



A 6-Point Plan to Make SA a Better Place for Kids...

as described by primary school children

Since 2019, I have received postcards from South Australian primary school children in every corner of the state; from Government, Catholic and Independent schools, special education schools, Aboriginal and Anangu schools, area schools, and schools with less than 20 students.

Whilst most postcards are handwritten, I also receive cards written in braille or using pictograms, and some children get some help from teachers and support officers. Children are also invited to draw a picture and when these are combined with the written answers, I get a privileged and informative insight into the everyday lives of South Australian children between the ages of 8 and 12 years.

Most seem to be leading happy healthy lives in which they are engaged with school, friends and family. They love their families and appreciate the care that parents and carers show them. Some children, however, have very personal experiences of poverty, abuse and mental illness. Rarely do children in this group have an opportunity to be asked their views and opinions or have their voices heard, which is why my postcards initiative is so important.

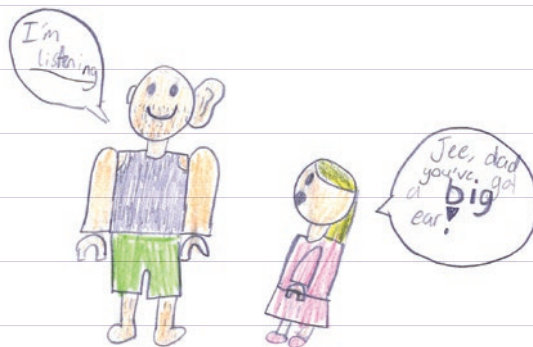
The insights children's postcard responses provide should be of real value to policy advisors and decision makers alike. They provide a rare snapshot in time of what matters most to South Australian primary school children in years 2–6.

Whilst the full *Things That Matter 5* report is a delightful read for those who want to drill down into responses to the questions children have supplied, this snapshot summary of what kids have told me will make South Australia better from their point of view has a range of practical and thoughtful ideas that political, government and civic leaders should heed.

Our youngest citizens have provided a roadmap for a better state. I hope we can rise to the challenge, listen to them and work on building their trust and respect by acting on the things they say will make their 21st century lives better.

1 Listen to us before you make changes that affect us

Children wish grownups would start understanding children's points of view. They want adults to listen to them and to let them have a say in decision-making. They say things like grownups need to 'let me talk more', 'just listen' and 'take us more seriously'.



Children shared that they want more of a say on things affecting them, including those things happening at home and school, as well as in the community more broadly. They wanted 'a say about what should be changed' and shared it would be better if 'people talked to the kids before changing something'. They highlighted that children may have different ideas to those of adults, and that these need to be listened to. Some children were more explicitly focused on having a more formal opportunity to have a say in politics and suggested a 'kid government'.

Children wrote about their desire for freedom and an opportunity to choose and to do more of what they like. They wanted fewer restrictions and rules, and the space to explore and do more things on their own. Suggestions they made included creating better systems for addressing bullying and for monitoring schools more broadly, having a swimming pool and trampoline at school, going on more fun excursions like bush walks, improving and increasing access to technology in school, having a canteen or cheaper food, and having an art club during lunchtimes. They also wanted less smoking, vaping, drugs, and alcohol consumption being done around them.

“ Grownups ask kids for help or ideas because sometimes kids think of things grownups don't and we have lots of imagination. (11, girl – Southern Adelaide)

“ They [kids] could help with decisions like what kind of playground would be good or places fun and not too expensive to go. (12, girl – Yorke and Mid North)

“ We can maybe have a say in politics. Because grown-ups think about things other than children. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide)

“ We could have more freedom and some voice about what we should be allowed to do. (11, boy – Southern Adelaide)

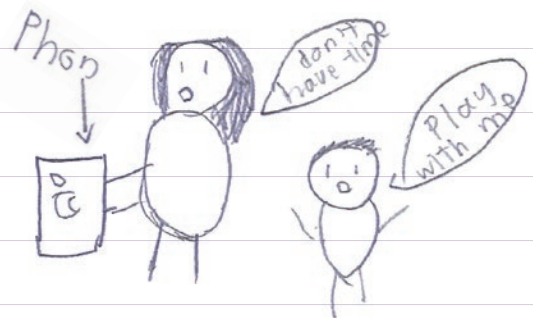
Children want their school to make learning more engaging and relevant to their lives and for teachers to listen to them and to offer more 'funner' ways to learn. They also suggested specific improvements relating to school rules, particularly around uniforms that restrict movement. Other children requested fewer days of school or shorter hours at school, with the most popular being to attend school just 3 to 4 days per week or to start school later or finish earlier.

“ if school started later because it's really makes me very tired and is harder to get work done when tired. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide)

“ longer school holidays since we do 10 weeks of school and only get 2 weeks for a break. (11, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

2 Understand us more and spend more time with us

Many children wished grownups would spend more time with them doing things they enjoy, such as playing games, reading books to them, telling stories, watching movies, gaming, baking, doing art and craft activities, going for walks and playing with them at the playground. They also wanted grownups to 'show up to important events' and to go to their birthday celebrations.



Some children suggested that to spend more time with them, grownups should work less – they could work fewer hours or days, or take more days off, especially during the school holidays. Some children wanted grownups to stop working night shifts, or to find another way to earn money so they didn't have to work as much, or at all. Others said that grownups spend too much time on their phones, taking attention away from their children.

- “ Listen to me a bit more and understand our problems. (9, boy – Eastern Adelaide)
- “ Consider that every child is different in terms of learning and personality. (12, girl – Southern Adelaide)
- “ Sometimes stop working and spend more time with their children, I wish grownups wouldn't have to work soooo... hard to earn money. (12, girl – Eastern Adelaide)

3 More places to play and more things to do

Children had many suggestions relating to play spaces and outdoor activities. They want more and/or improved playgrounds and play spaces along with more opportunities for outside activities. Their suggestions included having more bike parks, pump tracks, and skate parks, along with more places to 'ride', 'scoot', 'skate', or 'hover'. They often wrote about their desire for more water parks and theme parks, swimming pools, bowling alleys and arcade places, rides, and trampolines.



Their suggestions included having better play equipment and age appropriate playgrounds to better suit different skill levels. Some children asked for these spaces to be more accessible for all children, including those who use wheelchairs or have movement challenges. They also expressed a need for playgrounds to have more things for children with autism. Other children specifically wanted more clubs and facilities for more traditional sports such as football, rugby, soccer, netball, basketball, gymnastics, and cricket.

Children living in small towns particularly noted the lack of sport and physical activity opportunities that are available to them.

- “ more public play/swim/park areas. (11, girl – Limestone Coast)
- “ it had more public land (ovals, playgrounds, public indoor gyms). (10, boy – Eastern Adelaide)

“ SA would be better for kids if there was more Local playgrounds around Local areas. (12, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

“ the parks wernt so Boaring aDD ziplines, swings, slide, climbing, sand pit, and a lot of green. (9, girl – Northern Adelaide)

Children living in regional areas expressed a desire for specific infrastructure to be built in their town. These requests included ‘water slides at Kingscote’, ‘a splash park for whyalla!’ and a ‘water slide in Mimili’. Others asked for ‘a theme park in edthburgh’, ‘indoor pools in Loxton or the riverland’, and ‘a trapilin park in port lincoln’. Children in Victor Harbor as well as those in Port Pirie said they wanted a zoo, and ‘an arcade in Marree’ and ‘more things in Glossop’.

Some children wrote about events they would like to be able to go to and ‘more activities, opportunities and things to do’. These included going to shows, concerts, and festivals, as well as generally having more activities specifically for children. Again, children in regional areas asked for locally-specific events such as ‘More festivals like Wharfest’ and ‘tunarama again’.

“ Every town needs an indoor facility. (9, girl – Murray and Mallee)

“ If every town had a town pool. (11, girl – Eyre and Western)

“ we had a theme parck or water parck or a pump track in StAnsBury. (9, boy – Yorke and Mid North)

“ There were more events for kids 10-14 years old. but don't make it cring. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide)

“ There were more Activities that children could do not just Aduts. (9, girl – Western Adelaide)

4 Increased safety

Improving safety was another issue that children felt needed to be addressed by adults to make SA better for kids. Children said they want to be and to feel safe when they are out and to have safe spaces in which to do children’s activities.

They said that making SA safer for kids would mean children could be more independent. They also suggested ‘A program which asks kids if they’re safe’ would be good and they were also concerned about kids’ safety on the Internet.

Some children were concerned about road safety, both for car passengers and for people walking on the street. They suggested ways to improve road safety could include making ‘roads that cars have to drive slower [on] in suburbs’ and more road signs.

Some children shared their concerns about crime, including their fear of kidnappers and robbers, as well as child abuse and violence. Children wanted fewer violent shows and ‘less violence on the Internet’.



“ Having a crossing over the road we cross to get to sport. So it's safer. (11, girl – Limestone Coast)

“ The roads were more safe so kid's could cross without an adult. (9, girl – Eastern Adelaide)

“ People in charge of SA took more action in road safety. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide)

“ it was safer for kids to go to public places alone. (12, girl – Northern Adelaide)

“ The internet was safe and if kids had their own special websites for kids only. (11, girl – Northern Adelaide)

5

Cost of living

Children shared their concerns about how much things cost and that they wanted things to be 'cheaper' or 'free'.

Some children were concerned about multiple aspects of living expenses. They were concerned about the price of everyday items such as food, clothing, housing, petrol, bills, electricity, cars, toys, playing and attending sport, and doing other fun activities. They also wrote about the cost of school, including school uniforms, school supplies, canteen food, and school fees.

Some children explicitly wrote about the impact increasing costs of living are having on themselves and their families.

- “ They wouldn't make food and fuel so expensive so kids parents would be able to pay for stuff for there kids to be happy. (10, girl – Murray and Mallee)
- “ They could get jobs at twele then i would be able to help my mum pay the bill's. (12, boy – Murray and Mallee)

- “ school was less money so homeless children can go to school to. (9, girl – Eastern Adelaide)
- “ Stuff would be cheaper to stay alive my family spends over \$400 a week to keep us alive. (10, girl – Murray and Mallee)
- “ Make bills less expensive. Stop making things over priced. Because then Mum could buy me more clothes. (10, girl – Yorke and Mid North)



6

More concern for each other and the environment

Children shared that SA would be better for kids if more people were 'nice' and 'kind', and if there was no 'bullying', 'yelling' or 'discrimination'. They raised the need for there to be less racism and less discrimination based on disability, gender and being LGBTQIA+. They also wanted less rudeness, yelling, and swearing from children and grownups.

- “ They have Respect share be nice Play with each other support each other don't get angry at them play properly hang out don't be mean be nice don't hit eachother. (11, girl – Eyre and Western)

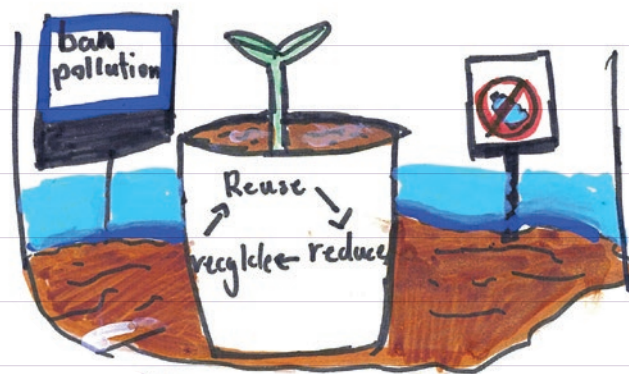
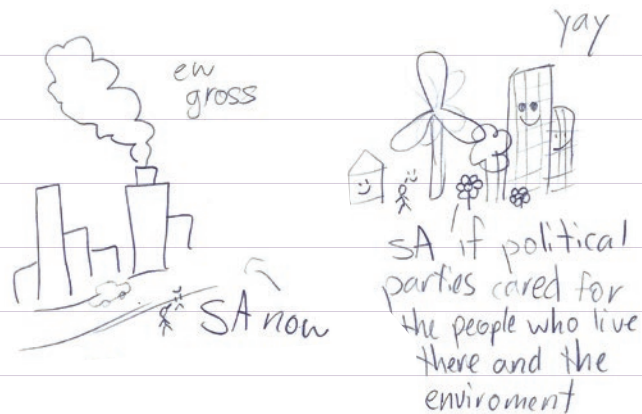


- “ I don't get bullied, but I still wish there was less bullying. (12, boy – Limestone Coast)
- “ Everyone was accepted, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, disabled people, and furries. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide)

Children were also concerned about the environment and shared that SA would be better for kids if there was 'less litter and pollution'. They want to see more people who 'cared more for the environment' and more action on climate change.

Children offered suggestions for change, such as ensuring cities and towns were more sustainable through creating 'more Nature Parks' and making 'more environment friendly things'. They also suggested SA would be better if people 'started recycling more' and 'put their rubbish in the bin'.

- “ People wouldn't litter so the kids won't need to pick it up. (7, girl – Southern Adelaide)
- “ The smelters would cool down and not make lead in the air. (11, boy – Yorke and Mid North)
- “ If we stop climate change. We will stop the world from changing and flooding and burning our world. (12, girl – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)



The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act'). The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular, children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making, and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda, including ways in which children and young people can have greater input into the design and delivery of policies, programs and practices that affect their lives.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 18,328 South Australian school students aged 8–12 years who participated in the Commissioner's Student Voice Postcard Project in 2023. Thanks also to the teachers and school staff at the 347 South Australian Government, Catholic and Independent schools who supported their participation.

Please note: All quotes in this summary report are reproduced verbatim.

Suggested Citation

Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2024). *A 6-Point Plan to Make SA a Better Place for Kids*. July 2024.

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