

ALL STUDENTS MUST FEEL WELCOME IN OUR SCHOOLS

REVELATIONS secondary schools are actively discouraging underperforming year 11 students from continuing their education are deeply disturbing.

Children and Young Person Commissioner Helen Connolly has raised the issue in a new report detailing the pressure being felt by year 12 students to achieve high ATAR scores and obtain the SA Certificate of Education (SACE).

Ms Connolly quite rightly has questioned the detrimental impact on the mental health of year 11 students encouraged to either leave school or switch to vocational education training when they are struggling to cope with workloads or attaining poor results.

A passionate advocate for the state's younger citizens, she is correctly arguing that ATAR is not the only pathway for year 12 students to their future careers, nor is it the only way for them to obtain their SACE.

Concerningly though, her report reveals year 12 students are not being encouraged by schools or teachers to pursue other options, with the focus remaining intently on making sure they get good ATAR scores.

Whether this is for the benefit of individual students or, as it appears, more for ensuring private schools can compete against each other for fee-paying students warrants closer scrutiny.

No student should be forced out of our education system, public or private, because they may not achieve a high ATAR. Nor should their future be determined on the basis on whether they will obtain their SACE.

Every effort must be provided to support all of our young people, regardless of their intelligence, throughout their schooling. Not every child is suited to academia but all have something to offer schools as part of their communities.

Over 300 teenagers from various secondary schools across the state have told Ms Connolly they do not believe they received enough support or direction during their final year of education.

This is unacceptable and must be addressed. It can begin by stopping the practice of forcing them out of school at the end of year 11.