

SNAPSHOT

THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO CHILDREN



What SA Children say about School

- ✓ Pressure to succeed
- ✓ Less homework
- ✓ More engaging lessons

Across government, business, and community planning and decision making, the views, perspectives and experiences of primary school aged children need to be considered. This Snapshot is designed to support capacity for this to occur.



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The data is drawn directly from consultation undertaken with South Australian children in 2020 and 2021. It is designed to inform decision makers, researchers, policy makers, and others who have an interest in understanding what children aged 8–12 years think and need.

Children are growing up, learning, and navigating relationships in a hyperconnected, fast-paced world. Their diverse and complex lives have been shaped by vast technological, cultural, political, and environmental change, while the decisions being made by leaders, decision makers and policy developers affect children and young people's daily lives.

As critical stakeholders and citizens, children and young people have a right to inform the development, design, and implementation of legislation, policies, programs, and services that have a direct or indirect impact on them now, and in the future.

Children are asking adults to take a sharper focus on their rights, interests, and wellbeing, and to integrate these into economic, social, and environmental policy.

We want children and young people to see that change is possible and that adults can be effective in addressing the issues they've told us they see as most important.

Children want more of a voice and to be taken seriously – in the classroom, in their homes, in the community, and at government level. Being heard is key to them making their own lives better and improving their whole communities. By listening, empathising, and validating their experiences, we will be building enduring relationships that are grounded in trust.

In 2020, a total of 8,379 postcards from 219 Public, Catholic and Independent schools across metropolitan Adelaide and South Australian regional centres, and rural and remote communities, were received via the Commissioner's Student Postcard initiative. This snapshot report provides a summary of what they said worries them most.

What would children change about School?

Many children focused on the significant pressures and expectations they feel to do well at school. While many enjoy school and like learning, many children do not think school is set up in the best possible way to engage all students. They want school to be more inclusive and less punitive.

Others described their “tough schedule” as the worst thing about being a kid and said that the amount of schoolwork and homework they’re given leaves them with little time for family and friends, sport, or other extracurricular activities.

“ ‘Getting sent to sit out during class and the environment getting killed’
– 9 year old (Eyre and Western)

“ ‘learning pressure (some things are hard to understand) but I like learning’
– 13 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘It would be the pressure we hae on our shoulders at the moment with every subject and heaps of tests’ – 13 year old (Far North)

All children shared many ideas for changing some aspect of school from the curriculum and structure of the school day to the nature of physical learning environments and uniforms.

A higher proportion of boys than girls wanted to change some aspect of their school to make lessons more engaging, and to find ways to provide more help for kids who are struggling to learn, including having more opportunities to have breaks and be active.

In addition to making school more affordable, tweens offered a range of ideas to improve both the school curriculum and the physical and social environment of their school. They said this could be done in ways that would benefit both their learning and their wellbeing.

They wrote about wanting more help from teachers and SSOs (Students Support Officers) to help ‘kids feel safe and to learn’, and they wanted to see more flexible learning options introduced to help those who ‘struggle’ or who ‘learn differently’.

Specific suggestions included providing more opportunities to be active and creative at school, with more fitness lessons and music teachers on staff. Others wrote about ‘making mindfulness part of the curriculum’, putting plants in classrooms, improving school toilets and air conditioning, creating spaces at school for students to relax, and letting people have a pet at school ‘so they have a good friend’ and ‘wouldn’t feel sad’.

“ ‘I would give more funds to schools so they can get more SSO teachers to help stressed out kids.’ – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘I would have a fitness subject at the end of the day. I would upgrade all school’s internet and buildings.’ – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘I’d like to have more outside learning time for kids in SA.’ – 12 year old (Barossa, Light and Lower North)



WHAT SA CHILDREN SAY ABOUT SCHOOL

Children also wanted to have more choice in what they learnt at school. They wanted to see more opportunities to learn practical skills that would prepare them for adult life and the 'real world'. This ranged from learning about 'how to fix cars' to learning about diverse cultures and identities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and histories, LGBTIQ+ young people, and people with disability.

“ ‘Give everyone a very good education and teach everyone important skills they will need later in life’
– 10 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

Many children wanted school uniform policies to be more flexible, particularly considering how this might impact those who 'can't afford it'. They also wanted to change strict rules about going to the toilet, so that children could use the bathroom when they needed to without being told off or made to feel embarrassed.

“ ‘Try to treat students fair and the same. When someone needs to go to the toilet let them’ – 9 year old (Limestone Coast)

Other tweens focused on the structure of the school day, writing about how slightly shorter school days would allow them to play more sport, get more sleep, and connect with others.

A few children wanted more time at school, highlighting how it is an important and safe place where they learn, play and connect with peers and adults. While a few children wanted more homework 'to prepare for high school and college', most children wanted less homework so they could spend more time 'as kids' and connecting with family after what is already a long day at school.

“ ‘Change it so kids have less homework and more leisure time to enjoy being a kid while they still can.’ – 10 year old (Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘make school tasks use more imagination so kids can do what they do best’
– 11 year old (Eyre and Western)

For more information on *The Things That Matter To Children* see other snapshots in this series:

- **What SA Children say about Jobs, Skills, and the Future**
- **What Worries SA Children Most**

For more information on the *Job Aspirations of South Australian Children aged 8–12 years* visit:

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