

Over 19,000 SA children learnt how to speak robot this year!

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly has today announced key outcomes of her 'Learn to Speak Robot' Commissioner's Digital Challenge. Participation was robust with an estimated 19,026 South Australian children completing the Challenge in its inaugural year.

This figure represents 217 public and independent schools and 31 public libraries around the State, and equates to approximately one third of primary and combined schools. Of these, 27% of the overall number of participants came from regional schools with 23% from South Australia's remote area schools. The vast majority of schools are expected to register for the Challenge again in 2020 with positive feedback received from students who participated (see a selection of children's testimonials below).

Adelaide's Thorndon Park Primary School were chosen as recipients of the major digital reward – a new school website donated by project supporters EWS – when one of their students had this to say about their experience: *"Although I wasn't that interested in things like coding at first, experimenting with Grok and Code.org has made me insanely interested in a future of technology and even an education career in it. So, thank you!"*

The Commissioner's Digital Challenge is not a competition, but is designed to encourage children of all ages in South Australia to increase their uptake of digital skills. It is made available FREE to schools, community groups, libraries and families via a dedicated website (www.commissionersdigitalchallenge.net.au) where hundreds of digital activities curated with input from some of Australia's (and the world's) leading digital industry players can be accessed with ease. They include activities from Microsoft's MakeCode, Code.org's Hour of Code, Grok Learning, Digital Technologies Hub, CS Unplugged and Code Club Australia. Digital rewards donated by Microsoft, JB HI-FI Solutions, Grok Learning, Advanced Technology Project and Thinkfun Games were awarded to schools and libraries submitting the best testimonials. Strong support for the Challenge has also been provided by Girl Guides, Scouts, Children's University Adelaide, Public Library Services SA, EdTechSA, the Australian Computing Academy and the Computer Science Education Research Group.

'Learn to Speak Robot' re-opens on Day 1 of Term 1 in 2020, at which time the second challenge in the series will also be launched; a Mars-themed design thinking challenge called **'Space to Dream'**. 'Space to Dream' is designed to encourage children to 'lean in' to their innate creativity and limitless potential. In 2021, the Challenge will expand to include systems thinking, digital literacy and digital citizenship components, with these programs being developed hand in glove with industry to ensure relevance to technological changes and advancements occurring in real time.

Details of SA schools who achieved Challenge rewards is available via the link below:
<https://commissionersdigitalchallenge.net.au/digital-thinking/schools-winners/>

Quotes attributable to Helen Connolly, Commissioner for Children and Young People:

Children born this century are growing up in a completely digital world. This impacts on the way children and young people view their world, access information and services, gain knowledge, form opinions, and participate in things that matter to them. Digital access doesn't automatically translate to digital literacy and digital empowerment. All children and young people in SA should be able to engage with the digital world, access its benefits equally, be digitally included and have their rights protected. That's why I've made my Digital Challenge suitable for every school and adaptable to any level of experience and ability. My Challenge provides a manageable springboard for schools while supporting teachers who may lack confidence in the area of digital literacy, and may therefore be reluctant to bring digital technologies into their classrooms. I want parents and families to get involved at home too, because education does not stop at the school gate. Guides and Scouts taking the Challenge earn fun fabric 'Learn to Speak Robot' or 'Space to Dream' badges.

Background:

The Digital Challenge is the result of Commissioner Connolly's commitment to ensuring South Australian children and young people are given an inclusive digital opportunity. The free, recurring, year-round Challenge (January to September) has been designed to ensure core ideas integral to digital empowerment are taught in fun and interactive ways, supporting students, teachers, schools and libraries, to participate with ease.

Note to Editors:

Launch of the 2020 iterations of the Challenges (*Learn to Speak Robot* and *Space to Dream*) will take place on Day 1 of Term 1 – 28 January 2020. Details of photo opportunities for the launch of '*Space to Dream*' will be advised from mid-January.

Additional information:

See testimonials from students representing participating schools below.

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What children had to say about 'Learn to Speak Robot'...

I like [the] Commissioner's Digital Challenge because when I did Lightbot it was challenging for my brain and I think if others tried it their coding brain would get stronger and be able to cope with other challenges in other subjects.

MARION PRIMARY SCHOOL

I've found out that I love creating digital games. The code club activities have helped me learn how.

EASTERN FLEURIEU SCHOOL, STRATHALBYN CAMPUS R-6

We completed a coding program which was very beneficial to us in adapting to the world around us. We learnt to code robots and 3D print – we can't wait for the future!

WESTPORT PRIMARY SCHOOL

My favourite part of the Commissioner's Digital Challenge was learning new things and having challenges. We were doing things we had never done before and we might need this learning to be able to figure out how to solve problems in the future.

BLACK FOREST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Our coding adventure took us through the Land of Stories with six different challenges, where we coded our way through the book. It was fun, we made mistakes, but learnt how to fix these errors.

SHEIDOW PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Every student [in] year 3 to year 7 completed the challenge at our school. Students were engaged and have continued to use the programs and develop a coding language. Coding club now happens at lunch times.

CAMBRAI PRIMARY SCHOOL

The CDC set my coding skills on fire and took me to an advanced level!

ST JOHN BOSCO CATHOLIC SCHOOL

What I love about coding is that you can always enjoy it and whenever Mrs Coggins says we are going to be doing coding or we are coding, my class gets so excited and happy. Last year I thought coding was like 'eh' but now I love it so much.

SOUTHERN VALES CHRISTIAN SCHOOL