

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Sixth Report — “Annual Report 2019–20” — Tabling

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [10.26 am]: Greetings. I present for tabling the sixth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People titled “Annual Report 2019–20”.

[See paper [3893](#).]

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: On behalf of the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, who sits in the other place, it is my pleasure to present for tabling the committee's final annual report for the fortieth Parliament. For the purposes of tabling, I will read the chair's foreword from the report. It states —

The reporting period covered by this annual report includes the first several months of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated disruption that the virus and measures to contain its harmful effects has brought to the daily lives of people throughout the world.

While Western Australia has to date successfully controlled the spread of COVID-19 in our community, the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of children and young people in this state has been significant. As the Commissioner noted in May 2020:

COVID-19 has caused sudden and unforeseen changes to the lives of children and young people worldwide. For many in WA, this has been their first experience of significant upheaval to everyday routines and being physically isolated from family members, friends and support networks. These changes have had immediate impacts on the wellbeing of children and young people across the state, which will need to be addressed in the short term. We must also consider the long-term impacts to their mental health and wellbeing, which will be more likely to impact vulnerable groups of children and young people.

Importantly, the ongoing management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the state's recovery plan to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the pandemic are likely to remain the highest priority for government and non-government agencies well into the future. The work of the Children's Commissioner has been substantially redirected to reflect these new priorities.

From the perspective of the oversight role played by the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, it is worth noting that the work carried out by the Commissioner in the first few months of the COVID-9 pandemic focusses closely on ensuring children and young people have a voice about their experiences and using evidence gathered directly from children and young people as the basis for providing sound advice to government about how best to protect and advance the wellbeing of children and young people.

It is of considerable significance that the themes identified by the Commissioner in the responses of children and young people to the first months of the COVID- 19 pandemic closely relate to the themes expressed during the Commissioner's inaugural 2019 Speaking Out Survey which was tabled in Parliament in February 2020. What the survey provides is invaluable baseline data tracking how our children and young people are faring. As has been widely noted, this was the first representative sample of children and young people's wellbeing undertaken in WA and establishes a national benchmark.

To gain maximum benefit from the richness of the information contained in the first Speaking Out Survey, the Commissioner now plans to bring forward the next survey to early 2021. There is no doubt that the possibility of having such detailed information about the views of children and young people on their health and wellbeing places Western Australia in a unique position compared with other Australian states in terms of being able to make informed decisions about to deliver the best possible support and services to children and their families both immediately and into the future.

The other major issue with which the Joint Standing Committee concerned itself during this reporting period was the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of child safe standards. The Committee's report on these matters, which focussed specifically on several recommendations of the *Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse*, was tabled in August 2020, and this annual report provides details of the months of work which the Committee undertook to gather the evidence on which the report—*From Words To Action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*—was based.

I trust that this Annual Report will be of interest to those who understand the importance of the work carried out by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow committee members, the chair, Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Donna Faragher, MLC; and Jessica Stojkovski, MLA; as well as our advisory officers, Renee Gould and Michele Chiasson, for their work during the fortieth Parliament. I commend the report to the house.