

# PUPILS MOCK VAPING RULES

## SCHOOLS URGED TO RETHINK APPROACH

COLIN JAMES – EDUCATION EDITOR

SOUTH Australian schools have adopted the wrong tactics to reduce vaping by students, a survey has found.

Two out of three SA teens told Children and Young People Commissioner Helen Connolly they had used electronic cigarettes at least once.

In a report, Ms Connolly said only 30 per cent of 950 students aged 13–19 said they had not tried vaping.

However, two-thirds believed schools needed to educate young people more about associated health risks, rather than taking punitive action,

This had included removing toilet doors, expelling students caught vaping or selling e-cigarettes and conducting random searches.

“As a result, many young people are feeling misunderstood, shamed, blamed and punished for vaping,” Ms Connolly said in her report.

“They say they lack information, education and support from the adults and institutions around them.”

Ms Connolly (inset) said most of the respondents to her survey believed schools had “overreacted and gone too far” with how they had dealt with vaping.

“These respondents felt that an ‘over-the-top’ approach, even where well-intentioned, was unlikely to be effective in ‘getting the message through’,” she said.

“Indeed, a number of young people expressed concerns that some current responses, particularly those that are punitive, threatening or invasive, were eroding trust between students and staff – and restricting students’ rights to privacy.”

Ms Connolly said students had raised “specific concerns” about school responses that: access to school bathrooms, including locking or closing toilets, removing doors or requiring students to sign in and out; **LIMITED** student privacy, such as searching bags and pockets and proposing to install cameras or smoke detectors in school bathrooms; and excluding students who vaped through, detention, suspensions or formal

expulsions; and to get students to “snitch” on students who were vaping or selling e-cigarettes.

Ms Connolly said students believed these responses would not reduce vaping “because they aren’t based on any understanding around why students vape and how addictive vaping is”.

“In fact, some young people reported that such responses only make young people who vape ‘more cautious and sneakier’,” she said.

Education Minister Blair Boyer said it was “not fair for our teachers and principals to have to police such an issue”.

Mr Boyer said Ms Connolly’s report highlighted the lack of information about the serious side effects and the addictive nature of vaping.

“This is why we need to educate our young people on the health risks but also the legal implications,” he said.