



Speech By  
**Melissa McMahon**


**MEMBER FOR MACALISTER**

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## ADJOURNMENT

### World Autism Understanding Day

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (6.09 pm): I rise to make my annual contribution in relation to World Autism Understanding Day on this Sunday, 2 April. On this day landmarks will be lit up blue to help raise awareness.

I reflect that I have made this speech every year since my son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in 2018. During these speeches I have outlined my family's journey raising a child with autism. I note that what was originally World Autism Day Awareness Day—and is still considered as such by the UN—in Australia we have adopted World Autism Understanding Day. The theme promoted by Autism Spectrum Australia this year is: 'If you find out I'm autistic, this is what I want you know ...'.

In line with that, instead of outlining how our family is progressing, the constant interactions with teachers and the school and therapists, and continuing our vast disappointment that is the NDIS, I thought I would give words to my boy this year. So I asked him what his day was like and what he wanted people to know about him. Getting him to talk about himself was no easy feat—trains would have been easier. He does not like school. He likes the learning, occasionally, and when the task is in his wheelhouse, with a bit of prompting, he can be the most productive student in the class. He is a monarchist and loves drawing pictures of the English flag and loves corgis.

His memory is not that great. If you ask him out of the blue who his friends are at school he has no recollection of what their names are. However, when he recalls a memory of them playing, his details are amazing. He does not feel safe at school. He is different. He is targeted. Kids in his age cohort like poking a bear while he tries to regulate his behaviour. It is not always possible in conflict situations. He spends most of his time by himself, walking in circles or running away from other kids. He is trying. He is trying to reach out and make friends, but he does not always read the situation, the person or get the response right. He is often rebuffed, sometimes violently.

He likes things that other kids do not. He loves trains—steam trains in particular. He realised his life dream when he got to visit the National Railway Museum in York last year—even if the Flying Scotsman was not there. He does not like being picked on because he likes Thomas the Tank Engine and that he is called names.

As in previous years, I would normally table a self-portrait of Ronan, now aged nine. Unfortunately, I do not have it with me today. He loves his curly hair. Thankfully for everyone, in this picture he is actually wearing clothes, unlike most days at home.

More importantly, I look forward to one day acknowledging not just World Autism Understanding Day here in Australia but World Autism Acceptance Day, just like they do in the UK. I look forward to updating the House next year on my boy.