

School closure a social risk to kids, families

CHRIS RUSSELL

EDUCATION REPORTER



CLOSING Springbank Secondary College would risk causing great harm to students and their families, the Commissioner for Children and Young People says.

In a passionate appeal to the independent panel considering the school's future, Commissioner Helen Connolly warns that social costs could outweigh

financial savings.

"It might be argued that in terms of economic costs per student, it would be cheaper for these children to be absorbed into bigger schools," Ms Connolly, pictured, said.

"However, the trade-offs could be great in the long-term when it comes to the impact on these students and the costs to their families and the broader community.

"South Australia has made a promise to keep children safe and give them every opportunity to thrive in SA.

"Closing this school could mean breaking this promise to this group of children."

The commissioner's views came as the period for public submissions to the panel closed on Friday. The panel, headed by experienced education practitioner Terry Sizer, has been tasked with making a recommendation to Education Minister John Gardner on whether the school should close this year with most students reassigned to Unley High School.

The panel's terms of reference say the school has capacity for 450 students, but it only has 167 students in Years 8 to 12.

"Community feedback is central to this process and we are pleased with the number of submissions provided," an Education Department spokeswoman said on behalf of the review panel. In her submission, Ms Connolly drew attention to education legislation which says "children, students, stakeholders and communities should be consulted in respect of decisions" affecting them.

Ms Connolly visited the school, in Pasadena, and spoke to students at length. Her purpose was to hear students' concerns and present them to the review panel.

Ms Connolly said students told her their grades had improved at Springbank and they worried about struggling academically at another school.

Nearly half of the students she spoke to said they had been bullied at previous schools. They felt safe at Springbank but feared being bullied again at a new school.

"I heard how the school has provided them with opportunities and hope that they have not felt elsewhere," Ms Connolly said. The panel has been told to report to the Minister by the end of June.