



Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MACALISTER**

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## ADJOURNMENT

### World Autism Awareness Day

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (7.27 pm): Today is World Autism Awareness Day where everyone is encouraged to ‘go blue for autism’. I note that significant landmarks in Brisbane are lit up blue tonight. I could use this speech to rattle off a whole heap of facts about autism spectrum disorder—the symptoms, the prevalence, the support systems available—but I thought I would share with members the impact of a diagnosis.

It has been almost a year since my son’s ASD was confirmed. Like most parents, we had seen the signs, the symptoms, but they could easily be attributed to other things and I had heard them all—‘Boys always take longer to develop,’ or ‘Some kids appreciate routine more than others.’ I could and would as a parent make excuses for everything. He had had more surgeries, more invasive procedures and more blood transfusions in the first three months of his life than I have had in a lifetime. His first 12 months featured regular cranial scans to track his brain haemorrhages. Of course he was going to have delayed development. He generally caught up with his milestones, even if they were six months, 12 months or 18 months delayed. He got there, right? ‘He’ll be fine’—but his prep year was fast approaching and I had heard all the stories of parents who had missed the window of having their child diagnosed in order to access support at school. I had to face up to what I had likely been denying for some time.

As a family we had been bruised and battered, literally and figuratively, attending to a boy who was at once charming and affectionate but could resort to a physical outburst once his limit had been reached. Shopping expeditions are fraught, large public events are generally a no-go and routine is king, even if it is not particularly doable in a shift-working household like ours.

I honestly do not know what the future holds for him, but I tell members what I do know. We now have a team around us—a speech therapist, an occupational therapist, we have access to a psychologist specialising in children with autism and he has assistance in the classroom. These were things we did not have a year ago. A diagnosis—while unleashing a torrent of parental emotions—has already brought with it the interventions he so desperately needs.

He is in a mainstream classroom and he is having daily interactions with teachers and his peers. The first few weeks were a bit rough. I will not lie; there was a lot of bribery involved just to get him into the classroom. Some days are tougher than others in ways we can never predict, but his vocabulary has grown, his sentences are longer, most times we understand what he is saying and he can mostly write his name in a manner that we can recognise. I table a self-portrait, age 5—something he could not do six months ago.

*Tabled paper.* Child’s drawings [516](#).

I urge any parent to ask the question, particularly when their child's teacher or principal approaches them with concerns. They only have their child's best interests at heart. I often speak to the school principals in my area about how many verified children they have, but the hardest work is with the unverified ones. Conversations with parents are difficult, but I urge parents to ask the question. Do yourself a favour and get the help.