

Australian and
New Zealand Children's
COMMISSIONERS
AND **GUARDIANS**

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email to: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

9 December 2022

Dear Committee Members,

The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians note your current inquiry into *School Can't*. Our offices are keenly aware that a growing number of children and young people throughout Australia are grappling with the many impacts of not being able to attend school regularly.

The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians aim to promote and protect the safety, wellbeing and rights of children and young people in Australia and New Zealand and ensure their best interests are considered in public policy and program development. We congratulate you on your intention to hear from the community on this issue.

We feel sure you will receive a wide range of submissions noting the negative impact on students and their families, the strain placed on often over-subscribed mental health services, and the challenges faced by schools. Submissions will likely note that the quality of responses to *School Can't* is inconsistent across different schools, within and between states and territories. School culture and leadership are defining factors in ensuring positive, child-centred solutions but too often schools opt for punitive responses, thereby increasing the stress that students and their families experience. Many submissions will no doubt also include a range of practical solutions and policy recommendations.

However, we are concerned that there is a lack of appropriate avenues for children and young people to have their say in your Inquiry. Any efforts to support students affected by *School Can't* will require children and young people to be actively engaged. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that children and young people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This not only includes decisions relating directly to their individual circumstances, but also policies, frameworks and legislation that affect children and young people as a cohort and as citizens.

Children and young people are the experts in their own lives and the only ones who truly understand their lived experiences – no one knows what it is like to be a child today better than children and young people themselves. Ensuring children and young people can share their knowledge and experiences with the Committee will enable the Inquiry and any resulting recommendations to be more relevant and effective.

Hearing from children and young people themselves provides a different perspective to the voices of adults. Further, the recommendations made by the Committee to address *School Can't* will only be successful if they encompass the needs of children and young people and, more importantly, that children and young people consider them to be relevant to their experiences.

To this end, if you have not already done so we would encourage the Committee to establish appropriate mechanisms so that those who directly experience *School Can't* can actively engage in the Inquiry and comment on the causes, impact, and solutions.

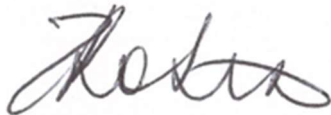
Warm regards,



Jodie Griffiths-Cook
Children and Young People Commissioner (ACT)



Anne Hollonds
National Children's Commissioner



Zoë Robinson
Advocate for Children and Young People (NSW)



Richard Weston
A/Children's Guardian (NSW)




Nicole Hucks
A/Children's Commissioner (NT)



Shayna Smith
Public Guardian (QLD)



Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner, Queensland Family and
Child Commission



Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA)



Helen Connolly
Commissioner for Children and Young People (SA)



April Lawrie
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young
People (SA)



Shona Reid
Guardian for Children and Young People and
Training Centre Visitor (SA)



Leanne McLean
Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas)



Liana Buchanan
Principal Commissioner for Children and Young
People (Vic)



Meena Singh
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young
People (Vic)