

## THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO CHILDREN



# What SA Children say about Wellbeing

- ✓ Find out more about what happens at school
- ✓ Expand the curriculum to include more variety
- ✓ Make education affordable for everyone
- ✓ Support children who are struggling

Across government, business, and community, the views, perspectives, and experiences of primary aged children need to be included. This snapshot is designed to support the capacity for this to occur.

The findings have been drawn directly from consultation undertaken in 2021 with South Australian children aged 8–12 years. It is presented in this snapshot format to help inform decision makers, researchers, policy makers, and others who have an interest in understanding what children in this age group think and need.

Regardless of where they live, children aged 8 to 12 years share many of the same interests, passions, aspirations, and ideas for how to build a better world.

Children across South Australia wrote about wanting to be taken seriously by adults and be provided with more opportunities to have a say at every level of decision-making – in their homes, schools, and local community, as well as at all levels of government and service systems.

They were clear that when adults listen to their imaginations, creative perspectives, and big ideas, this not only improves their own wellbeing, self-confidence, and trust in adults, it also benefits their whole school and community.

Across all ages, genders and regions, children identified changes that could be made at the family, school,



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community and systemic levels to make the world a better place. Their postcard responses reflected how much they care for the people and environment around them, and articulated a clear vision for a fair, inclusive, and kinder world; one where everyone belongs and has a say. Their ideas included eliminating ‘racism’, ‘sexism’ ‘homophobia and transphobia’ and creating communities where ‘we are all equal’, particularly ‘men and women’ and ‘adults and kids’.

Climate change, natural disasters, mental health, and a global pandemic, are just some of the complex issues permeating the lives of children in primary school today. While new and emerging trends have always shaped children’s lives, the differences between those responding in 2021 and those who responded in 2020 and 2019, is the impact that fast paced changes in technological, cultural, political, and environmental aspects of life is having on children growing up in the twenty-first century.

## WHAT SA CHILDREN SAY ABOUT WELLBEING

Children want us to understand that the decisions we make affect younger generations and consequently they want to be provided with information and opportunities to influence decision-making, including decisions being made about and at school.

Beyond their connections with friends, family and their culture, children tell us about their relationships at school with their teachers and friends. Many children wanted us to know more about what happens to them at school, and they often describe wanting to make school safer and say this could be achieved by having more chill out spots, canteen options, fidgets, and 'life skills' lessons.

As we might expect, what kids want us to know about school varies. Some students wish school was more challenging, and that students could be 'grouped by skill, not age'. Others want their schoolwork to be a bit easier. Some children want school to start and finish earlier so that kids can spend more time with family, enjoy longer breaks during the day, have more long weekends, and take more holidays. Others wrote about wanting school to start later, so they could sleep for a bit longer.

Most want less homework or 'more time in which to do it'. Others focused on their relationships at school, including how they are treated with some sharing that they are sometimes being bullied, or find themselves being a bully, and that they don't like this or teachers who embarrass them.



For many children, school is the focus of their ideas for a better world. They gave a range of suggestions relating to ways to improve access to education for all and providing more support for those who are struggling with education costs and learning. They suggested that changing the structure of the school day and expanding the curriculum would help and that these are changes that would improve their overall school experience. Their ideas included the way timetables and classrooms are decided upon, as well as the physical environment and school facilities that are made available to students.

Some children wanted to see more sport and PE lessons each week, along with longer break times and longer lessons to help them be 'more prepared for when we leave school'. They were interested in 'cooking' and 'technology and gaming' courses, and wanted these to be offered earlier than when they get to high school. They also wanted financial literacy lessons to be incorporated into their primary school curriculum.

Common suggestions to improve school facilities and classroom environments included ensuring every school had a 'proper canteen', an 'oval' and 'a swimming pool' as well as ways to ensure there was 'less vandalism' of school property.

Children were eager to express that they're 'a good kid' and 'not naughty', 'trying their best' and 'getting better' at certain sports, schools subjects and other activities. Others focused on their relationships at school, including how they are treated or treat others. Some children shared that they are sometimes both bullied or find themselves being a bully, and that they needed help from adults with this. A small number of children focused on how much they enjoyed, or did not enjoy, home schooling in the context of COVID-19. Others wrote about where they want to go when they reach high school.

**“ how rudely and how bad boys mainly treat girls at school because it can make you feel embarrassed, scared and upset.”**  
– 11 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

**“ that I am not a boy who has bad marks or who is very naughty.”** – 10 year old male, Eastern Adelaide

Children wanted the cost of school to be far cheaper, and for there to be 'more chances for people in need' to 'start at a school they can afford to stay at'. They spoke about the need for more flexible learning along with better programs for students who move between schools, those living with disability, and those who have health issues such as anxiety or depression.

**“ A program for people who are moving schools to make them feel better and for people with health issues and Anxiety and depression to have a person to help!”**  
– 9 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

**“ Less fights and some or more class pets. Every class in every school had a class pet and if the government made it easier to get class pets.”** – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

**“ School and what is going on in the world and what is my future going to be like.”**  
– 10 year old, male, Murray and Mallee

**“ that they are not always right and that school is very hard for us and that we know when you talk about us and it hurts.”** – 11 year old, female, Limestone Coast

**“ we were able to do things like good tech earlier on, so we would be more prepared for when we leave school.”** – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide



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

- What SA Children say about the C word
- What SA Children say about Looking After the Planet
- What SA Children say about Grownups

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