

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

*Second Report — “Talking to the Experts: Responding to recommendations made by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report” — Tabling*

**MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley)** [3.38 pm]: I present for tabling the second report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People entitled “Talking to the Experts: Responding to recommendations made by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report”.

[See paper 1666.]

**Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI:** The Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit, plays a critical role in advocating for children and young people to ensure they are heard, valued, healthy and safe, and to safeguard and promote their overall wellbeing now and into the future. On 29 January 2018, the commissioner published his “School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report”, which makes a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing student engagement in Western Australia. These recommendations were based on evidence gathered through consultations between his office and 1 812 students from years 3 to 12 between July and November 2016. This was the largest consultation of students ever undertaken by the commissioner’s office and, on behalf of the committee, I can say that we view the technical report as an important document for enhancing education policy and practice into the future.

The commissioner’s recommendations have addressed identified problems and, although it is likely that relevant government agencies will take positive action to address these recommendations, there is no statutory requirement for response from government. This is where the committee stepped in. In June of this year, we held a series of consultative hearings with representatives from key education and parent stakeholder groups, including the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, Catholic Education Western Australia, the Department of Education, the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, and the Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia. The purpose of these public hearings was to gain an understanding of how the report was received and to seek responses from these key stakeholders to the commissioner’s seven findings and 14 recommendations. Overall, we found there was general support and even enthusiasm for these findings and recommendations. The report provided a good tool for the organisations to reflect on what they do well, and not so well, and what they can improve upon to ensure our students remain engaged with schooling and their wider communities. Something that came through strongly from the hearings was the support for teachers in the important work they do, but also a desire to see pre-service teachers supported with more thorough training and development to assist them in managing parent and community engagement within their schools. Often schools are the hub and heart of the community and teachers are an integral part of that hub. We should be providing them with the skills and tools to deal with all aspects of modern-day teaching.

To promote the work of the commissioner on his consultation and report we also hosted a briefing for members here at Parliament that allowed the commissioner and his colleague an opportunity to provide insight into what was learnt during the consultation process. I was pleased and proud that this briefing was attended by many of my parliamentary colleagues and included a slideshow presentation that, for those who missed it, is included in our report at appendix 2.

The experts in children’s engagement in schooling are the schools, the parent bodies and, of course, the students themselves. For me one of the most important findings of the report was that the students valued the role that parents and guardians and their broader families played in their learning. In our modern, fast-paced world, it can sometimes be hard for parents to engage fully with their children’s learning. The finding also highlights that although students may behave as if they do not want their parents involved or interested in their lives, and many teenagers push their parents away as they search for their own independence and autonomy moving towards adulthood, students actually do value parental interest and involvement and this supports them during their school journey and engagement.

The report I am tabling on behalf of the committee today, “Talking to the Experts”, includes eight findings and two recommendations. As for the recommendations, we believe that the government of Western Australia should examine what changes to policy and practice can arise from the commissioner’s findings and recommendations and explore the most effective way to implement these changes. We also recommend that the government work with the commissioner to determine how best to enable the school and learning consultation process to be repeated with appropriate frequency for producing useful research-based insights into the future. The committee was also very interested in the comments made by many of the representatives at the hearings about the opt-in versus opt-out methods of research, and the possible impact of not capturing the voices of the most vulnerable and disengaged students in our communities.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit, and his hardworking staff for their dedication to the children and young people in our state, for providing vehicles such as the school and learning consultation technical report in which children's voices are heard and promoted as experts on what is working and not working for them. Finally, I would like to thank the committee staff, Ms Renée Gould and Mr Michael Burton for organising the many hearings we have held so far in this Parliament, Mr Michael Burton for the assistance in compiling this report and also Ms Michele Chiasson for the finalisation of this report.