



Sunday, 13 November 2022

FIGHTING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY AND THEIR FAMILIES

Too many parents of children with disability feel like they're navigating a system that has been set up to fail kids and their families.

They face an unrelenting fight just to make sure their children grow up happy and healthy – and they're often so busy fighting, they miss out on the joy of seeing their kids be kids.

It shouldn't need to be this hard for families.

That's why a re-elected Andrews Labor Government will deliver a \$207 million package that will transform our specialist schools – and with it, the lives of their students, carers and families.

It's a package that has been designed every step of the way with the parents who have had to navigate the system tirelessly for years, to make sure families don't have to continue the same struggle.

And it builds on \$3 billion worth of investment the Labor Government has already delivered for inclusive education – an upgrade to every single specialist school in our state, more support for students in the classroom and facilities so every child gets the chance to play, learn and grow, no matter their needs.

Parents told us one of their biggest challenges is finding outside hours or holiday care for their kids – and if they can find a service at all, it's rarely affordable.

We've been piloting outside hours care in five specialist schools across Victoria – and the results are clear. Kids showed an improvement in their educational and emotional outcomes, parents reported improved wellbeing, and 92 per cent of mums and dads had either taken up, or were planning to, extra work or training.

A re-elected Labor Government will extend outside hours care to every single specialist school in our state – with the next 25 rolling out from 2024, giving kids the extra learning and social connection they need, and parents the respite they deserve.

Families also told us how tricky it is to juggle multiple health appointments with school – so we'll work with all our special schools to create dedicated, onsite spaces for allied health appointments.

It's a simple fix, but one that will give families back precious time in their weeks to spend together.

Nine years of a Liberal Government in Canberra has seen the NDIS eroded piece by piece, losing the families it was created to help in the depths of the system.

It's why we'll introduce NDIS Navigators into all 89 specialist schools – employed by the Victorian Government, but working for families to help navigate the system and get their kids the care they deserve.

We'll help make sure there are enough allied healthcare workers in regional Victoria to serve the community – with 1000 scholarships to attract speech pathologists, occupational therapists and disability workers to regional areas.

We know the transition from high school to further education can be daunting for students with disability - so we'll invest \$8.2 million to support TAFEs to employ 16 transition officers who will work directly with secondary schools to help students navigate their next chapter.

The package includes a lot of other things – big and small, but all things families have told us will make a huge difference to their kids.

More extracurricular activities to make school fun. More aqua-therapy pools in special schools. More therapy animals for all-important cuddles and companionship. Software to help non-verbal kids express themselves.

It's these things that are all at risk under Matthew Guy's Liberals – who, if given the chance, would go the same way as their mates in the Morrison Government and consign too many kids with disability to be numbers lost in an exhausting system.

Most importantly, Labor will make sure that we're not just honouring our pledges to these kids and their families – we're improving on them each and every day.

We'll move our conversations with parents out of makeshift meeting rooms, and into the light of a full Advisory Council – the Premier's Advisory Council.

It'll mean the voices of parents, families and children are being not only heard, but listened to – always.

Because they deserve nothing less.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Some of the most incredible people I've ever met are the parents and carers of kids with disability – but they have spent too long fighting. These families deserve a government that will stand with them and a re-elected Labor Government will do just that."

"This package is for Nicky. For Zara, for Jiraiya, Alam, Andreas, Dijana and John. It's for every family who's ever shared their story, and the parents, carers, teachers and advocates who fight quietly for their kids each and every day."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Colin Brooks

"Only Labor will back kids with disability and their families – with the big things like outside hours care and help with medical appointments, and the small things like extracurricular activities and therapy animals."

"These kids are too important to be put at risk by Matthew Guy's Liberals and their savage cuts – if they're given the chance, they'll copy the Morrison Government's record of leaving families with disability behind."