



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2022

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Kindergarten; Weather Events, School Closures**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (9.52 am): I am delighted to join the Premier today in announcing the most significant reform and boost to kindergarten funding in Queensland in over a decade. Over the next five years, the Palaszczuk government will invest more than \$1 billion, which will help around 40,000 kids to access more affordable—or free—quality kindy. That is nearly 70 per cent of families who have kids at kindy who will benefit from this landmark announcement. Kindy will be free for around 14,000 of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and kids.

The Palaszczuk government has committed to ongoing funding after those five years, so kindy in Queensland will be changed for the better. The increased funding is directed at four key priority areas. In regard to affordability, around \$615 million will reduce out-of-pocket costs for low-to-middle income families who need it the most. This is going to make a huge difference. For example, there are around 13,000 families who will save between \$16 and \$80 a week for the 40 weeks a year their kids are at kindy. That means savings of between \$634 and \$3,200 per annum. As I have said, there will be 40,000 families in total that get reduced fees or totally free kindy every single year.

We will look at the educational needs. Our successful Kindy Uplift pilot, which provides extra personalised support to kids that need it most, will get \$33 million to expand into an extra 530 long day care kindy settings. This brings the total number of settings receiving support to 930. Disability and inclusion will receive \$95 million in increased funding, extending disability funding support to the long day care sector for the first time. Remote and regional will get \$38.5 million for 300 services in remote and regional communities to attract and retain teachers through measures like accommodation support and relocation costs. I know this is a big issue for the sector. These are game-changing reforms that will make a real and tangible difference to the lives of Queensland families.

The department has briefed the sector—and it was great to catch up with them yesterday afternoon—on these changes and will consult in detail as part of a comprehensive and coordinated implementation plan ready for 2023. The sector has warmly welcomed the changes. I thank Louise Jackson—who sent a lovely email yesterday—the CEO of Lady Gowrie Queensland, who said the announcement was monumental. She was thrilled to be part of making history, working with a government that is taking the lead and putting our children first. Thank you, Louise. She is here in the gallery today along with Majella Fitzsimmons from the Australian Childcare Alliance Queensland, Sandra Cheeseman from the Kindergarten Association and Kellie Perren from Goodstart Early Learning. I welcome them in the gallery. It was great catching up with them yesterday afternoon. I thank them for all the excellent work they have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

As the Labor minister for early childhood I am proud to deliver this announcement today—not only increased funding but funding that is clearly targeted to assist those who need it the most. This is what Labor governments do—investing in our future, investing in education—because we know the lifelong benefits of kindy. I look forward to working with the early childhood sector to implement the new package for 2023. Our kids deserve nothing less.

As the Premier has announced, there are seven schools currently closed due to flooding. They are in the Gympie, Nicklin and Noosa electorates. We are keeping an eye on further necessary closures due to rising creeks and floodwaters. My department is organising a briefing among themselves, me, SES and other necessary bodies in order that we get a clear picture and get out notices as soon as possible. Our website will be updated so we can inform families what will happen, say, tomorrow or the rest of this week in relation to schools opening or closing. Clearly, some schools may not be flooded but to access them would be very dangerous in terms of crossing creeks, flooded lakes, roads and the like. Early notification of the impact on schools is what we are aiming for. It is better to be safe. We want to make sure that we wish the best for all the schools and all the families. We will get information to them as soon as we possibly can.