

VAPING RULES IN SCHOOL DUNNIES

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Schools are locking bathrooms, including during class time, to try to stop students from using them as a hideaway to vape.

The increasing takeover of toilets by groups using e-cigarettes is making others feel excluded from an “essential” facility and prompting calls for more secure cubicles.

Almost 550 students at public and private high schools across the state have shared their concerns with the Children’s Commissioner Helen Connolly.

In a new report Ms Connolly reveals that year 8, 9 and 10 students are also regularly experiencing sexism and racism at school, including from teachers.

They feel uniform rules are being “too strictly policed” and want more lessons focused on “real world” topics including taxes, driving and parenting.

In her report, titled *Seen But Not Heard*, Ms Connolly notes school bathrooms “were a hot topic among students” and had “become places to hang out during breaks”.

Despite the inclusion of wellbeing areas at many schools, students said the toilets were “the only place” where they felt they could go to “have a good cry” or calm down without being watched.

Ms Connolly told *The Advertiser* teachers were often restricting access to bathrooms in a bid to prevent vaping, but this sent the message that they suspected all students would do the wrong thing.

“They have to get permission, they have to get a key ... or fill out a (access) slip,” she said.

“What it says to them is they’re not trusted.”

Students told Ms Connolly they wanted upgrades to facilities to ensure “better cubicle doors that lock, and walls that peers can’t see through, come under or jump over”.

Education Department standards for new school buildings, or upgrades, state toilets should be “designed as fully enclosed toilet cubicles” providing for “complete privacy”.

“Students must not be able to easily see between gaps in to the toilet cubicle,” the guidelines say.

However areas of existing schools not affected by a redevelopment or upgrade “do not need to comply”.

The Advertiser has previously reported [more than 1000 students a year are being suspended for vaping](#), often on school grounds.

At least 12 public schools have installed vape detectors at a cost of up to \$2000 a unit.

Ms Connolly’s findings follow recent controversy over restricting access to bathrooms at three schools.

Grant High School, in the state’s South-East, limited student access in response to a [pupil smearing faeces](#).

[At Modbury High School doors were removed at the entry to bathrooms.](#)

[At nearby Golden Grove High School doors were removed](#) to mimic the design of non-gendered toilets being built elsewhere in the school.