

# Stop booting students out

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The Advertiser

Thursday 3rd December 2020

388 words

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## Report calls for ban on exclusions

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THE practice of excluding hundreds of students from the state's public schools each year for periods of up to 10 weeks should be abolished, a report commissioned by the State Government says.

The inquiry led by Queensland University of Technology's Linda Graham found suspensions (up to five days) and longer exclusions were used too frequently, for inappropriate or minor reasons, and in a way likely to reinforce bad behaviour. Most damningly, it says they are "misused to build a case for funding or other supports for students", particularly those with disabilities.

It suggests maximum five-day suspensions for primary students, with a six-10 day option for high schoolers, but only for the most serious incidents such as hard drugs, serious assaults or having "deadly weapons". Establishing an independent education ombuds-

man to manage an appeals and complaints process is also among the 76 recommendations.



Another report on school discipline, by SA's Commissioner for Children and Young People and also tabled in parliament yesterday, found students felt misunderstood and unsupported while parents felt schools failed to take into account disabilities and family circumstances.

A third major report released yesterday found 1600 students who drop out of the state's public schools each year, without completing their SACE, are not in work, training or other education by the following March.

The failure to successfully transition from school is laid bare in the report commissioned by the State Government to find out whether early

leavers were "earning and learning" or not – a huge blind spot in the education system.

That followed a series of stories in The Advertiser over several years that revealed alarming statistics, including that only 60 per cent of public students obtained their SACE.

The Australian Council of Education Research found almost half of SA's early leavers didn't know where to get information on opportunities outside school, and four in 10 were "unaware that there were various ways to complete SACE after leaving school".

Many said wider subject choice, better teachers, more counselling or mentoring, and more flexibility could have helped them stay in school.

Education Minister John Gardner, pictured, said a comprehensive response was necessary, but must not be rushed. Public consultation on the reports will run on the Education Department website until January 15.