is that a loss of 15 hours a week will disproportionately affect those families for whom this time represents their only access to formalised kindy programs. With the removal of this access, we are placing further barriers in front of some of our little ones who do not deserve to be left behind. This is no way to run a sector that is so critical for our future.

The federal LNP government needs to put an end to the circus in Canberra and get on with the job. People cannot operate early childhood services year to year. The sector cannot plan ahead and retain qualified and experienced staff without funding certainty. Despite some federal politicians believing that early childhood educators are merely child minders wiping noses all day, I know how influential their role is in a child's life and how much work they do planning, challenging, nurturing and educating our future leaders.

Tracey Bell is a Pacific Pines resident and director of an early childhood centre on the Gold Coast. At 32 she made the decision to enter the industry for what she thought would be a career in which she would be regarded as a professional, respected for the work that she did and able to make a difference in the lives of children. She attained a diploma and advanced diploma in child care and worked her way through the ranks from assistant to group leader and then to centre director, a position she has held for 13 years. However, the poor award rates have affected Tracey's life. As a single mother of two, she has never been able to break into the housing market.

Early childhood educators are some of the lowest paid professionals in the country, with some being paid only \$22 an hour—almost half of the national average wage. Tracey and many childhood educators from across the country will be walking off the job tomorrow for a better deal and to be paid fairly for the important work they do. Whilst I cannot be with them tomorrow, I stand here in solidarity with their fight. It is time that our country and the federal government value the early education and care sector and the educators within it.