



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Primary Language Disorder

SPEECH

Monday, 11 February 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker O'Dwyer, Kelly, MP

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Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (20:07): I am very pleased to stand in support of this motion put forward by my good friend and colleague the member for Ryan and seconded by my other good friend and colleague the member for Aston, and I join with those across the chamber here tonight to commend the member for Ryan for bringing forward this motion to the House.

Primary language disorder is a developmental disorder that affects many children across Australia. Children with PLD, as it is known, do not develop the ability to use or understand spoken or written language at the same rate as their peers. By 12 months of age, a child without PLD would be saying their first words such as 'mama' and 'dada'. However, sufferers of PLD may not be able to say their first words until they are three years of age. This has several negative implications on the child's development, and children with PLD often experience learning difficulties, social isolation, and behavioural problems. In some cases, PLD can affect the child's coordination and fine motor movements.

While there is no cure for PLD, it has been shown that early intervention greatly improves the child's ability to communicate and interact with others. If sufferers of PLD do not receive the early attention they require, their speech or language disability impairment may become more profound and have a serious impact on their ability to learn and interact with others in the years to come.

This often makes mainstream schooling difficult, and very frustrating not only for the child but also for their family, as adequate assistance is not always available. Despite the impact that PLD has on a child's ability to learn and interact with others, sufferers are not eligible for additional funding under the government's Better Start for Children with a Disability program. The Better Start initiative provides funding to children who have been diagnosed with one of 13 specific disability types prior to their sixth birthday, and this is not one of them.

As the member for Ryan has pointed out, in her electorate there is some hope for parents who have children suffering with PLD: the Glenleighden School in Brisbane, which has been teaching children with PLD for the past 30 years. In my own electorate of Higgins, for more than 39 years the Currajong School has offered specialist support for students with spectrum disorder associated with social and behavioural problems. Currajong has a specialist support staff that includes a psychologist, a speech pathologist and an occupational therapist, all of whom work closely with teaching staff to ensure the best outcomes for each student. Every student has learning or behavioural goals that the staff and family work toward achieving. I have visited the school and seen the very dramatic impact that a specialist learning environment can have on children with behavioural and social issues and with such learning difficulties as PLD. I have sat with parents who have told me how these schools have helped their children to achieve their educational and personal potential.

There are significant problems, as we all know, with disability funding. We know that disability funding is different in each and every state. The hope that somehow disability funding will be solved by the Gonski recommendations is just that—a hope. We have no detail currently as to how it might apply. The coalition's policy at the last election was to have an education card that would not discriminate between children who went to a government school and those who went to an independent school. The funding would follow the student so that parents could have choice as to where they sent their child to school to ensure that it was the best possible environment for them. We on this side want a learning environment where it is possible for children with PLD and other issues to receive targeted assistance for their conditions not only at school but in the years beyond that and for parents to receive the right and appropriate support. I commend the motion that the member for Ryan has brought before this House. It is a critically important issue.