



What SA Kids Have Told us About Learning

Commissioner for
Children & Young People
September 2019

Children and young people would like to see teachers given the support and training they need to be the best teachers they can be for their students. This includes having a rethink on the traditional way students are taught. It also means reconsidering class sizes, as well as where and how lessons are being taught.

Children and young people frequently talk about wanting to be more engaged in their learning and how they want teachers to use new and innovative methods to teach. Some current practices include the requirement for students to take notes whilst teachers talk. In their words this old method of teaching leads them to 'zone out' in the classroom. Students who are struggling in the mainstream system find this approach particularly unhelpful, saying it doesn't work.

Many young people said they want more support in school. This includes providing help in class time as well as offering individual assistance after hours. It is often difficult for children and young people to ask for help, and they want teachers to be more proactive in reaching out to their students.

Children and young people often tell the Commissioner about the one 'good teacher' that made a difference to their learning and their life. This is especially so when they do not have a strong role model through a parent or other adult.

A number of children and young people spoke about teachers' who need to find a better balance between treating children as competent, while still being mindful of their developmental levels. Young people said that as



they are still learning about themselves, their world, their relationships and the curriculum, their experience would be improved if teachers were trained with a greater emphasis on 'social studies and child development.'

To help create a positive change to teaching methods and relationships, young people said that there must be a mechanism introduced that enables students to provide feedback on how effectively teachers help them to learn. In most other service-based organisations, customers and clients are asked to provide feedback on the service they receive, so that services can be modified and improved accordingly. A teacher's method of teaching could be reviewed by his or her students on an annual basis to provide feedback and indicators of which methods are working best for their students. The results would allow teachers to tailor their methods to suit the kids they are teaching in a more personalised way. This could also be achieved by assessing an individual student's learning style to see which they prefer and then adapting teaching methods to suit.

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Children and young people have consistently said that they want all children and young people to have the same opportunities. They want those 'doing it tough' to have the same quality of education and opportunities as those who are more well-off. The cost of education is a big issue for many children and young people, especially those who come from households that are struggling both financially and emotionally. They worry about whether their parents or guardians can afford to get everything they need for education, school sport, or extra-curricular activities such as learning a musical instrument or taking singing or dancing lessons, and this affects their own well-being.

Many children and young people are worried about the cost of living. They talk about the high cost of education (including uniforms and books) competing against the cost of basic utilities, such as electricity, water and food, medical bills and housing.

Children and young people understand that education and formal qualifications are increasingly vital in the modern world. They know that to succeed and follow their dreams they will need experience and training, and they are hungry to take on any challenges they can as early as they can. However, many young people said that the opportunities to gain qualifications are unequal and in some cases inaccessible to some and that this was not fair.

- “ *‘Respect from teachers. More understanding teachers. More fun in the way they teach.’*
- “ *‘High school teachers care more about uniform than the child actually learning. They would rather test us than teach us.’*
- “ *‘Having class outside instead – when you learn outside it’s more FUN! Which means we listen more, exercise more / engage more!’*
- “ *‘Teachers! Some teachers don’t understand what is effective. Students should complete compulsory surveys about specific teachers. Teachers should explore more ways to teach. Make students more involved in activities rather than just writing.’*
- “ *‘Students have opinions and they matter. Don’t forget that they want to be listened to. Do not forget about us and when you make decisions they do actually affect us.’*
- “ *‘Improve education – in general, raise standards of education – Equal opportunities for all children, no matter where you live, how much money you have.’*

- “ *‘Improve education in rural areas – introduce highly educated teachers...’*
- “ *‘A lot of young people can’t even afford the things they need (health, food, clean water, school uniforms, school supplies).’*
- “ *‘Education costs...uniform costs, tutoring, supplies, extra curricula, transport, food, internet to do homework.’*
- “ *‘Feels like we are disadvantaged. We don’t get to learn the same things as in the city schools. We don’t have the same facilities, eg STEM. It’s coming, but that doesn’t help us now.’*
- “ *‘Situating a university campus closer to rural students.. eg in Mount Barker or Murray Bridge.’*
- “ *‘Certain courses in Adelaide cost too much, FLO can’t pay for a 3-day course, accommodation food/drink, the trip up there - and since I don’t have the money for it, I lose out on what I want to do and the education for it.’*