

Quality Education for Children with ASD



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Quality Education for Children with ASD

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic entitlement for all children.

The Liberal Party believes that all students should be able to receive a quality education which meets their individual needs and supports a positive learning experience.

Quality education services need to embrace the diversity of student abilities, interests and learning styles. Children with disability, in particular, are likely to benefit from an education sector which is flexible and able to tailor services to students.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a particular group of students who often need more focussed, distinctive supports.

Unfortunately, Labor has refused to respond to these needs. For many parents there is little or no choice regarding their child's education and many children are not receiving the quality of education they deserve.

It is time for a new approach in South Australia.



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Shadow Minister for Education



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Quality Education for Children with ASD

A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

The Need for Quality Education for Children With ASD

The Liberal Party believes that all children have a right to a quality education, an education that meets the individual personality, learning style and support needs of the child.

In particular, providing children with disability with quality education involves providing a flexible range of learning strategies, environments and supports which can be tailored to the needs of the student.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) – including both autism and Asperger syndrome - are pervasive developmental disorders characterised by significant impairments in communication and socialisation, and restricted and repetitive patterns of interest and activity.

Each person with ASD presents differently. Their behaviours can vary as they grow and develop, experience different environments and respond to situations in their daily life. The behaviours can be complex and challenging.

Providing tailored education and support will maximise the education benefit for both the child with ASD and their fellow students.

A recent analysis of Australian Government Centrelink data suggested that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is present across Australia in 1 in every 160 children aged between 6 -12 years, making it the most common disability for children in Australia. In 2008-09 alone, 445 South Australian school-age children were diagnosed with ASD - another 204 under 6.

Providing Parents with Choice

For a child with ASD, education will only be effective if services are sufficiently flexible to meet the unique personality, learning style and support needs of the child.

Parents should have the opportunity to choose the education setting which best suits the needs of their child – including within and between the government and non-government sectors.

For many students with disabilities a mainstream class setting, sometimes with additional support, offers the most positive education experience.

For other students, their needs may best be met by special classes or units within mainstream schools with specialist teachers and additional support.

Similarly, in some instances, specialised schools can offer more appropriate supports and cater to students with a range of disabilities.

Whatever the individual needs of the child, parents should be given the opportunity to make choices.

Quality Education for Children with ASD

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN WITH ASD

There is a clear need in South Australia for more ASD-specific education services for students with ASD and an increased range of alternative options.

The Liberal Party believes that a key first step to facilitate the development of a full range of services over time is to establish an ASD-specific school in metropolitan Adelaide.

An ASD-specific school would offer benefits such as ASD-sensitive classroom design, improved student-teacher ratios, and a curriculum and teaching methods particularly appropriate for students with ASD.

Over time, the school would develop as a base for the delivery of ASD-specific education services throughout the state, through its own classes, as a feeder school to other schools and as an outreach service to mainstream schools, special schools and the community.

The ASD-specific school could also provide a base for professional development for teachers.

Under the Liberal plan, children with ASD will have a range of education options to support them to achieve their full potential and parents will have genuine choices.

A State Liberal Government will:

- ensure that the right of every child to a quality education is recognised and respected.
- develop a plan to deliver ASD-focussed education services across South Australia. The plan will foster a range of educational opportunities for students with disability, including supported participation in mainstream classes, special classes and units in mainstream schools, and special schools.
- establish an ASD-specific school in South Australia to provide ASD-focussed educational services and support a range of alternative options available to parents.
- establish a steering committee including parents and other stakeholders to develop the framework for and oversee the establishment of the ASD-specific school.
- develop governance arrangements for an ASD-specific school which maximise opportunities for parents to be involved in the operation and direction of the school.