

# Schooled to fight obesity

By ELIZABETH HENSON

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## Call to open grounds to the public

**ELIZABETH HENSON**

ALL school grounds should be open to the public after hours and on weekends to tackle a growing childhood obesity problem in South Australia, Children and Young People Commissioner Helen Connolly says.

Latest statistics showed that obesity rates among children and young people increased to eight per cent in 2017-18, compared to six per cent in 2011-12.

The figures were revealed in a new Child Development Council report, tabled in State Parliament.

The document said that 19 per cent of South Australian children, aged two to 17, were overweight and that figure had not changed in the past decade.

Ms Connolly, pictured, said that childhood obesity in SA “really concerns me”.

She said the State Government should open school facilities, such as playgrounds,

ovals and playing courts, to the public after hours and on weekends to encourage youngsters to get active.

“We might have a fantastic school with a great outdoor playground, with ovals, and then on the next block is a pretty run-down playground owned by the local council,” Ms Connolly said.

“We don’t need to necessarily build a new one, all we need to do is look at the assets that we’ve got and see how do we use them better.”

An Education Department spokesman said the government “understands and supports the Commissioner’s views on the accessibility of school grounds”.

“Although official school activities and formal agreements take precedence, the



majority of outdoor school recreation spaces are freely accessible for use by the public on evenings, weekends and during school holidays,” the spokesman said.

“Schools with restricted access are clearly signposted, so people should check before they enter.”

The report also revealed that South Australia had, compared to the national average, higher rates of preventable deaths as well as children in out-of-home care, disability and young people with mental-health issues.

The Opposition said that the report showed the government was “failing its own test on the welfare of South Australian children”.

A government spokeswoman said that the government was taking a “whole-of-government approach to ensure we are better supporting South Australian children, young people and families – and this is a priority”.