

21 June 2017

MEDIA STATEMENT

Statement by Dr James Morton, Chairman, AEIOU Foundation

Re: *'Pauline Hanson says autistic kids should be removed from mainstream classes'* **The Courier-Mail 21 June 2017**

Today One Nation Leader Senator Pauline Hanson told The Senate, “we should get rid’ of autistic children from mainstream classrooms” (The Courier-Mail). This comment is broad and provocative, but Senator Hanson has raised an issue that needs to be discussed.

The problem Senator Hanson is referring to is that there is a lack of investment in early intervention, there is under-investment in teacher training and a lack of resources in schools.

While some children with autism will succeed in a mainstream setting, there are risks in a global view which prioritises mainstream schooling above the safety and wellbeing of these children and their ability to learn in that environment.

To succeed at school, children with autism need to receive quality, evidence-based early intervention. This means at least 20 hours of transdisciplinary therapy and education each week for two years, where they develop communication, social, play and pre-academic skills, along with self-help skills. They need support to transition to their next learning environment, and teachers need adequate training and resources to support these children to learn and develop to their full capacity.

The NDIS needs to objectively assess diagnoses, ascertain severity and provide appropriate levels of funding for early intervention for children with moderate to severe autism. Simply, the NDIS must invest in these children when they are little. We know this, because we have been successfully supporting young children with autism for 12 years and the benefits are profound.

There are discrepancies in funding between families under the NDIS, particularly in different states such as Queensland and South Australia, where families are struggling to receive adequate funding to access appropriate intervention for their child’s needs. This must be addressed, reducing the burden on families and schools and ensuring every child with autism has the best chance of succeeding in an inclusive environment.

About AEIOU Foundation:

AEIOU Foundation is one of Australia’s leading providers of early intervention for children with autism who are aged 2-6 years. Our evidence-based program supports children to develop essential life skills, fostering greater independence, confidence and inclusion.

The full-time program is delivered by a transdisciplinary team comprised of behaviour therapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, teachers and educators.

Along with supporting the individual needs of each child, families receive regular training and tools to achieve therapy goals in the home and broader community.

AEIOU Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation, operating across nine centres in Queensland and South Australia with a national expansion program underway.