

THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO CHILDREN



What SA Children say about Well-being at School

- ✓ 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 AT SCHOOL

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'. Other tweens focused on the structure of the school day, writing about how slightly shorter school days would allow them to play more sport, get more sleep, and connect with others.

A few children wanted more time at school, highlighting how it is an important and safe place where they learn, play and connect with peers and adults. While a few children wanted more homework 'to prepare for high school and college', most children wanted less homework so they could spend more time 'as kids' and connecting with family after what is already a long day at school.



“ Change it so kids have less homework and more leisure time to enjoy being a kid while they still can.” – 10 year old (Adelaide Hills)

“ make school tasks use more imagination so kids can do what they do best.” – 11 year old (Eyre and Western)

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.

A higher proportion of boys than girls wanted to change some aspect of their school to make lessons more engaging, and to find ways to provide more help for kids who are struggling to learn, including having more opportunities to have breaks and be active.

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.

They wrote about wanting more help from teachers and SSOs (Students Support Officers) to help 'kids feel safe and to learn', and they wanted to see more flexible learning options introduced to help those who 'struggle' or who 'learn differently'.

Specific suggestions included providing more opportunities to be active and creative at school, with more fitness lessons and music teachers on staff. Others wrote about 'making mindfulness part of the curriculum', putting plants in classrooms, improving school toilets and air conditioning, creating spaces at school for students to relax, and letting people have a pet at school 'so they have a good friend' and 'wouldn't feel sad'.

“ I would give more funds to schools so they can get more SSO teachers to help stressed out kids.” – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ I would have a fitness subject at the end of the day. I would upgrade all school’s internet and buildings.” – 11 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ I’d like to have more outside learning time for kids in SA.” – 12 year old (Barossa, Light and Lower North)

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 also wanted to have more choice in what they learnt at school. They wanted to see more opportunities to learn practical skills that would prepare them for adult life and the ‘real world’. This ranged from learning about ‘how to fix cars’ to learning about diverse cultures and identities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and histories, LGBTQIA+ young people, and people with disability.

“ Give everyone a very good education and teach everyone important skills they will need later in life.”
– 10 year old (Metropolitan Adelaide)

Many children wanted school uniform policies to be more flexible, particularly considering how this might impact those who ‘can’t afford it’. They also wanted to change strict rules about going to the toilet, so that children could use the bathroom when they needed to without being told off or made to feel embarrassed.

“ Try to treat students fair and the same. When someone needs to go to the toilet let them.” – 9 year old (Limestone Coast)



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 deppreshoin 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

“ 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

“ 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

“ 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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