

Schoolchildren stay posted on issues that matter most to them



Edwardstown Primary School students Cameron James, 11, Isabella Watts, 8, and Paton Crane, 9, are keen to have their say. Picture: Mark Brake

REBECCA BAKER

DON'T be fooled by their ages, these youngsters have plenty to say – and the state's leading child advocate is ready to listen.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, wants to know what matters most to schoolchildren.

She is sending specially created postcards to pupils at every primary and combined school across the state, asking the youngsters to share thoughts and priorities.

Into its third year, the Commissioner's Student Voice Postcard Initiative aims to gain an insight into the lives of eight to 12-year-olds.

"The first two years of the project have proved successful with more than 8000 children each year sending back their completed postcards for analysis and review," Ms Connolly said.

"The responses help shape future policy and agenda priorities in relation to children and young people's needs, defined with their direct input.

"We want them to see that change is possible and that adults can be effective in addressing the issues children see as important.

"We know that wellbeing and participation are essential for learning ... when parents and carers take an

interest in these areas of their children's lives."

Ms Connolly said "tweens" were targeted as she believed the voices of this age group were too often overlooked.

"This annual student voice postcard project is one simple yet effective way for children to know that someone is listening," she said.

"Each year, children are

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asked to respond to four key questions: what is important to them, what their aspirations are, what they're worried about, and what they would change if they could."

In 2021, it is hoped as many as 30,000 young people will fill in the postcards which will be distributed to metropolitan and regional areas in a staggered rollout.

Students in Adelaide's south will be among the first to receive the postcards, with a trio of Edwardstown Primary School students getting in early to share their views.

Paton Crane, 9, said she thought it was great that children her age had the chance to have their say.

"(It's important) they can have a voice in the future and when they need to speak to someone important they can," she said.

Eight-year-old Isabella Watts agreed.

"We need to speak up otherwise adults don't know what we want," she said.

Cameron James, 11, was confident in what he would do if he was "in charge" for the day.

"I would shut down a coal mine and then provide education to the workers about running a wind farm and build a wind farm in its place," he said.

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