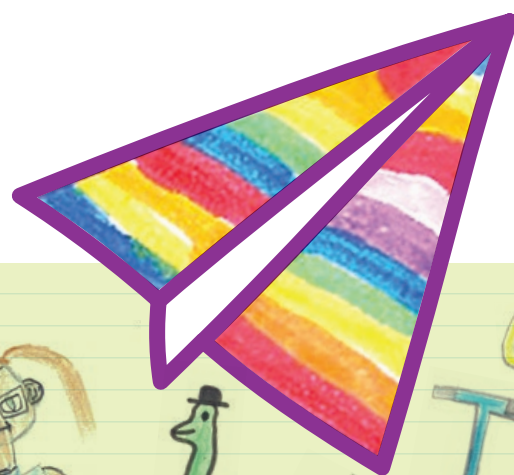
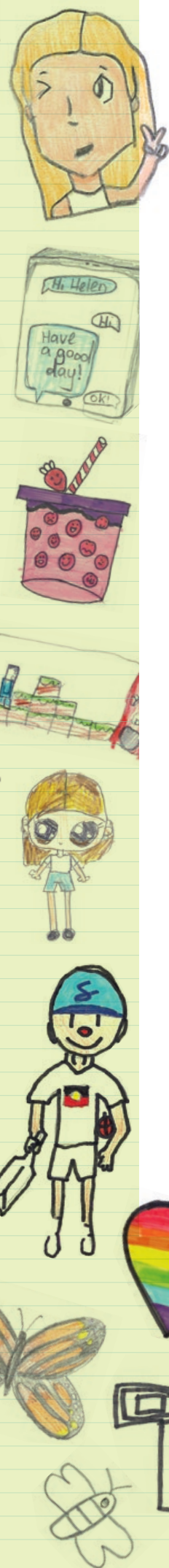


South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
2024

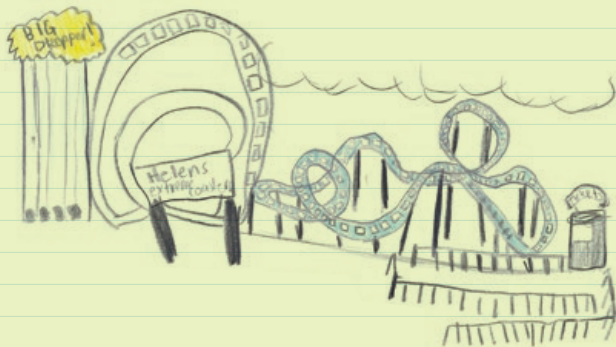
The Things That Matter 5

Views of 8-12 year olds on life,
school and community

PROJECT REPORT NO. 43 | JULY 2024



Commissioner
for Children &
Young People



The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act'). The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular, children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making, and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda, including ways in which children and young people can have greater input into the design and delivery of policies, processes and practices that affect their lives.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 18,328 South Australian school students aged 8–12 years who participated in the Commissioner's Student Voice Postcard Project in 2023. Thanks also to the teachers and school staff who supported their participation.

Please note: All quotes in this report are reproduced verbatim.

Suggested Citation

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Commissioner's Foreword

This is the fifth in my series of annual *Things That Matter* reports. It reflects the responses I have received from 18,328 children around the state who participated in my Student Voice Postcards initiative throughout Terms 3 and 4 of 2023 – up from 16,007 in 2022.



This brings the total number of postcards I have received since the initiative commenced 5 years ago in 2019, to 65,011. It is a large dataset that I hope will have enduring value to researchers, policy makers, and decision makers alike; a snapshot in time of what mattered most to South Australian children in this age group throughout these years.

Children in this age group rarely have an opportunity to have their voices heard, or be asked for their opinion, which is why I wanted to facilitate this in a simple and ongoing way. I designed the initiative to introduce children in this age group to the concept of what it means to have voice and agency.

I do this by inviting young South Australians aged 8–12 years to share their views on the 'things' that matter to them most by answering a set of four questions I set each year. I change this set of questions to keep children who participate across consecutive years engaged.

I am sure there are some children at some schools who will have participated at age 8 and in each subsequent year since, and I hope this participation will have an impact on their experience of what it means to have a voice. For some children they may see real change in their schools and communities based on their feedback, such as playground upgrades.

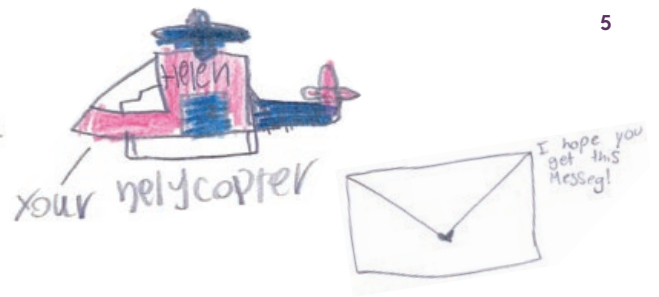
Children are also invited to draw me a picture. I love receiving these pictures. They're so insightful and at times very funny. There is also the odd sad picture too. These drawings combine with written answers to provide me with deep insights into children's everyday lives at these ages.

Most children in this age group are leading happy, healthy lives in which they are engaged with school, their friends, and their community. They love their families and appear to be balancing screen time with outdoor activities well. They appreciate the care that trusted adults and others in their lives are showing them, particularly their parents.

Some children, however, are experiencing difficulties, and it is the insights into the lives of these children that motivates me to continue with the initiative each year. What children share with me reveals certain trends across their age group. It also reminds me of the simplicity with which some children view the world at this age, while others clearly articulate their personal experiences of very real problems like poverty, abuse, and mental health issues.

Most children trust adults when they're 8, 9 and 10 years of age. This isn't something we should take for granted. We need to invest in our relationships with children and work on

Thank you for giving
us a right to speak.



building trust and respect by listening to them and understanding the complexity of their 21st century children's lives.

It is also important to acknowledge and understand that children's lives now compared to earlier generations are being impacted so much more by technology. It impacts how children learn, how they move around, how they interact with each other, and how quickly they must adapt to our rapidly and ever-changing world. Add to this their understanding of what the impact of climate change will bring in their lifetimes along with the struggles they may experience or witness other children experiencing via news and social media.

The postcards provide a wonderful reflection on how children see us as adults. For the most part children respect adults and see the value in the things we place importance on across education, sport, recreation, health, friendships, picking up litter, being kind to others, etc. They also offer us ideas on how to improve their situations, and invite us to think about how our actions can be seen through the eyes of the child.

I value the contribution made by each child who completes a postcard. I also appreciate the support that is being provided by schools via teachers, educators, and other school staff to facilitate children's participation in my postcards initiative each year.

This annual *Things That Matter* report is just one of the ways in which children's postcard responses are communicated to decision makers and community leaders across the state. I also use their responses to inform other aspects of my advocacy work.

This year in School Term 3, I will again be inviting SA Government, Catholic, and Independent primary students in the 8-12 year age group to participate. I encourage those who have not yet engaged with this initiative to do so, and to those schools who have been participating over the past five years, a huge thank you – keep those postcards coming. To the 54 schools who have participated every year since the initiative commenced, my sincere thanks.

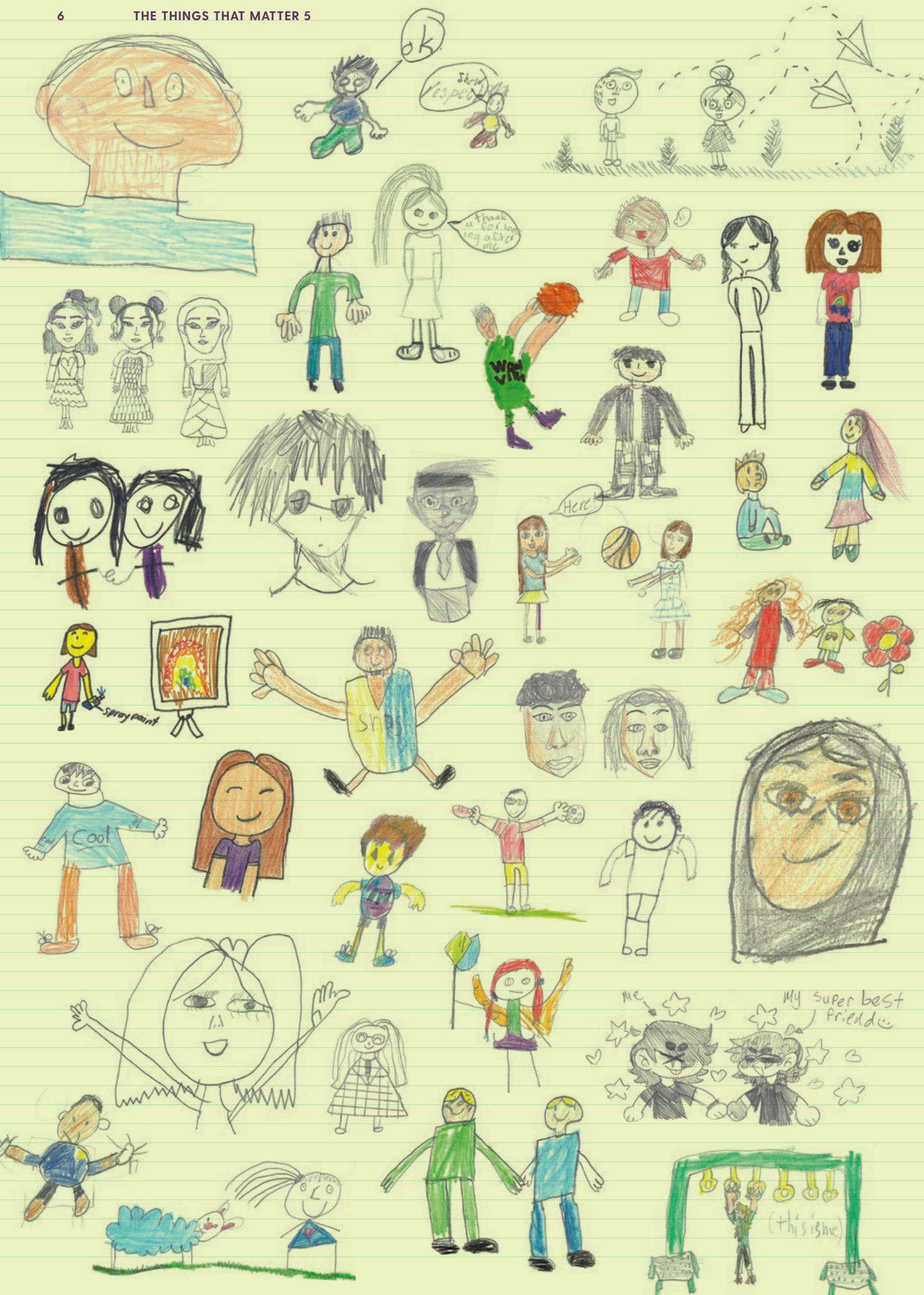
I look forward to your support again in 2024, and to receiving and reading the many thousands of completed postcards sent in from children across the state because of it.

Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Adelaide, South Australia



P.S. I love that your doing this
to help kids have a better future!



Overview of student and school participation

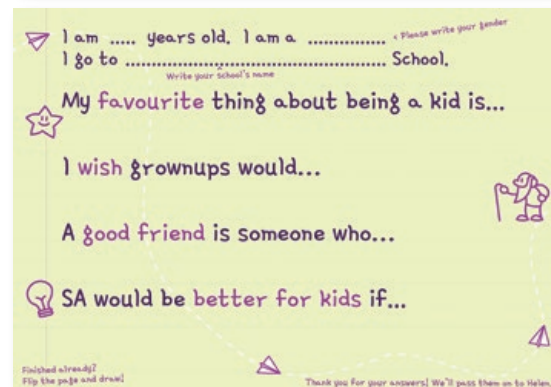
In 2023, postcards came from 347 schools across South Australia. This number represents more than half (56%) of SA schools with 8–12 year olds enrolled and is up from 53% in 2022. Of the schools taking part last year, 29 were participating for the first time. There are also 54 ‘champion’ schools that have participated over all five years.

Postcards were completed by children attending Government, Catholic, and Independent schools in metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote locations throughout South Australia. Students in the 8–12 age group attending primary, primary/secondary combined, Area schools, Special Education schools, and Aboriginal/Anangu schools are represented.

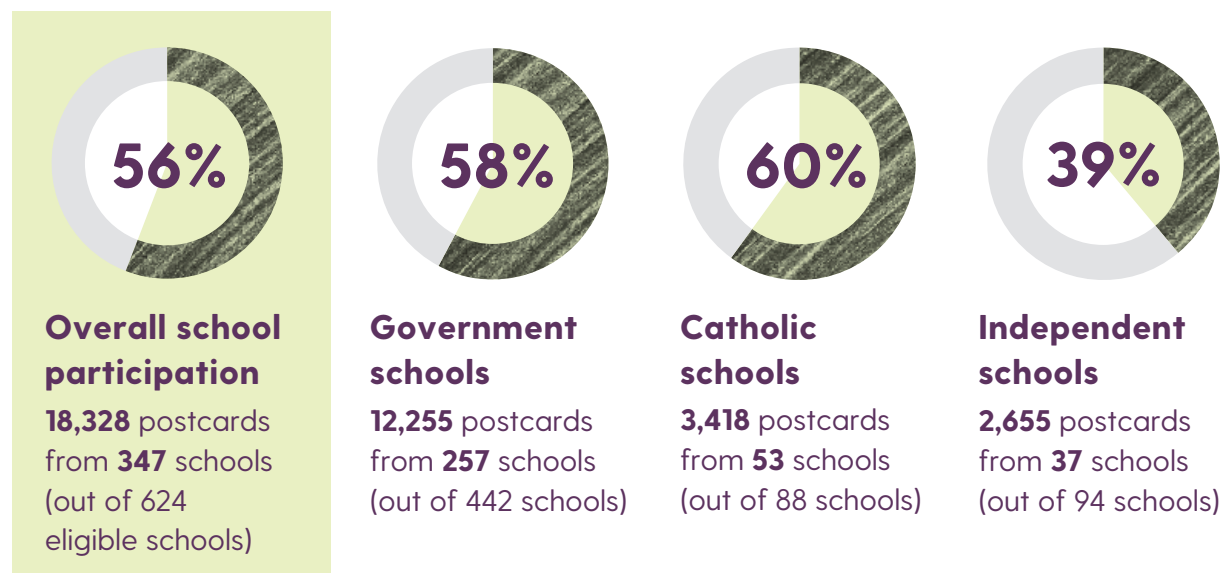
Similar numbers of girls and boys completed postcards. There were also some students who were non-binary, trans, or genderfluid, along with others who described their gender in different ways to these.

The 2023 postcard contained the following questions along with an option to draw a picture, as shown in the graphic (right).

Postcard packs were sent to 624 schools across South Australia. The following participation rates are based on 624 as the total number of schools with 8–12 year olds enrolled that were invited to participate.



Participation rates, by school sector

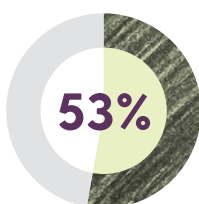


Participation, by type of school

- **12,768** postcards from **251** primary schools
- **4,193** postcards from **54** primary/secondary combined schools
- **1,163** postcards from **27** Area schools
- **148** postcards from **11** Special Education schools
- **56** postcards from **4** Aboriginal/Anangu schools

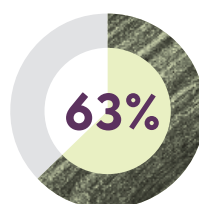


Participation rates, by Index of Educational Disadvantage* for government schools



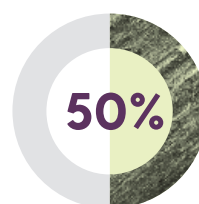
Category 1 schools

564 postcards from **19** schools (out of 36 schools)



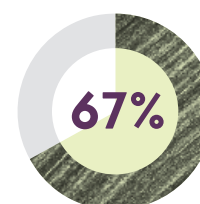
Category 2 schools

1,639 postcards from **40** schools (out of 63 schools)



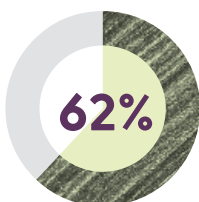
Category 3 schools

1,218 postcards from **24** schools (out of 48 schools)



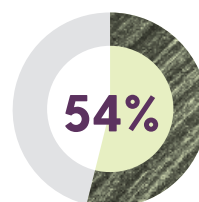
Category 4 schools

1,974 postcards from **42** schools (out of 63 schools)



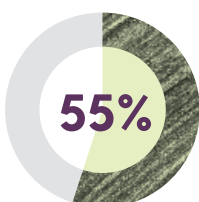
Category 5 schools

2,483 postcards from **50** schools (out of 81 schools)



Category 6 schools

2,446 postcards from **48** schools (out of 89 schools)

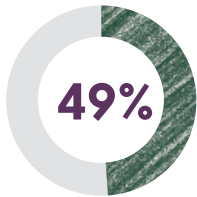


Category 7 schools

1,931 postcards from **34** schools (out of 62 schools)

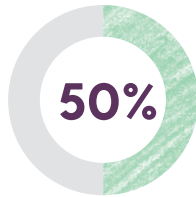
*The Index of Educational Disadvantage groups South Australian government schools into seven categories of relative disadvantage, with schools in Category 1 serving the most disadvantaged school communities, and Category 7 the least disadvantaged.

Participation rates, by South Australian government regions



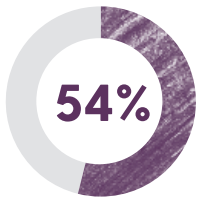
Adelaide Hills

741 postcards
from **18** schools
(out of 37 schools)



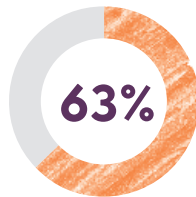
Barossa, Light and Lower North

687 postcards
from **14** schools
(out of 28 schools)



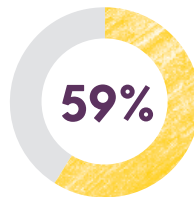
Eastern Adelaide

2,521 postcards
from **33** schools
(out of 61 schools)



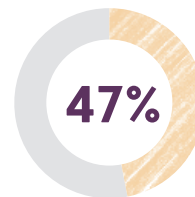
Eyre and Western

808 postcards
from **24** schools
(out of 38 schools)



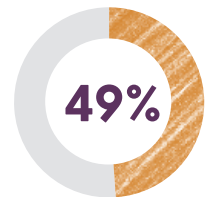
Far North

699 postcards
from **16** schools
(out of 27 schools)



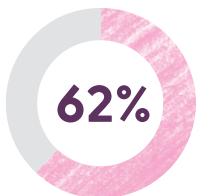
Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island

404 postcards
from **7** schools
(out of 15 schools)



Limestone Coast

718 postcards
from **19** schools
(out of 39 schools)



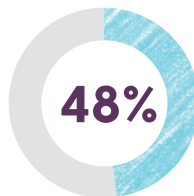
Murray and Mallee

1,046 postcards
from **29** schools
(out of 47 schools)



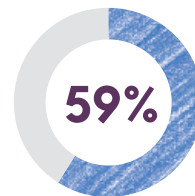
Northern Adelaide

4,283 postcards
from **62** schools
(out of 109 schools)



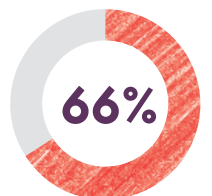
Southern Adelaide

3,032 postcards
from **49** schools
(out of 102 schools)



Western Adelaide

1,926 postcards
from **35** schools
(out of 59 schools)



Yorke & Mid North

1,463 postcards
from **41** schools
(out of 62 schools)

Key messages

Children love playing and having fun, and want more outdoor activities, playgrounds, and opportunities for sport.



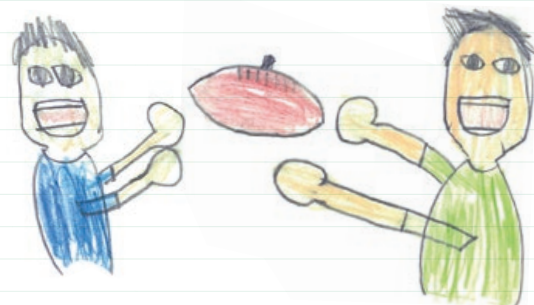
Children want to be listened to and understood by grownups and friends.



Children value kindness shown by grownups, friends, and others in their communities.



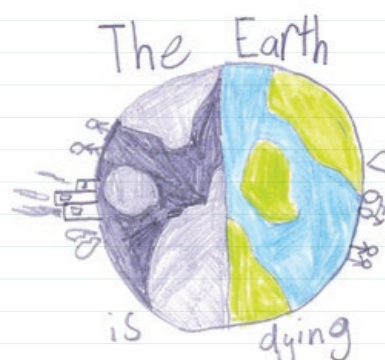
Children want school to be more engaging and relevant to their lives, and they want more opportunities and improved facilities for play and sport.



Children value their friends and family.



Children are concerned about the environment.



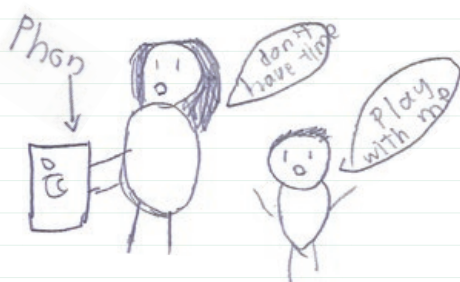
Children appreciate not having adult responsibilities and being able to enjoy their lives as children.



Children are concerned about the cost of everyday items, school, events, and sport.



Children want grownups to spend more time with them and play with them more.



Children have diverse experiences and views that need to be recognised.



What do 8- to 12-year-olds say is their favourite thing about being a kid?

Playing and having fun

Not having adult responsibilities, like bills and work

Having and spending time with friends and family

Going to school and learning

Being energetic and small

Children shared many things in relation to their favourite thing about being a kid. These often centred on playing and having fun, not having adult responsibilities, and spending time with friends and family. Only a small number of children did not write about at least one favourite thing.

“ Play with friend's at least 5x per week. Don't have to deal with the stress e.g. Bill's, car & fines. (11, boy – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

“ To have free time all the time and being able to play with friends at any time. (11, girl – Far North, Independent)

Playing and having fun

Many children wrote about playing and having fun as their favourite thing about being a kid. This included having 'lots of time to play', being able to 'play with your friends a lot more', and 'getting to go to fun places', including playgrounds, parks, and skate parks.

Play was most often mentioned in the form of sport and other physical activities. Children enjoyed a broad variety of sports, including football, soccer, basketball, netball, dancing, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, volleyball, rugby, karate, boxing, and hockey. Others wrote about activities like running, horse riding, bike riding, and skateboarding.

“ going to the SkatePark and playing with the other kids. (10, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)

“ being able to play sport and be outside, making me feel free and alive. (10, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)

Some children enjoyed playing games or playing with toys, while others named specific activities like drawing, playing with Lego, and reading. Activities included being able to 'play games all day', 'building Lego with my friends' and 'making comics'. Others wrote about having free time on phones, tablets, and computers, most often to play video games.

“ You get toys insted of clothes for your birthday/Christmas. (11, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)

“ playing games with my friends on ps5 ps4 xbox1. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Independent)



Several children wrote specifically about how fun it is to be a kid and some described how play makes them feel. Others enjoyed 'experimenting with new sports' or other interests, and being able to 'do more things' and relax more than older people can.

- “ I get to much more fun then grownups get to have. I also enjoy playing with my friends in the school yard. (9, girl – Western Adelaide, Catholic)

Not having adult responsibilities, like bills and work

Many children appreciated not having adult responsibilities and being able to enjoy their lives as children.

Responses often focused on aspects of adult responsibilities like not having to pay bills, taxes, and other expenses, such as housing and groceries. Not needing a job or 'to make money' was also viewed positively. Others focused on the benefits of not having to do chores, such as cooking and cleaning.

- “ No bills, no taxes, parents buying us stuff, not worrying about finance, no driving, parents take us places, privledges, no cooking, plan for your future. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ not having to pay bills and rent and food or my school bill. (11, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Catholic)
- “ that I go to school and learn instead of going to work and getting bossed around. (9, boy – Adelaide Hills, Government)

Children also appreciated not having the stress that adults have. This included 'not having big, big responsiblitiys' and not needing to 'worry about adult problems' like bills, taxes, and rent and 'running out of money'.



- “ that we can get a good night's sleep and not pay for food, shelter and worry too much about prices going up. (11, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Some children explicitly mentioned that this absence of adult responsibilities allowed them to have more free time and freedom. This meant they could do other things like attend school and play sport.

- “ Having more freedom then adults, adults need to pay taxes and spend to much money to live in a house with working appliances. (11, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Independent)
- “ getting more fun at school than at work. (9, boy – Eyre and Western, Government)

Having and spending time with friends and family

Another favourite thing children shared about being a kid was being able to spend time with friends and family. Children appreciated having people in their lives who care about them and who have fun with them.

- “ Having a nice family and awesome friends at primary school. (9, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)
- “ I have so much friends and a nice mum that care's about me. (10, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

Friends were often mentioned in relation to spending time together inside and outside of school, including hanging out, playing sport, going to 'lots of play dates', and gaming.



“ Staying at home and play video games with friends. (10, boy – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Independent)

“ Playing soccer with Freinds at school. (8, boy – Murray and Mallee, Independent)

When describing their favourite thing about being a kid, children wrote about many different family members, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and cousins. Parents were mentioned frequently, particularly in relation to doing things together, buying things for their children, providing a home and food, and giving their children love and support.

“ I get to ride my bike with my mum. (7, boy – Far North, Government)

“ I can still Live with my mum and dad. (9, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)

“ Is when my parents help me and keep me safe and love me. (9, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)



Going to school and learning

Going to school and learning were mentioned by several children as their favourite thing about being a kid. Some simply wrote 'school' or 'going to school', while others elaborated on their responses.

“ still going to school with a good teacher and a good classroom. (7, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)

“ We get to do loads of fun things At school. (8, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)

Seeing friends at school was particularly valued. Children liked playing and 'hanging out with my friends at school' as well as making new friends.

“ I get to go to school and see my frinds and my favorite teachers like Mrs [name] and SSOs. (9, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

“ Being at school and meeting new people and making life long friends. (10, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)

Some children wrote about their enjoyment of learning at school. They liked learning things that were 'new', 'cool', 'fun', and 'interesting'. Others mentioned learning 'new stuff' outside of school, including in relation to sports, as well as developing 'new life skills'.

- “ That I get to learn lots of cool things and do lots of cool activities at school. (12, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ Learning about all the new, interesting subjects and playing with my friends. (12, boy – Northern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ learning and writing all day at school. (9, girl – Far North, Government)
- “ you can play games and sport. you can join clubs and learn. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Government)

Being energetic and small

Some children wrote that their favourite thing about being a kid was being energetic and small. This included the benefits of having lots of energy, being active, and running fast. They enjoyed that they were ‘more energetic than parents/Adults’ and ‘way more flexible than grown ups’.

- “ being flexible, being short enough to do the monkeybars, being able to fit through tight spaces, and getting invited to lots of birthday partys. (8, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ easier to run (enrgetic) and dont have to go to work. (8, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ Not paying bills, playing video games for hours without getting tired, running fast. (10, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)



Others enjoyed being small and able to ‘fit in little spaces’ perfect for playing hide and seek.

- “ small so I can get into small places. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ Being free sometimes and fitting into small places in hide and seek. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

And so much more...

Children shared many other favourite things about being a kid. This included being young and having a long future ahead of them, experiencing new things and having opportunities, and having a vivid imagination. Others wrote about their love of sweet foods like ice cream, lollies, and doughnuts, as well as the love they have for animals. They also enjoyed fun events like holidays, school holidays, Christmas, and birthdays.

- “ enjoying being young and doing stuff you might not be able to when your older. (9, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)
- “ I get to experience lot's of things for the first time so it's extra exciting. (12, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)
- “ I get to use my vivid imagination every day! (10, she/they – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ I never grow old and we have lots of sweet tooth. (9, girl – Northern Adelaide, Catholic)



What do 8- to 12-year-olds wish grownups would do?

Listen and understand more

Spend more time together

Be nicer and not yell

Let children do more things

Be happier and have more fun

Give children more things

Ultimately, children wish grownups would listen to them and understand them better, spend more time with them, be nicer to them, and let them do more things.

“ *Let kids do whatever we want, buy us more things, Days off as they work too hard and play with us. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)*

“ *let kids ride there bikes and play with them and help them study. (12, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)*

Many responses related to children's parents, while some were about adults in general, or occasionally teachers. A few children were quick to point out that while they wished grownups would change in some way, this did not include their parents, who they thought were already doing a great job.

There were also a small number of children who didn't want grownups to do anything differently, saying they already 'do every thing perfectly' and wanted them to 'do what they already do' and 'stay the same as they are now'.

Listen and understand more

Children most often wanted adults to listen to them more and understand them better. They wanted grownups to 'know how kids feel' and to 'start understanding a children's point of view'.

Children wish grownups would listen to them and let them have a say in decision making. They wanted grownups to 'let me talk more', 'just listen' and 'take us more seriously'.

“ *listen to me a bit more and understand our problems. (9, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Government)*

“ *listen to our ideas more. My Parents and family listen but no other adults do. (10, boy – Southern Adelaide, Independent)*

“ *Let me say my side of the story. (10, girl – Far North, Government)*

“ *Let kids make more decisions even if it's only something small. (12, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)*



Some shared that understanding children means knowing them better. In some cases, they suggested that this understanding may be improved by grownups listening to children. They wanted grownups to understand children's 'true feelings', 'what might be happening at school', and 'that kids have hard times to'. They also wanted grownups to know that children are not all the same. They might need 'easier' or 'harder' work at school, have mental health issues, or have friendship problems of which they feel grownups aren't aware.

- “ Consider that every child is different in terms of learning and personality. (12, girl – Southern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ Understand me and believe me at least twice as much as they do. (10, trans to a boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ know that when you dont get good grades, they should know that we were trying our hardest. (11, girl – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Independent)
- “ I'm grateful for my current ones but I wish they'd understand us. (11, genderfluid – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)

Spend more time together

Many children wished grownups would spend more time with them and give them more attention. They 'wish they were around more' and that parents in particular would 'interact with us more'. They wished grownups would 'be able to play with you 247'.

More specifically, spending time together included doing things like playing, reading books and telling stories, watching movies, gaming, baking, doing art and craft, going for walks, and playing on the playground. They also wanted grownups to 'show up to important events' and 'go to birthdays'.

- “ have more time to play and help us After School. (9, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ Play Roblox with me. Play handball with me. Spend alot of time with me. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Government)

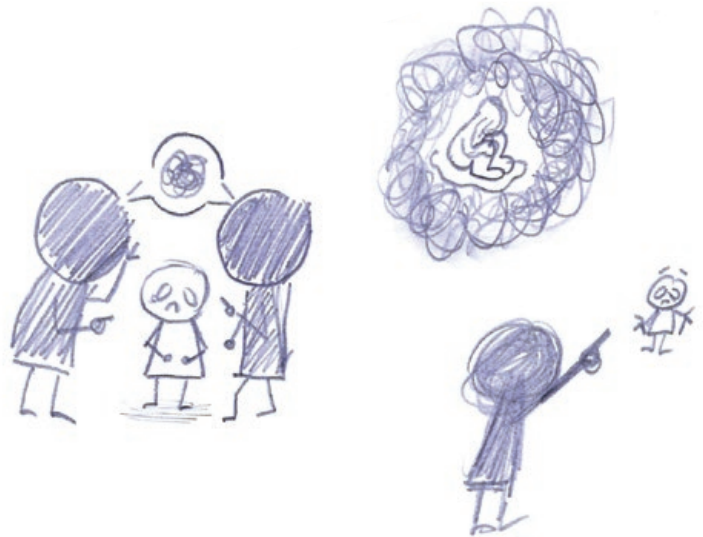
Some children specified their wish for grownups to spend more time with them by working less. They wanted adults to work fewer hours or days, take days off work (including during the holidays), stop working night shifts, or find another way to earn money so they didn't have to work as much or at all.

- “ Sometimes stop working and spend more time with their children, I wish grownups wouldn't have to work soooo... hard to earn money. (12, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ Stay with me and don't go to work. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ not be addicted to work and I wish they would hang out with there kids. (11, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)
- “ earn money without going to work so they could spend a little more time with us. (10, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

Others indicated that grownups spent too much time on their phones, taking attention away from their children.



- “ get of there phones and play with there kids and spend family time. (10, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ play with their kids insted of siting on the couch and watching a phone. (9, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)



Be nicer and not yell

Children also wished grownups treated them better. They wished grownups were nicer to them and to others. They wanted them to 'Always be Kind to everybody' and show more love towards them.

- “ I wish grownups would be nice to us all the time. (12, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North)
- “ give us more hugs and kisses. (8, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)

Children wanted grownups to help them more. They wanted more help with things like homework and learning, sports and hobbies, and problems they were experiencing.

- “ help us if we were stuck on something. (9, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ have more patients for questions about the work\activities. (9, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ help you if you're sad, angry or hurt because my dad dose'nt. (11, boy – Murray and Mallee, Independent)

Children also wished that grownups did not yell as much and would not get 'angry', 'mad', or 'cross'. They didn't like adults telling them off or being 'bossy' or 'mean'. Some wanted more patience and forgiveness from adults, and opportunities to learn from mistakes rather than be punished. Some also wished that adults wouldn't swear so much, particularly in front of kids, or in public.

- “ realise that kids get emotional if they get yelled at. (12, girl – Western Adelaide, Government)
- “ be nice to me because they always make me cry and to stop yelling at me. (10, boy – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ sometimes grownups can be realy mean to kids I want that to stop. (8, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

Let children do more things

Children wanted grownups to let them choose what to do and where to go, and to have more freedom in their lives. Some children framed this as wanting grownups to say 'yes' to everything or have a 'yes day'.

- “ Let us be more free and let us do what we want. (10, boy – Western Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ let us have a yes day or just have fun all year around. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)

More specifically, some children gave examples of wanting to spend more time gaming, playing sport, or going outside. Some children wanted to spend more time with friends, have more sleepovers, stay up later or sleep more, and eat more of the things they liked.

- “ let me eat what I want and play video/ playstation games when I want. (9, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)

“ take us to the swimming lake more. (12, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)

“ wake me up a little bit later because I am very tired in the morning's. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)

Some children wished grownups would not make as many restrictions and rules. They wanted grownups to 'be less strict', 'let us roam free', and allow children to have more independence.

“ Make sure we're safe but let us go out and play. (10, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)

“ let me have more free time and not make me stay inside all day. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)

“ Mum let me ride my bike further. (12, boy – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

Be happier and have more fun

Children wished grownups would be happier. They also wanted them to be more fun and have more fun. They wished they would 'be Happy all Their life' and enjoy themselves.

“ have more fun with us and enjoy their life. (8, girl – Northern Adelaide, Independent)



Relatedly, children also wished grownups would stress less, relax more, and 'be more chill'. They wanted them to look after themselves more and be more active.

“ be able to have stress free weeks and have NO tax and be happy. (11, boy – Western Adelaide, Catholic)

“ Relax more because my mum does every thing. (7, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)

“ Treat themselves like they treat us (in terms of spoiling themselves). (12, boy – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Independent)

Give children more things

Some children wished grownups would buy or give them more things. Some of these responses related to giving children more choices and listening to them, while others reflected on their desire to have more things or more of the 'stuff' they wanted.

“ Give children more choices on what they wish to get. (13, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)

“ give what I want but the stuff that I want is not what I need and I think it is ok! (8, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)

More children were specific with what they wanted. They included requests that ranged from technology (like gaming consoles, games, and phones) to toys and bikes. They also wanted pets, books, and stationery, as well as food such as lollies, chocolate, and fast food.



- “ buy me a dual suspension bike. (11, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ Give me the dog that I have always wanted. (9, girl – Northern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ buy more dino books for me. (10, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)



And so much more...

There were many other things that children wished grownups would do. This included creating a better world by caring more about the environment and animals, and by stopping wars and bad things from happening. They also wished grownups would give them pocket money and not make them do chores. Some wished grownups would stop smoking and vaping.



- “ help pandas because there are 1,800 panda left and they are my favioute animal. (10, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ give us less chores or more time to do them. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ stop smoking because it's bad for little kid's to breathe it in. (9, boy – Western Adelaide, Catholic)



What do 8- to 12-year-olds say makes a good friend?

Is caring and kind

Is loyal, trustworthy, and supportive

Helps you and looks after you

Spends time with you and includes you

Respects you and listens

Isn't mean and doesn't lie or share secrets

Most children shared at least one thing they think makes a good friend, with several naming multiple things.

- “ Is trustworthy. Helps you. Listens to your views. Is kind. Doesn't talk behind your back. Backs you up. Stands up for you. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ is loyal caring, has similar interests, trustworthy, and a true friend. (12, boy – Northern Adelaide, Catholic)

Some children even wrote specific names of friends, illustrating what a good friend looks like. A small number left this question blank with a few mentioning friendship issues which prevented them from sharing what they think makes a good friend.

Is caring and kind

Children overwhelmingly viewed a good friend as someone 'who cares' and who 'is kind and nice'. This was often expressed very simply as 'cares', 'cares about you', or 'is kind and caring'. They wrote that a good friend 'be's kind to everyone' and 'cares for others'.

- “ who cares about you and always by your side. (10, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

- “ Is a kind person who cares about me and my family. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ who cares for you and is always with you and loves you. (10, boy – Northern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ cares about you and is kind and loyal. (11, non-binary – Eastern Adelaide, Government)
- “ cares for me, kind, nice, thoughtful and funny (11, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)

A good friend 'cares about you no matter what', 'will be nice to you always', and 'is being kind to me every day'.

- “ will care for you and will always show loving kindness. (8, girl – Western Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ is kind but funny at the same time. (11, boy – Murray and Mallee, Government)





Is loyal, trustworthy, and supportive

Many children viewed a good friend as someone who is loyal, trustworthy, and supportive. This included being someone who they could trust with their secrets and who 'you trust and they trust you back'. Good friends are also honest and will 'tell the truth', including 'even when it hurts (saying it softly)'.

- “ you can trust and someone who is there for you when you need them. (11, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ shares secret information in your life and never shares it out to anybody else. (12, boy – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Independent)

A good friend 'always stands up for you', 'boosts you up then you do the same', and 'looks out for you'. They are also encouraging and someone who 'celebrates your wins'. A good friend even 'drops their pizza on the table to see if your ok'.

- “ Someone who you can always count on, someone who knows how to cheer you up, someone who will never abandon you and someone to be their with you through the ups and downs you'll have to face in life. (12, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)



Helps you and looks after you

Children also wrote about a good friend being someone who helps you and looks after you. Many children made comments about good friends being helpful and looking out for you generally, with several writing about good friends helping at certain times, particularly when you're hurt or sad.

- “ will help you if you hurt yourself or if you just need help. (9, boy – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ helps you when you fall. Make you happy when your sad. (10, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

Some children provided examples of what good friends help them with 'in school or out of school'. A good friend helps with 'your work' and homework, and 'when I am stuck on something'. Others described how good friends help and make them feel better, including someone who 'helps you when times are tough'.

- “ Helps each other and plays with each other. If I was upset my friend would tell me to take deep breathe. (12, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ shares with you and when you are stuck in work they don't tell you what to do, they help you. (no age given, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Spends time with you and includes you

A good friend spends time with you and enjoys being together. This was overwhelmingly expressed by children simply as 'plays with me' or 'plays with you'. A good friend is 'a person that always hangs out with me', and someone who 'Plays with you neary everyday' and 'enjoys having their friend with them'.

- “ be nice, honest, letting me play their game and playing with me. (7, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ stand up for you and plays with you at school or backyard. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ includes you. stands up for you. talks to you hangs out with you. (11, girl – Northern Adelaide, Catholic)

Including others and sharing were other aspects of being a good friend. A good friend is someone who 'includes people in their play' as well as someone who shares toys, food, and other things.

- “ includes you in everything and cares about you. (11, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)
- “ Shares ideas, shares secrets and plays with you. (11, girl – Far North, Government)



Children mentioned all sorts of things that good friends do together, including playing cricket, footy, and other sports, 'goes to the playground with me', 'plays games', 'builds Lego with you', and 'draws'.

Children also wanted friends who had similar interests and hobbies. This was described variously as 'has the same interests as you', 'likes the same things as you' and 'mostly has things in common with you'. Shared interests included playing, sport, drawing, gaming, and watching TV.

- “ Cares for you and that you like and mostly has things in common with you. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)

Respects you and listens

A good friend is someone who 'respects and listens to you'. Children wrote about friends needing to respect them and treat them well.

- “ respects who you are, and also helps you, and I'm lucky that I have friends like that! (some friends that have been with me since Kindy) (9, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ cares and respects you and treats you fairly. (12, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Related to respect, some children shared that a good friend is someone who 'always listens' and 'takes the time to listen to you'. This includes listening to your thoughts, ideas, and problems.

- “ Listens to me and understands me. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ you can talk about your problems and they will listen. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)
- “ when you talk your friend would look straight away. (9, boy – Northern Adelaide, Independent)

Isn't mean and doesn't lie or share secrets

Many children defined a good friend by naming what they shouldn't do. They especially shared that a good friend should not be mean, bully, or be rude. A good friend 'Doesn't bully you or try to hurt you'. They don't 'judge you', 'make fun of you', or 'tell you what to do'. This also means they don't 'change around certain people and then be mean to you'.

- “ *Listens to you plays with you and doesn't bully or make fun of you. (9, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)*
- “ *who cares for You and is not rude but nice. (10, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)*

Children shared that a good friend 'never lies to others' and 'Does not blurt out your secrets'.

- “ *Doesnt lie isnt mean and doesnt tell you what to do. (10, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)*
- “ *keeps secrets and doesn't spread rumors. (11, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)*

And so much more...

Children named many things that they felt made a good friend. They also said a friend is someone who understands you and who 'gets you' as well as someone who 'likes and loves' you. They wanted someone who 'makes you laugh' and 'can have a joke', as well as someone who will 'have fun with you' and 'always wants to have fun'. Others saw a good friend as someone who would give you chocolate, ice cream or lollies, or who 'is cooking for me'.

- “ *Understands me, includes me, makes socialising easier and is fun. (12, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)*
- “ *Loves you the most and takes care of you. (8, girl – Far North, Government)*

Children also shared a wide range of other traits they thought made someone a good friend. These included being polite, thoughtful, patient, calm, responsible, forgiving, generous, brave, cool, silly, positive, enthusiastic, gentle, imaginative, smart, and playful.



What do 8- to 12-year-olds say would make SA better for kids?

Improved schools	Cheaper or free things
More play spaces and outdoor activities	More concern for the environment
More entertainment venues and events	Increased safety
More kindness and less bullying and yelling	More say and more freedom

Children offered many different suggestions for what would make South Australia better for kids. This ranged from improving school and having more play activities to better entertainment venues and people being kinder. Children were also concerned about the cost of living, the environment, and safety. As always, they wanted more of a say in their lives.

“ more great teachers, more playgrounds and more great schools. (7, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)

“ Everyone would care for the environment, prices were cheaper and if we didn't have to go to school for 5 days. (12, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Children living in regional areas often had suggestions for more play spaces and events they'd like in their towns, as well as which facilities and services they would like more of. At the same time, these children highlighted the benefits of where they lived.

“ There wasn't as many lights and everyone can see the stars like I do. (12, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)

While most children offered suggestions for improvement, a small number of children did not want any change because they viewed SA as 'already really good for kids'. They shared that SA is 'perfect just the way it is' or that it's 'good enough' and that there is no need for 'massive improvements' from their point of view.

Improved schools

Many children said SA would be better for kids if improvements were made to schools. They wanted school to be more engaging and relevant to their lives. They also suggested specific improvements relating to school facilities and equipment, the length of the school day or week, and school rules, particularly around clothing.

“ School lunch was longer and there is no school uniform and your hair is down and a play ground on the oval. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Children particularly wanted better sport and play equipment, more facilities, and more activities offered at school. This included having

more spaces and more regular opportunities for play and on equipment suitable for children of different ages.

- “ Every school had really good sport's stuff and good basket ball courts and footy oval's. (10, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)
- “ country schools had school sports every week. (10, boy – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Government)
- “ there were more play equmient at school to play at break time. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)

Several children focused on homework, wanting either 'a little less' homework or 'none at all'. Some reasoned that children already spent many hours in school and had other things to do instead of homework when they got home.

- “ we didn't have to do homework. So, we do a hard days work of school and then around an hour of homework after school for 4-5 days a week. (12, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ had no homework because it puts pressure on kids when they have things to worry about and do. (10, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)



Schoolwork in the classroom was a focus for some children. Some wanted less school work, easier school work, or more help from teachers. Others asked for harder school work to suit their abilities and to prepare them for the future. Some children desired more choice in their learning, with more lessons based on things they wanted to learn, such as sport, art, and life skills. More broadly, they wanted grownups to 'make school a funner way to learn for kids'.

- “ less kids in class so the teacher could help me more. (9, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ kids could choose what they want to have as a subject. (10, boy – Northern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ they taught us stuff we need to know in life. (10, girl – Western Adelaide, Catholic)

Having more freedom in clothing choices and personal expression was also desired. This included 'we have no uniform' and being able to wear 'normal' clothes.

- “ kids would be able to wear jewellery and nail polish because I don't get how it is distracting to people. (12, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

Children also had many other suggestions for improvements, such as having a 'better system' for addressing bullying and for monitoring schools more broadly, having a swimming pool and trampoline at school, going on more fun excursions like bush walks, improving and increasing access to technology in school, having a canteen or cheaper food at the canteen, and having an art club during lunchtimes.

In terms of less school, some children shared that SA would be better for kids if there was 'no school' at all or if 'school wasnt a thing'.



Other children requested fewer days of school or shorter hours at school. Some particularly wanted 3 or 4 days of school (especially cutting Monday or Friday) or to be able to start school later or finish earlier so that 'schools whent for not long like 3 hours'. Others favoured longer playtime, longer holidays, and/or more public holidays and long weekends. They reasoned that school was tiring and longer lunch breaks would mean 'everyone can socialise and make [a] new friend'.

- “ if school started later because it's really makes me very tired and is harder to get work done when tired. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ longer school holidays since we do 10 weeks of school and only get 2 weeks for a break. (11, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

More play spaces and outdoor activities

Children had many suggestions relating to play spaces and outdoor activities. These ranged from 'super sized playgrounds' and 'bigger parks' to more sports activities and bike parks. Several children wished 'there would be more outside activities for children'.

They particularly wanted more and/or improved playgrounds and play spaces with more opportunities for outside activities. This included better play equipment and playgrounds to suit different age groups. They wanted 'better playgrounds for little kids' and 'more playgrounds for taller, older kids', as well as 'more parks for teens/tweens'. Children in regional towns asked for more play spaces too. For example, 'more playgrounds in Port Augusta' and 'more wooden playgrounds like woodward park'.

- “ more public play/swim/park areas. (11, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ it had more public land (ovals, playgrounds, public indoor gyms). (10, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Government)



- “ SA would be better for kids if there was more Local playgrounds around Local areas. (12, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Independent)
- “ They had more places for us to play. (11, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ the parks wernt so Boaring aDD ziplines, swings, slide, climbing, sand pit, and a lot of green. (9, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ they put more dog parks in which will encourage kids to take they're dog for a walk which is good excersise. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)

Some children asked for these spaces to be more accessible for all children, including those who use wheelchairs. They also expressed a need for 'more ASD playgrounds' for children with autism.

- “ There were more wheelchair ability playgrounds. (9, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)

Some children specifically wanted more opportunities for sport and physical activities. This included more clubs and facilities for football, rugby, soccer, netball, basketball, gymnastics, and cricket. Children living in small towns particularly noted the lack of sport and physical activity opportunities and asked for 'more soccer Fields in Waikerie', 'a volleyball team in Stansbury', and 'gymnastics clubs in little towns like Wudinna'.

- “ we had 50 more sport things like Pools, bike traks and more. (11, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)
- “ there was a place for soccer kids to traf[i]n. (8, boy – Murray and Mallee, Independent)

Children suggested SA would be better for kids if there were more bike parks, pump tracks, and skate parks, along with more places to 'ride', 'scoot', 'skate', or 'hover'. Again, those in regional towns had specific requests for what they wanted: 'more dirt bmx tracks in nairne', 'more scate parks in streaky bay', and a 'motorbike track at Mimili'.

- “ there was more Places to RiDe Your Bike. Scooter. Scate Board. Hover Board. (9, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ More bike Parks and not BMX tracks and PlayGrounds four older kids. (10, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)

More entertainment venues and events

Children wrote that having more entertainment venues and events would make SA better for kids. They wanted 'more places to have fun' and 'more kid-interactive places' to go.

They often wrote about their desire for more water parks and theme parks, along with zoos and aquariums. They also wanted more pools, bowling and arcade places, rides, and trampolines.



- “ There were more fun, active and interactive places all over South Australia. (11, girl – Limestone Coast, Catholic)
- “ It had more kid friendly things like more theme parks or shows/concerts like Disney World. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ they had more fun places to hang out with a friend. (10, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)

Children living in regional areas expressed their desire for specific infrastructure to be built in their towns. Their requests included ‘water slides at Kingscote’, ‘a splash park for whyalla’ and a ‘water slide in Mimili’. Others asked for ‘a theme park in edthburgh’, ‘Indoor pools in Loxton or the riverland’, and ‘a trapilin park in port lincoln’. Children also wanted zoos in Victor Harbor and Port Pirie and ‘an arcade in Marree’. One child more generally wished that ‘they would make more things in Glossip’.

- “ Every town needs an indoor facility. (9, girl – Murray and Mallee, Catholic)
- “ If every town had a town pool. (11, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)
- “ we had a them parck or water parck or a pump track in StAnsBury. (9, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ we had bolig aliy in mout barkr and a egerirem as well. (9, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)

Some children wrote about events and activities they would like to be able to go to and do more. They wanted ‘more activities, opportunities and things to do’. This included going to shows, concerts, and festivals, as well as having more activities for children to do more generally. Again, children in regional areas asked for local-specific things like ‘More festivals like Wharfest’ and ‘we can tanarama agina’.



- “ There were more events for kids 10-14 years old. but don't make it cring. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ There were more Activities that children could do not just Adults. (9, girl – Western Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ there were carnival rides all the time in my town. (11, girl – Far North, Government)

More kindness and less bullying and yelling

Children shared that SA would be better for kids if more people were nice and kind, and if there was no ‘bullying’, ‘yelling’, or ‘discrimination’.

- “ they have Respect share be nice Play with each other support each other don't get angry at them play properly hang out don't be mean be nice don't hit each other. (11, girl – Eyre and Western, Government)

Several children suggested SA would be better for kids if ‘everyone was kind, nice, and lovely’. They shared it would be better if ‘everyone could get along more’, people helped each other, and everyone was included. They wanted SA to have ‘friendly communities’.

- “ Everyone is gentle and kind to each other. (10, girl – Adelaide Hills, Government)

Others said SA would be better for kids if there was ‘no bullying’ and if ‘bullying wasn't a thing!’ They also wanted less rudeness, yelling, and swearing from children and grownups.

Some children suggested SA would be better if there was less discrimination, including against people with disabilities. They also mentioned the need for less racism and less discrimination based on gender and being LGBTQIA+.

- “ we don’t get bullied and if we aren’t so rude to one another. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)
- “ I don’t get bullied, but I still wish there was less bullying. (12, boy – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ Everyone was accepted, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, disabled people, and furies. (to name a few) (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)

Cheaper or free things

Some children shared their concerns about how much things cost and that they wanted things to be ‘cheaper’ or ‘free’. They suggested SA would be better if ‘people made every thing less money’. They also shared it would be better if ‘the price of things weren’t going up’ and ‘the cost of living didn’t exist’.

Children were concerned about multiple aspects of living expenses. They wrote about the cost of school, including school uniforms, school supplies, canteen food, and school fees. They were also concerned about the price of ‘daily used items’. These included food, clothing, housing, petrol, bills, electricity, cars, toys, playing and attending sport, and fun activities.

- “ They wouldn’t make food and fuel so expensive so kids parents would be able to pay for stuff for there kids to be happy. (10, girl – Murray and Mallee, Independent)
- “ things weren’t that much money like a human need (sometimes it’s to expensive). If people earned more money. (11, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

Some children explicitly wrote about the impacts of the cost of living on themselves and their families.

- “ stuff would be cheaper to stay alive my family spends over \$400 a week to keep us alive. (10, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)
- “ make bills less expensive. Stop making things over priced. Because then Mum could buy me more clothes. (10, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ they could get jobs at twele then i would be able to help my mum pay the bill’s. (12, boy – Murray and Mallee, Independent)

Some children showed concern for others who may not be able to afford essentials like school, food, and housing. They were also concerned about the inequality amongst schools, with some schools having more money than others.

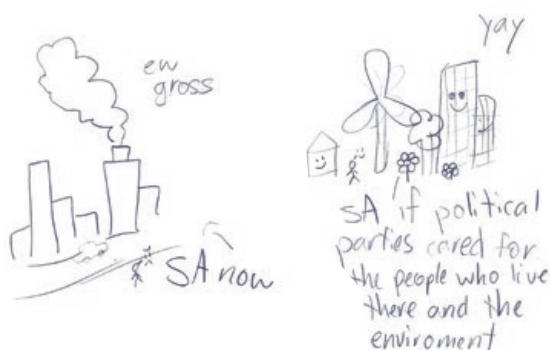
- “ school was less money so homeless children can go to school to. (9, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)
- “ every one had a home family’s had more money for food. (11, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)

More concern for the environment

Children were concerned about the environment and shared that SA would be better for kids if there was ‘less litter and pollution’. They want to see more people who ‘cared more for the environment’ and more action on climate change.

- “ adluts would’t cut so many trees down. (11, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)
- “ People would’nt litter so the kids won’t need to pick it up. (7, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)





- “ The smelters would cool down and not make lead in the air. (11, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)

Some children wrote that SA would be better for kids if it ‘had more trees’, ‘more nature’ and ‘more plants and flowers’. Children offered suggestions for change, such as ensuring that ‘the cities & towns were more sustainable’, creating ‘more Nature Parks’, and making ‘more environment friendly things’. They also wanted action on climate change and suggested SA would be better if people ‘started recycling more’ and ‘put their rubbish in the bin’.

- “ Their was more parks so kids could find out more things about the enviornment. (7, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Catholic)
- “ If we stop climent change. We will stop the world from changing and flooding and burning our world. (12, girl - Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Government)
- “ Kids learnt about global warming and in the future that kid could be the person who changes the world. (10, boy – Western Adelaide, Catholic)

Increased safety

Improving safety was another issue children felt needed to be addressed by adults to make SA better for kids. This included wanting to be and to feel safe when they were out, and having safe spaces to do activities. They said that making SA safer for kids would mean children could be more independent.

They also suggested ‘A program which ask kids if their safe’ and were also concerned about kids’ safety on the Internet.

- “ it was safer for kids to go to public places alone. (12, girl – Northern Adelaide, Government)
- “ more Activity centres and more safe places for kids to go in port pire mabye add a big shopping centre so kids Have a safe place to go. with friends. (10, boy – Yorke and Mid North, Government)
- “ The internet was safe and if kids had their own special websites for kids only. (11, girl – Northern Adelaide, Independent)

Some were concerned about road safety, both for car passengers and people walking on the street. Their suggestions to improve road safety included ‘roads that cars have to drive slower in suburbs’ and ‘more road signs for saftay for kids’.



- “ Having a crossing over the road we cross to get to sport. So it's safer. (11, girl – Limestone Coast, Government)
- “ The roads were more safe so kid's could cross without an aduld. (9, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Government)
- “ People in charge of SA took more action in road safty. (10, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

Some children shared their concerns about crime, including fear of kidnappers and robbers, as well as child abuse and violence. Some children wanted fewer violent shows and ‘less violence on the internet’.

- “ you could go anywhere without getting kidnapped. (8, girl – Barossa, Light and Lower North, Government)

More say and more freedom

Children shared that they want more of a say and to be listened to. They also want to have more freedom and more choice.

Some children expressed their right to 'have a say' on things affecting them, including those things happening at home and school, as well as in the community more broadly. They wanted 'a say about what should be changed' and shared it would be better if 'people talked to the kids before changing something'. They highlighted that children may have different ideas to those of adults, and that these need to be listened to. Some children were more explicitly focused on having a formalised say in politics and 'if there was a kid government'.

“grownups ask kids for help or ideas because sometimes kids think of things grownups don't and we have lots of imagination. (11, girl – Southern Adelaide, Catholic)

“they could help with decisions like what kind of playground would be good or places fun and not too expensive to go. (12, girl – Yorke and Mid North, Independent)

“We can maybe have a say in politics. Because grown-ups think about things other than children. (11, boy – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)

Relatedly, children wrote about their desire for freedom and an opportunity to choose and do what they like. They wanted fewer restrictions and rules, and the space to explore and do more things.

“we could have more freedom and some voice about what we should be allowed to do. (11, boy – Southern Adelaide, Government)

“you could ride a bike to your friends house when ever you want. (8, girl – Southern Adelaide, Government)

And so much more...

Children offered many other suggestions for ways to make SA better for kids. These included that there would be less smoking, vaping, drugs, and drinking alcohol. Others wanted more shops, facilities, and services, including better health services, particularly in regional areas. Some wrote about wanting more animals such as more pets, wildlife, or service animals. Others wanted fewer 'dangerous' animals like 'swooping magpies' and 'kicking kangaroos'. Children made other suggestions about food such as having more chocolate and lollies. Others wanted more toys and games, and bigger houses, including more houses with swimming pools. Some wanted parents and adults to spend more time with them, including by working less.

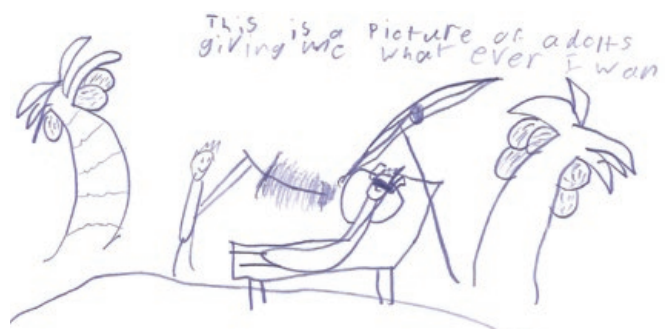
“People didnt do graffeti and smoking because the smoke effects kids lungs. (11, girl – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Independent)

“the school bus came out far enough to where we live. (10, girl – Murray and Mallee, Government)

“remote towns had more shops. (6, boy – Far North, Government)

“there are more therapy animals to help and support them. (11, girl – Eastern Adelaide, Independent)

“they have a kids day like mothers and fathers day. (9, boy – Western Adelaide, Independent)



Reflections on gender

A similar number of girls and boys completed postcards in 2023. There were also some students who were non-binary, trans, or genderfluid, or described their gender in different ways to these. This report offers some reflections on girls and boys, while acknowledging the diversity of children's genders.

The most common broad responses for each postcard question were often the same for girls and boys. This indicates that the key issues important to children are often similar across genders for children between 8 and 12 years of age. There were some differences between responses when grouped by gender, and which is likely to be reflecting a broad range of social norms and expectations.

Children often wrote that their favourite things about being a kid are being able to play and have fun and having no adult responsibilities. These were mentioned frequently by girls and boys. There were many other similarities in responses between girls and boys, particularly in relation to play, friends, having small and energetic bodies, and not having to work. Boys wrote more about play, especially when it involved sport/physical activities and screen activities. Girls wrote more about not having adult responsibilities, particularly not having to pay bills or manage expenses. Girls also wrote about school and learning more than boys did.

In terms of what they wished grownups would know, many responses from girls and boys were similar. These included wanting grownups to spend more time with them, and to be nicer and not yell. Girls wrote that they wanted adults to listen to them and understand them more often than boys did.

Overwhelmingly both girls and boys viewed a good friend as being someone who cares and who is kind. There were several other similarities in responses from girls and boys to this question, including that a good friend is someone who likes you. While some attributes were mentioned by both girls and boys, girls were more likely to be focused on a good friend being loyal, trustworthy, and supportive. Girls also wrote about what a good friend doesn't do more often than boys did. In contrast, boys were more likely to view a good friend as being someone who you spend time with and play with.

Girls and boys mentioned many similar things that they thought would make SA better for kids. Similar responses included a mutual desire for improvements to be made to their school, more play spaces and activities, and for things to be cheaper. There were small differences by gender, with girls mentioning the need to take care of the environment more often than boys.



Conclusion

In 2023, Commissioner Helen Connolly asked children to tell her what their favourite thing about being a kid is, what they wish grownups would do, what makes a good friend, and what would make SA better for kids. These questions drew responses that made it very clear there are some common areas and issues of importance to children in this age group.

Many of the topics that came up across the 2023 postcards have come up in one form or another over previous years too. Recurring themes include the importance of having friends and family in children's lives, the role of play, and the significant concerns children have about the environment and the need to take urgent action on climate change.

While children's responses showed many similarities, they also presented a diversity of experiences and views and it is important to recognise these. Across the postcard responses, children shared many things about the quality of their lives at home, at school, and in their communities. Children wrote about themselves and their own experiences, as well as about issues that concern them at the broader community, state, national, and international levels.

Their responses show children in this age group really love playing and having fun, and that they want more opportunities to engage in outdoor activities, visit playgrounds, and play sport. They would like these activities to occur in their own neighbourhoods, as well as at school, and just generally more often overall.

Kindness and caring is greatly valued by children in this age group. They want these two things to be demonstrated most by grownups, friends, and other people across their communities. They wish grownups 'would be nicer' and 'not yell as

much' and they want South Australia to be a place that has more kindness and less bullying and yelling overall.

Children also told their Commissioner that they want to be listened to more and understood by grownups, their friends, schools, governments, and others. They want to be heard and to have what they say taken seriously, and for others to get to know them better.

Whether they like or dislike school, or are somewhere in between, time spent at school takes up a large and important part of most children's lives. While some children viewed going to school as one of their favourite things about being a kid, others shared that SA would be better if there was no school. School experiences need to be more engaging and relevant to children's lives, including having more opportunities and facilities for sport and play.

Schoolwork too needs to be more meaningful to children's situations, while also catering to differing skill levels and abilities. It needs to offer children more choice across learning styles and areas of interest. This includes considering the purpose of homework in children's lives and how it can be made more relevant to them.

Children value their friends and family and enjoy spending time with them. They view a good friend as someone who is caring and loyal, helps you and spends time with you, and respects you



and listens to you. They appreciate having people in their lives who care about them and with whom they can have fun.

Children generally want grownups to spend more time with them, and to play with them more often. Many link this with a desire for grownups to not work as much, and to use their mobile phones less.

Not having adult responsibilities, such as paying bills and having a job, is appreciated by many children. They see this absence of adult responsibilities as something that allows them to spend more time being a kid and enjoy their lives.

The 2023 postcard responses show a particular increase in children's concerns about the cost of everyday items, often expressed by a desire for things to be 'cheaper' or 'free'. This commentary reflects the impact the rising cost of living is having on many Australian households. Many children shared the impact these increased costs are having on their everyday lives, including the pressure it is placing on their parents to find the money for everyday items, school, events, and sport. Others expressed their concern for other children and adults who were not able to afford some 'things'.

The lack of freedom and independence expressed by some children suggests they're not enjoying as much personal freedom as they would like. The say being allowed to go

to the park with their friends or ride their bike around their neighbourhood on their own would improve the quality of their daily lives. This lack of freedom, combined with their expressed desire for more outdoor activities and for grownups to spend more time with them, suggests that South Australian children in this age group are more likely to be playing at home; often indoors.

This postcards initiative is one way to ensure children in this age group can gain an understanding of what it means to have a voice and be heard. But more action needs to be taken in response to what children have said. These postcard responses are used to produce this summary report, but they are also used to inform the ongoing advocacy work the Commissioner undertakes on behalf of all South Australian children and young people.

The annual Student Voice Postcards initiative can only happen with the support of teachers, educators, and school staff. By supporting children to participate schools are facilitating what is often a child's first experience of what it means to have a voice and agency in a formal setting in our society, the value of which cannot be underestimated.

The Commissioner is extremely grateful for the support the initiative receives. She sends her sincere thanks to those schools that have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to ensuring the annual initiative is a success.

