



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## SCHOOL STARTING AGE CAN BE MORE FLEXIBLE

Following pressure from parents and education experts, Tasmanian parents will be more easily able to delay starting their child at school, if that child is not yet developmentally ready.

A petition presented to Parliament by MLC Ruth Forrest on October 1<sup>st</sup> this year requesting some flexibility with regard to school entry age for children born late in the year to enable some children to start school a year later, has received a favourable response from Government. This response is attached.

Steve Biddulph, psychologist and author of the bestseller 'Raising Boys', sponsored the petition after he was approached by distressed parents. He believes many children benefit from delaying school entry.

"Allowing parents some leeway in school starting, especially for boys, and children born later in the year, is now seen as best practice. Worldwide studies find that children who are young or immature for their year tend to fair poorly right throughout school" Mr Biddulph stated. "The calendar is a very poor guide to school readiness and each child needs to be looked at individually. A boy born late in the year may be developmentally as much as 18 months behind a girl in the same class. We know boys are slower to acquire fine motor and language skills, which leads to a feeling of failure and dislike of school. Even sporting ability is affected. Sometimes another year in pre-school can make a lifetime of difference" added Mr Biddulph.

"Whilst the current Education Act does provide for a degree of flexibility in this area, in practice this is not being supported in all schools" Ms Forrest stated.

"Some parents wishing to delay the commencement of formal schooling for a year, in the best interests of their child, were finding this flexibility lacking and had received advice inconsistent with the Act" Ms Forrest said.

The Premier also wrote to Ms Forrest outlining measures that would now be taken to ensure parents of young children are aware that there is flexibility surrounding this important decision.

“The Premier has committed to clarifying the matter with all Learning Services General Managers, who will ensure that all school principals are aware of their obligations and requirements under the Act” Ms Forrest said.

“Furthermore, the Admissions Policy page of the Education Department website will be redeveloped to provide more explicit information about options for parents and children with regard to school entry age” Ms Forrest said.

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For further information contact Ruth Forrest MLC on 0419 879 524