

# Autism support to ease the load

Autism | Anthea Cannon

AN Australian-first kindergarten and childcare centre in Maidstone will help lighten the load for parents of children with autism and give the best start to their education.

Autism Partnership, Centre for Inclusive Schooling of Children with Autism and Rose Garden Childcare have created Little Learners, the first behavioural intervention program giving one-on-one time with trained therapists and integration with mainstream classes.

Autism Partnership psychologist Karen McKinnon said that, until now, parents had to run a behavioural program at home, which prevented one parent from working and could be expensive.

From January 31 the centre will give 20 hours of personalised intervention, including communication and social skills, for eight children between 2 and 5, plus child care.

"There are five factors that affect behavioural intervention - how early you start, how intensively you do it, parental involvement,



Marco, 3, and Shannon Eels promote the Little Learners autism support classes in Maidstone.

Picture: DAVIDSMITH N26WT100

the quality of the program and what the child brings to the table. And we're trying to accommodate all of those," Ms McKinnon said.

"Research shows (children who do the program) can be successful in mainstream schooling and that's something we can test out with the centre's other kinder classes."

Tony and Nancy Casuscelli of

East Malvern signed up in October after their son was diagnosed with autism in June.

"We've been doing the program at home for the past two or three months and it's been helpful, but you need a consistent 20 hours and my wife and I work and scheduling therapists is hard," Tony said.

"Marco is our first child so every-

thing is all new to us. At the start of the year we realised something wasn't right and we want to make sure he's got the best start and support."

Rose Garden Childcare director Frances Mesiti said the centre was going great after starting 18 months ago.

Little Learners details: 9375 2469.