

2024 Child Rights Progress Report on Education

South Australia's progress on recommendations made
by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child



About the Commissioner for Children and Young People

The [South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People](#) is an independent position, established under the [Children and Young People \(Oversight and Advocacy Bodies\) Act 2016](#) (OAB Act). This legislation was introduced to the South Australian Parliament in response to the [Child Protection Systems Royal Commission 2014](#).

The Commissioner promotes and advocates for the rights, development and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia and seeks to change laws, policies, systems and practice to uphold children's rights.

The work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is guided by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC); the core international treaty established in 1989 to which Australia is a signatory. This important agreement sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children around the world.

The Commissioner aims to ensure that as a part of the Australian Commonwealth, South Australia enacts its international obligations under this Convention.

Each year the Commissioner produces a series of Child Rights Progress reports measuring South Australia's progress against recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee).

This year's progress reports comprise:

- Child Health
- Child Justice
- Child Protection
- Disability
- Education
- Environment
- Physical Punishment

Data reported in the data tables are the most accurate available at the time of writing.



2024 Child Rights Progress Report on Education



South Australia's progress on recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

What the data says

Measure	Year: Data	1 year change	5 year trend	5 year assessment
Proportion of students in South Australian government and non-government schools receiving adjustments due to disability. ¹	2023: 29.2% 2022: 28.4% 2021: 28.3% 2020: 27.7% 2019: 26.3%	Stable	Increasing	+ Favourable
Total incidents of students being suspended in government schools (at Term 2). ²	Total suspensions 2023: 14,480 2022: 5,548 2021: 5,128 2020: 5,003 2019: 5,252	Increased*	Increasing	- Unfavourable
2023: Semester 1 2020–2022: Term 2 only				
Number of primary school suspension incidents (% of total) ³	Primary school suspensions 2023: 4,370 (30.2%) 2022: 1,869 (33.7%) 2021: 2,559 (50.0%) 2020: 2,633 (52.6%) 2019: 2,439 (56.0%)	Increased (number of incidents)	Fluctuating, decrease from base year (per term)	- Unfavourable
Number of secondary school suspension incidents (% of total) ⁴	Secondary school suspensions 2023: 10,110 (69.8%) 2022: 3,679 (66.3%) 2021: 2,569 (50.1%) 2020: 2,370 (47.4%) 2019: 2,309 (44.0%)	Increased	Increasing	- Unfavourable
Total number of incidents of students being excluded in government schools. ⁵	Total exclusions 2023: 673 2022: 281 2021: 207 2020: 254 2019: 229	Increased*	Increasing	- Unfavourable
2023: Semester 1 2020–2022: Term 2 only				
Number of primary school exclusion incidents (% of total) ⁶	Primary school exclusions 2023: 154 (22.9%) 2022: 64 (22.8%) 2021: 85 (41.1%) 2020: 97 (38.2%) 2019: 112 (48.9%)	Increased (number of incidents)	Increasing	- Unfavourable
Number of secondary school exclusion incidents (% of total) ⁷	Secondary school exclusions 2023: 519 (77.1%) 2022: 217 (77.2%) 2021: 122 (58.9%) 2020: 157 (61.8%) 2019: 117 (51.1%)	Increased (number of incidents)	Fluctuating, increase from base year	- Unfavourable

What the data says

Measure	Year: Data	1 year change	5 year trend	5 year assessment
Proportion of Reception to Year 6 students suspended from government primary schools. ⁸ (% of students suspended/% of enrolments)	Children with Inclusive Education Support program (IESP) funding 2023: 28.4%/7.5% 2022: 32.3%/7.5% 2021: 34.8%/8.2% 2020: 39.9%/9.8% 2019: 30.4%/9.9%	Decreased	Fluctuating, slight decrease from base year	No change
	Aboriginal children 2023: 20.3%/7.4% 2022: 20.6%/7.2% 2021: 21.1%/7.0% 2020: 20.1%/6.7% 2019: 21.9%/6.6%	Stable	No change	No change
	Children in out-of-home care 2023: 6.2%/1.4% 2022: 6.8%/1.4% 2021: 7.3%/1.4% 2020: 6.9%/1.4% 2019: 6.3%/1.2%	Stable	Fluctuating, stable from base year	No change
	Boys 2023: 81.3%/51.9% 2022: 81.7%/51.9% 2021: 82.3%/51.9% 2020: 82.7%/51.9% 2019: 83.7%/51.8%	Stable	Decrease from base year	+ Favourable
Proportion of Reception to Year 6 students excluded from government primary schools. ⁹ (% of students excluded/% of enrolments)	Children with Inclusive Education Support program (IESP) funding 2023: 52.5%/7.5% 2022: 60.7%/7.5% 2021: 63.3%/8.2% 2020: 63.1%/9.8% 2019: 41.9%/9.9%	Decreased	Fluctuating, increase from base year	- Unfavourable
	Aboriginal children 2023: 23.4%/7.4% 2022: 25.1%/7.2% 2021: 20.8%/7.0% 2020: 18.2%/6.7% 2019: 22.4%/6.6%	Slightly decreased	No change	No change
	Children in out-of-home care 2023: 9.6%/1.4% 2022: 12.8%/1.4% 2021: 7.5%/1.4% 2020: 9.1%/1.4% 2019: 9.1%/1.2%	Decreased	Fluctuating, increase from base year	No change
	Boys 2023: 82.0%/51.9% 2022: 86.3%/51.9% 2021: 88.8%/51.9% 2020: 88.3%/51.9% 2019: 89.0%/51.8%	Decreased	Decrease from base year	+ Favourable

What the data says

Measure	Year: Data	1 year change	5 year trend	5 year assessment
Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (aged 15–24) who are in employment, education or training. ¹⁰	2021: 55.5% 2016: 57.6%	Annual data not available	Decreasing	- Unfavourable
Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting being bullied 'weekly'. ¹¹	2024: 18% 2023: 18% 2022: 16% 2021: 17% 2020: 19%	Stable	Fluctuating, stable from base year	No change
Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students who have an important adult at school. ¹²	2024: 60% 2023: 59% 2022: 57% 2021: 58% 2020: 57%	Stable	Fluctuating, increase from base year	No change
Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students who feel connected to school. ¹³	2024: 60% 2023: 59% 2022: 60% 2021: 64% 2020: 61%	Stable	Fluctuating, stable from base year	No change

Note: Year 7 moved to secondary schools in 2022.

*While not directly comparable due to the change in measurement from Term 2 to Semester 1, 2023 figures are more than double 2022 figures.

Areas of concern include:

- High proportions of children with disability, Aboriginal children and children in out-of-home care being excluded from primary schools. Primary school children should not be suspended, excluded or expelled from school.
- No child-focused safeguarding or independent oversight mechanisms in place to protect children with disability from exclusionary and restrictive practices in education settings.
- Attendance levels and Attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have been declining over the past 6 years.
- Lack of commitment by the Commonwealth and State governments in respect to the education recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Background

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was the first international Convention to acknowledge that children have rights and that these rights should be protected. Australia ratified the UNCRC in 1990 and South Australia's [Children and Young People \(Oversight and Advocacy Bodies\) Act 2016](#) (OAB Act) states that all government authorities must seek to give effect to the UNCRC. The Convention sets minimum standards and obligations for the protection of children's and young people's rights, including their rights to have access to justice, education, health care and social services. All children have the right to have a say on all matters that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously. In making decisions about children their best interests should be the primary concern, as well as the right to be safe and to be free from discrimination.

Every five years, the Australian Government reports to the UNCRC Committee to explain how Australia is fulfilling its obligations in relation to child rights. In response to Australia's fifth and sixth periodic reports, the Committee highlighted key areas of concern and made recommendations to ensure governments at both the Commonwealth and State levels fulfil their obligations under the Convention. One of the Committee's main areas of concern requiring urgent attention is access to education.

Child's right to education

Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC recognise the rights of every child to access and participate in education that respects their dignity and develops their individual personality and talents to the full. A good education is central to lifelong physical and mental health outcomes, social inclusion and employment prospects. Education is not only a human right in itself, but also a fundamental means of realising other rights and greater social inclusion.

The right of every child to an education is embedded in South Australia's *Education and Children's Services Act 2019*. The Act also states that the best interests of the child must be the paramount consideration in all decisions pertaining to the Act.

Education is also one of the five key dimensions of the South Australian Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People, which recognises the importance of children entering the school system 'ready to take advantage of the learning environment', having positive learning experiences and being engaged in school, further education, training or work.

The school system in South Australia

South Australia's school system is comprised of three compulsory stages: preschool, primary and secondary school. Children aged 6 to 16 years are required to engage in formal education. Children may attend government or non-government (Catholic or independent) schools, as well as authorised home schooling options. The majority of children in South Australia attend government schools.

Some welcome developments in 2024 include:

- \$48.3 million over three years to support disengaged students with significant personal barriers, including mental health concerns, unstable accommodation, family difficulties, addiction, pregnancy and parenting through the Tailored Learning Provision program. The redesigned model gives schools greater oversight of the programs offered, puts more individualised supports in place for each student based on their needs and challenges, and encourages supports to be delivered within the school setting rather than off-site and away from their peers.¹⁴
- Commitments in the 2024–25 State Budget addressing cost of living pressures, include the expansion of the school breakfast program and the subsidy for materials and services charge increasing from \$100 to \$200 for the 2025 school year.¹⁵
- The government is investing approximately \$1.9 billion to implement the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care over the life of the reforms until 2032.¹⁶

South Australia's progress on the latest recommendations made by the UN Committee in relation to education



No evidence that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed



Some evidence that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed



Clear evidence that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

Current Status

To intensify its efforts to prevent and address bullying in schools, including online bullying, through the eSafety Commissioner and provide support to child victims, in particular lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.

Overall, there has been a slight reduction in bullying experiences as reported by all South Australian government school students since 2019. Results from the Department for Education's 2024 Wellbeing and Engagement Collection show:

- The proportion of all students reporting being bullied 'weekly' is stable at 19% in 2020 to 18% in 2024.
- A decrease in 'weekly' or 'monthly' verbal bullying (55% in 2020 to 50% in 2024), in physical bullying (36% in 2020 to 32% in 2024), cyberbullying (26% in 2020 to 22% in 2024) and social bullying (50% 2020 to 43% in 2024).
- Physical, verbal and social bullying become less frequent as students get older, whereas the frequency of cyberbullying remains relatively steady across year levels. Across all bullying types, 21% of Year 4 students reported being bullied 'weekly', compared to 16% of Year 10 students and 11% of Year 12 students.¹⁷

In April 2024, the Department for Education released the Key Achievements Report in relation to the state-wide bullying prevention strategy titled Connected: A community approach to bullying prevention within the school gates and beyond.¹⁸ Initiatives from the Connected strategy were implemented between 2019 and 2022. The final evaluation report, released in August 2024, found:

- Increased staff awareness, understanding and confidence around bullying behaviours with:
 - 2,500 educators completing bullying prevention training modules
 - 856 educators using bullying prevention lesson plans
 - more schools being funded to promote the National Day of Action; and
 - positive trends reported by staff in relation to how their site assists in promoting student safety.
- High uptake in the use of the online policy tool, but a low completion rate of schools developing a local bullying prevention policy utilising the tool itself.
- The public-facing bullying website associated with the strategy is not as effective as had been hoped, with direct communication to educators found to be more impactful.
- A slight reduction in self-reporting of bullying has occurred over the life of the Strategy. However, there have been year-on-year declines in students reporting school connectedness and friendship/peer belonging. Experiences of bullying remain high with over 50% of students annually reporting having experienced regular bullying during the school year. There has also been an increase in the reporting of bullying incidents.¹⁹

■ **No evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

■ **Some evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

■ **Clear evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

Data from the non-government sector was not made available for this evaluation. The Department for Education reported that it will refresh and promote the resources created under the Connected strategy.

The Department for Education has also released its Safe and Supported Learning Environments – Plan of Action 2024–2026.²⁰ This Plan was developed in 2023 to tackle violence and bullying behaviour in schools. It builds on previous actions to address bullying and also commits to:

- building students’ skills and knowledge to deal with bullying, providing support for their peers, and training other students through a students’ ‘train the trainer’ model
- providing educators and schools with training and new resources to better understand challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students; and
- updating the department’s bullying prevention requirements in schools using good practice examples from schools where there has been a reduction in bullying.²¹

Bullying against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children

In terms of support for LGBTQIA+ students, the Department for Education’s Supporting Gender Diverse, Intersex and Sexually Diverse Children and Young People Policy along with its Gender Diverse and Intersex Child and Young People Support Procedure states that discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or intersex status ‘must be addressed’ in anti-bullying policies across all department preschools, schools and childcare settings. It remains unclear as to how implementation of the policy is monitored. Whilst versions of this policy and procedure have remained in place over changes of government, legislation is needed to ensure the rights of LGBTQIA+ students are protected. Policies or procedures of this kind are not consistently in place. Neither are they made publicly available or monitored across South Australia’s Catholic and Independent schools.

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)* continues to allow some organisations (including religious schools) to discriminate on the basis of a student’s sexuality or gender identity. A private member’s Equal Opportunity (Religious Bodies) Amendment Bill 2024 was tabled by the Greens on 28 August 2024. It deletes exemptions that allow for certain faith-based institutions to discriminate against the LGBTQIA+ community in employment and in accessing services. The Bill has not progressed.

There has also been little movement in relation to national laws after several bills did not succeed through parliament due to their “controversial” nature.²² In 2023, the Australian Government asked the Australian Law Reform Commission to inquire into religious educational institutions and anti-discrimination laws with a report outlining findings tabled in March this year. As yet, there has been no formal response to the report. The acceptance of the recommendations should:

- Substantially narrow the circumstances in which discrimination by religious educational institutions of their students and staff is permissible at law.
- Maximise the enjoyment of human rights and appropriately manage the intersection of rights.

- Ensure any restriction of rights is justifiable under international law.
- Make federal law more consistent with state and territory laws and the law in comparable overseas jurisdiction.²³

To strengthen the school-based Respectful Relationships initiative to promote gender equality and respect.

A range of curriculum frameworks and learning resources support the delivery of relationships and sexual health education (or elements of it) in South Australia. The South Australian Curriculum for Public Education – an adapted version of the Australian Curriculum developed for Reception to Year 10 students in South Australian government schools – was released in 2024. However, there is no state-wide policy consistently mandating or prescribing school-based relationships and sexual health education, and no oversight mechanism to monitor or report on the delivery of such curriculum across primary and secondary schools.

Comprehensive relationships and sexual health (CRSH) education is crucial to promoting children's rights and gender equality. The right of South Australian children and young people to access comprehensive relationships and sexual health (CRSH) curriculum in primary and secondary school is inconsistent. In South Australia, SHINE SA is the approved provider that trains and supports teachers in South Australian public schools to facilitate evidence-based, best practice Teaching It Like It Is CRSH curriculum. At present, individual schools may elect to implement the SHINE SA program, or deliver alternative models, potentially including those which are not comprehensive, evidence-based, or inclusive of diversity.

At a national level, there has been increasing momentum at all levels of government to address family and domestic violence. The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, includes an action to strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships between all people in public and private spheres.²⁴ Recommendation 59 of the Commonwealth Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence highlights the importance of all governments working in partnership to ensure school students receive age-appropriate respectful relationships education that embeds prevention approaches in a range of settings, including schools.²⁵

In July 2023 the Australian government allocated \$77.6 million to develop high quality, age-appropriate, evidence-based respectful relationships education, including consent and sexuality education, to help prevent gender-based violence and promote healthy and respectful relationships between young people.

This includes:

- Establishing a national respectful relationships education expert working group with jurisdictional, non-government and expert representation to guide program design and advise schools on delivery methods that are evidenced based and suited to their school communities.
- Undertaking a rapid review of how respectful relationships consent education programs are currently being taught in schools.

- **No evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Some evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Clear evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

- Development of a national framework or guide for schools to use to support the delivery of high-quality respectful relationships education, including consent and sexuality education.
- Investment in a grants process to complement and support existing consent and respectful relationships education being undertaken by state, territory, and non-government school sectors.

In January 2024, the Australian government launched the Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework Development: Promoting Healthy Sexual Relationships and Consent Among Young People²⁶ to support any organisation working to prevent sexual violence. The policy framework has been developed specifically to promote healthy sexual relationships and sexual consent to young people. This is to ensure agencies provide young people with consistent messaging about consent and to support a unified approach to prevention of sexual violence.

To ensure that all children with disabilities have access to inclusive education in mainstream schools and are provided with the support they need, and to address the use of restraints and seclusion.

There was a disappointing response by the Commonwealth and State governments in respect to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. In respect to education, main recommendations included:

- providing equal access to mainstream education and enrolment
- preventing use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability
- improving the provision of reasonable adjustments
- developing a 'National Roadmap to Inclusive Education'
- implementing a careers guidance and transition support service for students with disability; and
- strengthening oversight and enforcement of inclusive practices and improve data collection, workforce capacity, student and parental communication, First Nations expertise, funding and complaints management.²⁷

None of the recommendations were fully 'accepted' by either the Commonwealth or State governments. Of the 15 recommendations made, the South Australian government accepted 13 in principle and 'noted' two, including the recommendation to phase out segregated education. The Australian Government's response was similar, with five of the 15 recommendations allocated to the states, 8 accepted in principle, and two noted.

Students with disability are disproportionately impacted by informal and formal exclusionary practices that limit or reject their enrolment, participation and engagement in education. This includes practices that limit the hours students can attend school, isolate students from peers and restrict children's rights.

Data provided to this office by the Department for Education shows a slight decrease in the proportion of primary school-age children with a disability being excluded.²⁸ However, these children are still much more likely to be excluded than children without a disability.

- **No evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Some evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Clear evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

- Students with disability (receiving funding through the Inclusion Education Support Program) make up 7.5% of total enrolments, but 30.6% of the total number of students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion in 2023 (this is lower than in 2022 with 7.5% of total enrolments but 34.5% of the total number of primary school students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion).
- There was no real change for students with disability (according to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on students with disability, which includes IESP students) between 2022 and 2023. These students make up only 33.1% of total enrolments but accounted for 75.6% of the total number of primary school students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion in 2023 (which is slightly higher than 2022 with 33.0% of total enrolments and 73.6% of students who received a take-home, suspension and/or exclusion).

In 2022, students with disability made up an estimated 22.8% of enrolments in South Australian independent schools.²⁹ In 2022, students with disability made up 23.6% of total enrolments in Catholic schools, with 13.2% receiving supplementary, 3.8% substantial or 0.8% extensive levels of adjustment.³⁰ Non-government schools do not currently report publicly on suspensions and exclusions data. In 2024, Catholic and Independent school leaders have agreed to report annually to the Education Minister on how often students with disability are suspended, excluded or refused enrolment.

During the 2023 reporting period all government primary schools received an allocation for an Autism Inclusion Teacher (AIT). Over 440 schools had an appointed AIT during the year. AITs were supported through professional learning and professional support networks during their first year of appointment.³¹

A new Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) Supplementary Level grant was introduced to schools in term 1 of 2024. This allows schools greater autonomy and flexibility to support students with disability and schools will no longer have to apply for IESP level 1 to 3 funding.³²

Restraints and seclusion

There has been no further progress in 2024 in terms of cross-government legislation for regulating restrictive practices outside of the NDIS. Educational institutions are not authorised to undertake planned restrictive practices, however, there is guidance in respect to unplanned restrictive practices. The Department for Education's Protective Practices guidelines allow staff to 'make legitimate use of physical restraint' as a 'last resort' where a student is causing harm to themselves or others. The guidelines acknowledge that staff must consider 'the age, stature, disability, understanding and gender of the child or young person' and that 'inappropriate use of physical restraint/ restrictive practices may constitute assault'.³³

To address the shortcomings of the Closing the Gap measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and to reach the targets on school attendance, retention rates, literacy and numeracy standards by paying particular attention to these children in remote areas and investing in teachers' cultural competency of these communities' history.

There has been some investment and progress made in relation to increasing enrolments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children in the early education space, in addition to retaining and keeping them in education. But the results are mixed.

Early childhood education data

Closing the Gap Target 3 – Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in the early years.

In 2023, 106.7%* of South Australia's ATSI children in the Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) age cohort were enrolled in a preschool program. This is an increase from about the 96.3% baseline.³⁴ (*the enrolment proportions may exceed 100% for some areas due to the numerator and denominator being from different sources).

Closing the Gap Target 4 – By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.³⁵

In 2023, 31.3% of South Australia's ATSI children were developmentally on track in all five domains, up from 26.8% from the baseline year in 2016, showing a slight improvement.³⁶

In August 2023, South Australia's Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care released its Final Report. The State government accepted recommendation 14, to strengthen the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector, and implement Aboriginal three-year-old preschool.

In South Australia's 2024 Budget the government allocated \$14 million over four years to:

- partner with Aboriginal communities on a co-design process to increase the benefits ATSI children receive from existing pre-school (it will start in 2024–25); and
- invest in early childhood education and care via Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and align Closing the Gap initiatives with outcomes for early childhood.³⁷

Primary and Secondary School data

Closing the Gap Target 5 – By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20–24) attaining year 12 or equivalent to 96%.

In 2023, 64.6% of South Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had completed year 12 or the equivalent by the age of 24 – similar to the percentage recorded in 2021 – but up from 61.4% in 2016.³⁸

Closing the Gap Target 6 – By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years had completed non-school qualifications of Certificate III or above.

- **No evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Some evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed
- **Clear evidence** that the UN Committee's recommendation is being addressed

In 2023, 42.2% of South Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the 25–34 year old age group had completed a non-school qualification of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate Level III or above; a slight increase from 39.8% in 2021.

Closing the Gap Target 7 – By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (15–24 years) who are in employment, education, or training to 67%.

In 2023, 55.5% of South Australia's 15 to 24-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were fully engaged in employment, education, or training, down from 57.6% in 2021.

The last three measures are only updated approximately every 4 years. However, data from ACARA shows a decrease in South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people completing vocational education and training with 2,000 students in 2022, down from 5,000 in 2019.³⁹ On a positive note, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more likely to complete their education compared to the rest of the population. It is not known why these numbers have been decreasing.

Aboriginal children and young people are less likely to attend school when compared to the whole of South Australia's child population. The attendance rates in Years 1–10 are lower for South Australian students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; down to 75.0% compared to 88.0% attendance levels for all students.

In 2023, the overall attendance level (meaning the percentage of total enrolled students attending school more than 90% of the time) is lower for ATSI students at 31.7% compared to 59.7% for all students. This means that in 2023, 68.3% of ATSI students missed more than 4 weeks of school.

In 2023, there were 421 ATSI school students who completed their South Australian Certificate of Education, up from 347 last year.⁴⁰ There were also 28 Aboriginal students who received recognition for Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Learning.

During 2024, the Department for Education expanded support for Aboriginal learners participating in programs that lead to post-school transitions. Six new school-based academies were established to strengthen Aboriginal languages education. There are also Aboriginal languages curriculum resources for six South Australian Aboriginal languages currently in development.

In respect to primary and secondary students, the Department for Education continued to implement targeted initiatives as per the Aboriginal Education Strategy as well as undertaking other initiatives throughout the year that included:

- Launching the new 2023 to 2026 Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)⁴¹ building on the previous plan, with particular focus on embedding reconciliation initiatives into the organisation and use their field of influence to drive reconciliation.
- Working with the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) to support education and skills targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- Introducing a new funding model for Aboriginal children and young people in schools to commence from 2024. The new model provides schools with more flexible and predictable funding, supporting informed, localised decision making responsive to the needs and interests of their Aboriginal students.
- Implementing the Aboriginal Voice Framework to embed Aboriginal perspectives and expertise in department policies and projects.
- Implementing a Culturally Responsive Framework through the Aboriginal Workforce Plan (2021–2031).
- Developing curriculum resources for Aboriginal languages in partnership with Aboriginal language communities to support the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages in schools.

In respect to initiatives relating to Aboriginal students, in 2023:

- 658 students from over 63 regional and metropolitan schools participated in the Workabout Program, delivering 1,477 accredited and non-accredited training outcomes. (Some students took up training opportunities and there were 17 employment outcomes for Aboriginal learners); and
- 1,119 Aboriginal learners participated in the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy (SAASTA) Programs across regional and metropolitan schools.⁴²

To invest more in improving education at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels, paying particular attention to children living in remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities, children in marginalised and disadvantaged situations, children in alternative care and children from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

In July 2023, the Department for Education released a new purpose statement for public education and strategy for public education, covering four interrelated areas of impact: wellbeing, equity and excellence, learner agency and effective learners. Progress has been recorded below.

The development of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025–2034) is said to ‘ensure all public schools receive full and fair funding over the life of the Agreement and put every public school on a path to 100 percent of the School Resourcing Standard.’⁴³ To date, due to the continued underfunding of public schools, only three States have signed the agreement. In August 2024, it was reported that the South Australian government will not sign on to the new agreement unless the Commonwealth Government increases its funding commitment to 25% of SRS.⁴⁴

Evidence of progress at different levels of education

Educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are below the national average and more needs to be done to realise their full potential.

Early childhood education data

The South Australian Government is investing approximately \$1.9 billion through to 2032 to implement the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care over the life of the reforms.⁴⁵ The government response consists of seven core elements to reduce the rate of South Australian children entering school developmentally vulnerable from 23.8% to 15% over 20 years.

- **No evidence** that the UN Committee’s recommendation is being addressed
- **Some evidence** that the UN Committee’s recommendation is being addressed
- **Clear evidence** that the UN Committee’s recommendation is being addressed

To date, the Department for Education has:

- amended its School and Preschool Enrolment Policy to reflect eligible 3-year-old preschool enrolments, increasing access from 12 hours a week to 15 hours a week with a \$9.5 million budget in 2024–25⁴⁶
- introduced a mid-year intake into Preschool from 2023, and for Reception from 2024;⁴⁷ and
- developed a targeted strategy to increase the number of service providers, including Autism SA, offering early intervention services in children’s centres.

The Commissioner will follow the progress of these recommendations, particularly those related to improving equitable outcomes, noting that preschool uptake is not equal, nor compulsory.

Primary and secondary data

A total of 15,699 students completed their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) in 2023, up from 14,676 students in 2022, but similar to the 15,738 students who completed in 2021. In respect to VET Certificate III, 2,930 students completed the Certificate as part of their SACE in 2023, down from 3,042 students in 2022 and down further from 3,586 in 2021.⁴⁸

In October 2024, the Department for Education announced it will be rolling out its Tailored Learning Provision program at the start of 2025, with an investment of \$48 million over three years.⁴⁹ This followed a successful trial at 12 public high schools that provided additional supports for vulnerable students, including those with mental health concerns, unstable accommodation, family difficulties, pregnancy and parenting. During the trial, the 12 schools reported improvement in student attendance as a direct outcome of the extra youth workers and supports that were provided and resulted in stronger engagement with the students and their families.⁵⁰

The redesigned model gives schools greater oversight of the programs offered, puts more individualised supports in place for each student based on their needs and challenges, and encourages supports to be delivered within the school setting rather than off-site and away from peers.

Country and rural areas

In 2023, there were 48,140 full-time equivalent students enrolled in South Australian schools located in rural, regional and remote areas, making up 28.4% of all government school enrolments. According to the Report on Government Expenditure 8,989 students were from remote areas (8,834 full-time equivalent students). Of the 3,790 rural, regional and remote students who completed SACE last year, 89 received merits. The overall completion rate was up from 2,351 in 2022 and 2,566 in 2021.⁵¹

Key deliverables against the Country Education Strategy 2022, as reported in the Department for 2023 Education Annual Report, include:

- improved accessibility to psychology and speech pathology services in rural, regional and remote areas by expanding a tele-practice service and finalising availability of an External Provider Panel (EPP) to these sites; and
- establishing a South Australian Rural Youth Ambassadors Program.⁵²

Children in care

South Australia's 2022/2023 Child and Young Person Visitor's (CYP Visitor's) Annual Report noted that only 45% of young people visited in residential care were engaged in full time education. There is no data available on this year's percentages as this will only be reported upon in the new year. The figures are based on information provided by the Department for Child Protection and non-government organisations. The CYP Visitor 'believes that this may be a "best case scenario"'.

Children and young people in care are over-represented in exclusions, take homes and suspension data. In 2023, children in care made up 1.4% of enrolments, but 6% of take homes, suspensions and exclusions. There is a joint Plan of Action with the Department for Child Protection to ensure this group of children is given access and the appropriate supports to achieve good educational outcomes and remain in education.⁵³

The new Children and Young People (Safety and Support) Bill has now been tabled with provisions that strengthen post care support up to 25 years of age. This followed the review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act* which recommended the Act 'require certain levels of service provision for children and young people in care and leaving care', particularly in the areas of education, health, disability support and housing.⁵⁴

Children in poverty

According to Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data, in 2021 more than one quarter (27.3%) of students enrolled in all schools in South Australia were in the lowest quartile of socio-educational advantage (SEA), increasing to 33.7% of students enrolled in government schools in 2022.⁵⁵ As noted in previous reports, Tasmania and Northern Territory are the only two states and territories with a higher proportion of students with low socio-educational advantage.

Key commitments in the 2024–2025 State Budget seek to support children living in disadvantaged and marginalised situations. They include:

- \$24 million in 2024–25 to deliver a \$200 reduction in the annual materials and services charge for students attending government schools. This initiative expands and extends this support for a further year and will support up to 120,000 school children and their parents and carers.
- \$127.3 million over four years to increase the minimum 15 hours of preschool to 30 hours for 2,000 children aged 3 and 4 years who are at greatest risk of developmental vulnerability. This includes creation of integrated hubs to be co-designed with local communities, opening progressively over the life of the reform, and including two initial demonstration hubs opening in late 2025.⁵⁶

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