



Policy Position Priorities

Education

2025



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Acknowledgment of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located.

She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities of all Aboriginal peoples. The Commissioner and her team also pay their respects to Elders, past and present and emerging leaders. The Commissioner and her team recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, although similarities do exist.

Who is the Commissioner for Children and Young People?

Jacqueline McGowan-Jones is the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia (WA). She has an important statutory role to monitor and review written laws, draft laws, policies, practices, and services affecting the wellbeing of children and young people under eighteen. The Commissioner has a duty to regularly consult with children and young people about issues that affect them and to promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives. She also has responsibility to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children and young people in their work.

More information about the Commissioner and the work of her office is available from:
ccyp.wa.gov.au.

Suggested citation

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Content note

This priority paper covers issues that may be distressing for some readers.
Please read with care.

If any of the topics discussed raise issues for you, you may wish to contact:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **13YARN:** 13 92 76
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 551 800
- **Butterfly Foundation National Eating Disorders Helpline:** 1800 33 4673
- **QLife:** 1800 184 527





Message from the Commissioner

Since commencing as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in January 2022, my team and I have undertaken extensive consultation with over 11,000 children and young people in Western Australia (WA).

Their voices are critical in informing the work of my office. In 2023, these discussions resulted in the development of Policy Position Statements for Health and Mental Health, Education, Child Protection and Youth Justice. Discussion Papers were then developed and stakeholders (children and young people; government and non-governments; individuals) were also asked to provide submissions in relation to any evidence suggestions or concerns noted.

Following the extensive engagement, including focus groups with children and young people and a review of the 42 submissions received, we evaluated both the Position Statements and Policy Priorities.


I am pleased to provide you with our updated Policy Position Statements and Priorities.

I urge you all to consider these evidence-informed documents when creating policies, programs and services that are aimed at supporting WA children and young people to live in a better world where their voices and rights are valued and respected.



Thank you!

to all of the children
and young people who
shared their voices.



Priorities

The Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA) establishes that the Commissioner's paramount concern must be the best interests of children and young people in WA. The Commissioner undertakes research with children and young people to ensure their voices inform the activities and priorities of the Commissioner.

In line with national and international evidence, the Commissioner advocates for education to be focused on the following six priorities:

1 Building strong foundations for learning in the early years

The Commissioner advocates for education to prioritise the early years, recognising that this period of rapid growth shapes a child's lifelong health, development and wellbeing. ⁱ

To ensure every child has the best start, all families should receive support in the first 1000 days to build strong foundations for successful learning and development. Universal access to high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is essential, and barriers must be identified and addressed to achieve this goal. Early screening and intervention play a crucial role in positively shaping life trajectories.

Expanding access to integrated community hubs, co-located on school sites or alongside ECEC services, can connect families with specialised support, education opportunities and stronger community networks. Additionally, alternative early learning opportunities should be explored, including support for family-led playgroups onsite.

Our key recommendation is to prioritise families' access to affordable, equitable and inclusive early childhood education and care, through community-based models that are trauma-informed and culturally safe.

2 Quality learning and educational attainment

All children and young people have the right to receive an education that supports them to thrive and reach their full potential. Foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, and health literacy are essential for lifelong learning, participation in the community and access to services. ⁱⁱ Children and young people have also expressed the need for better education in financial literacy, civics, democracy, and community participation.

To keep students engaged, education must be welcoming, relevant, and stimulating. Teachers play a critical role in fostering a culture of high expectations, valuing diverse strengths and abilities, and using evidence-based teaching methods to close achievement gaps and promote equity. Explicit instruction tailored to individual learning needs can significantly enhance outcomes for all students.



Pathways to post-school options must be accessible and inclusive, supporting students with diverse learning needs to meet their aspirations, whether through university, vocational training or employment. Children and young people in homeschool or alternative learning settings should also have clear pathways to vocational training, tertiary education and employment.

To enhance quality learning and educational attainment, our education system must adopt a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that ensures all children and young people receive the support they need to succeed.

This includes fostering high expectations, inclusive teaching practices, and equitable access to diverse learning pathways that empower students to reach their full potential. As part of this approach, identifying learning needs soon as possible allows for targeted, evidence-based interventions that prevent students from falling behind and promote long-term educational success.

Inclusive and equitable education

All children and young people have the right to an education that meets their needs, recognises their strengths, and supports their learning. To achieve this, our education system must be inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible to all.

Building inclusive learning communities requires celebrating diversity, actively seeking participation from all students, and valuing the strength that different perspectives bring. Equity and inclusion must be embedded both system-wide and within individual schools and alternative learning settings. This means ensuring universal accessibility while also providing targeted or specialised support for individuals and cohorts facing additional barriers.

Support should be available based on individual needs rather than relying solely on formal diagnoses. Disparities in attainment, achievement, and participation highlight where additional strategies and resources are needed to ensure every student can engage in education on an equal footing with their peers. Children and young people in regional and remote areas must have access to the same quality education and support services as those in metropolitan areas. This may require a comprehensive review of the existing student funding approach and framework.

Equitable access to resources, particularly contemporary technology, is essential for all students. We promote the integration of digital technology into the classroom, including the use of digital tools and online platforms. Research demonstrate that digital technologies allow students to develop critical digital literacy skills, engage in collaborative learning and access resources that enhance their education experience, and are an essential tool in achieving inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education. ⁱⁱⁱ



Additionally, children and young people have raised concerns about bullying in schools, particularly related to racism, disability, and diverse sex, sexuality, and gender. Addressing these issues requires building the capacity of students and teachers to challenge systemic social barriers and prioritise student safety. We recommend developing and implementing comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-racism educational programs, including professional development for teachers focused on cultural competency, conflict resolution and trauma-informed practice. We also encourage the adoption of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability to ensure inclusive education practices are fully integrated across all schools.

Education supports should be developed in collaboration with children, young people, and their caregivers to ensure they are effective and responsive to individual needs. While some students may benefit from specialised learning programs, others prefer mainstream education with tailored support. Schools and teachers must be adequately resourced, including access to expert guidance, to foster truly inclusive education environments.

4 Connection to education

Engagement in education fosters a sense of belonging, consistency, reliability, and achievement, key factors that reduces vulnerability and disadvantage.^{iv} When children and young people become disconnected from education, they face increased risks to their health and mental health issues and are less likely to develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills.^v Ensuring all students remain engaged in education must be a priority.

Students in out-of-home care, those with complex care needs, or from low socio-economic backgrounds, are particularly vulnerable to under-enrolment, suspension, exclusion and disengagement.^{vi} To address these issues, capacity must be built to facilitate wrap-around support, including integrated, multi-agency responses. However, it is essential that children and young people are included in the development of these integrated approaches, with their consent sought in line with their developing autonomy.

Early identification of the root causes of absenteeism and addressing these early is crucial to prevent disengagement from becoming entrenched. This involves providing alternative education options and tailored programs that quickly address school disengagement and keep students on track.

Successful transitions support both student wellbeing and academic success. Every child and young person should be supported in making smooth transitions throughout their education journey, maintaining continuity of learning from early years right through to post-school pathways. Building positive relationships with children and families, recognising students' strengths, and fostering collaboration between educators can all support effective transitions.^{vii}



To achieve these priorities, we recommend implementing a statewide strategy to reduce disengagement by reforming the education system to ensure that schools are better integrated with relevant agencies. This strategy should focus on creating coordinated, multi-agency support systems that provide targeted interventions for students at risk of disengagement or those reconnecting with education. The approach should prioritise early identification of at-risk students and provide tailored, ongoing support throughout their educational journey.

5 Social and emotional health and wellbeing

All children and young people have the right to learn in safe, fair, respectful and supportive environments. For this to be achieved, educational settings must incorporate trauma-informed practice, cultural responsiveness, and positive relationships with students, families, and communities.

Supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of students is essential for their overall development. Schools are uniquely positioned to equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills to build meaningful relationships, encourage resilience, and self-regulate their emotions and behaviours.^{viii} To ensure that schools provide this level of support, is critical to integrate evidence-based wellbeing curricula and school-based programs. This should include comprehensive consent and respectful relationships education, which will foster emotional resilience and raise awareness around mental health.

For Aboriginal students, it is especially important that schools work within a culturally safe framework that promotes connections to culture, spirituality, community, and Country. This approach is foundational for fostering social and emotional wellbeing. Positive and inclusive engagement with the broader communities that children and young people belong to, whether local, cultural, linguistic, disability-related, creative, or sporting, should also be supported.

Children and young people have shared the need for better access to health and wellbeing resources in schools. Strength-based interventions can empower students, helping them to use their personal strengths and coping strategies to manage their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Early intervention mental health support should be made available within schools, with clear referral pathways to additional services when necessary. This can be facilitated by increasing the accessibility and availability of essential health services, such as psychology, social work, and occupational therapy, to meet students' social and emotional needs.

Additionally, children and young people need clear and accessible information on how to access help, raise concerns, and report safety issues. This should include child-friendly complaints mechanisms, with options to raise concerns independently of individual institutions



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Child and youth-centred approaches

To create an education system that truly serves all students, we must prioritise and value the voices of children and young people, actively incorporating their insights and perspectives into decision-making processes. It is vital that their voices are not only heard but also genuinely considered in decisions that affect their education and wellbeing.

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) emphasises the importance of progressively granting children and young people more autonomy over decision-making as they mature. In practice, this means ensuring that children and young people have access to the necessary information to make informed choices about their lives and the issues that impact them. This access is fundamental to fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their education.

To support this autonomy, children and young people should also be provided with appropriate support mechanisms to express their views and address any concerns they may have about their education or wellbeing. These support systems may include cultural guidance, advocacy, or diverse communication methods that ensure all students can participate in the decision-making process, regardless of their background or ability.

Special attention must be given to elevating the voices of children and young people who are disengaging from education or those from groups facing poorer educational outcomes. Ensuring that their perspectives are heard is essential to making the education system more equitable and responsive to their unique needs.

To facilitate these processes, we recommend the implementation of child-friendly and culturally safe mechanisms through which children and young people can engage in educational decision-making. It is also critical to establish and widely publicise child-friendly complaints systems, with age-appropriate and inclusive communication strategies, across all education services. Additionally, advocacy services should be bolstered to support children and young people at risk of school exclusion or disconnection, ensuring that their voices are not only heard but actively acted upon.



References

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