




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Early Childhood Education

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (2.51 pm): I stand in this House to address an issue very dear to my heart, and that is the education and wellbeing of our youngest Queenslanders. In my first speech here I spoke about the number of vulnerable children in our communities, those who are in danger of being left behind, and I am proud to stand here as part of a Palaszczuk Labor government that has a stated clear priority of giving every Queenslander a great start in life. There is almost no end to the research that shows that the early years—that is, the pre-prep years—is when the most exponential growth in brain development occurs. The role of structured early childhood education is a major determining factor of success in later schooling, educational opportunities and employment.

As a parent of two kids currently in the early childhood education system, I acknowledge the work that our early childhood educators do. We are moving, albeit slowly, from the perception of our educators merely as childminders and nappy changers. Our early childhood educators plan, build, engage, cuddle, lead, correct and challenge our kids. They are truly some of the most influential people in this state. Speaking to primary school principals in my area, I have been made acutely aware of the challenges that our prep transition officers and teachers face. I am advised that our prep teachers are often educating young Queenslanders who have never had a book read to them or have never held a pencil before starting school. The difference in exposure to kindy or pre-prep readiness programs is startling, particularly when one considers what the research shows us of their projected later outcomes.

It is with sadness that I report that in my home city of Logan, and certainly concentrated in parts of my electorate, this issue of disparate access to early childhood programs is a concern. Data on Logan shows some of the lowest uptake in structured early childhood education in the state. When combined with some of the lowest immunisation rates and child health clinics, this paints a very complex situation among some of our kids. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Logan Together team which, with the support of the state government and other key organisations such as Griffith University, are working to address these much larger problems.

Recent federal changes to childcare subsidies should have been about ensuring greater access and affordability of early childhood education for all Australian families. Personally, I am more than pleased that the changes have made the cost of child care for my family certainly affordable, but I am pretty sure that it was not my wage bracket that required the greatest amount of relief—but thank you nonetheless. What is concerning though is the lack of certainty and ongoing funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. The national partnership agreement funding provides families with 15 hours a week of accredited kindy programs in the year before prep. This was to ensure that all kids Queensland wide, regardless of their family income or circumstances, could access what we know to be incredible life-changing, structured learning kindy programs.

The 2018 federal government budget refuses to fund this program beyond 2020. This means that our kids who are currently one or two do not have any guarantee of access to the kindy programs that our kids in Logan desperately need. Our families need this and they need the certainty. For many Logan families these 15 hours of kindy are the only ones that they can afford. Long day care rates are often over \$85 or \$100 a day. Even with childcare subsidies this is often out of the reach of many Logan families. My biggest fear is that the loss of the 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 them to help them improve their life outcomes.

I call on the federal government and the Prime Minister—whomever that may be in the weeks ahead—to continue to fund the national partnership agreement beyond 2020. Not only that, I implore them to consider expanding the funding to include the two years before prep. The money that we spend in early education and childhood development today is going to save us money in the long run. This is not a disputed fact. The research is there. We just need governments that are willing to invest in our best and most valuable resource, and that is our young children.