

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

*Eighth Report — Report review 2023: Examination of selected reports
by the Commissioner for Children and Young People — Tabling*

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [10.21 am]: I present for tabling the eighth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People titled *Report review 2023: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*.

[See paper 2776.]

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: This report provides a summary of the reports released by the Commissioner for Children and Young People over the period June 2022 to December 2023. The committee's key functions include the monitoring of the exercise of the functions of the commissioner, as well as the examination of her annual report and other research. This report by the committee is in part fulfilment of that role.

The commissioner has released a broad range of reports over the relevant period, many of which are discussed in more detail in this report. I would like to draw attention to several of these research reports as I feel they are important contributions to our understanding of the wellbeing of children and young people in this state. The first of these is the *Speaking out about girls' wellbeing* report. This report continues the investigations into girls' wellbeing that the commissioner's office has carried out since the first Speaking Out Survey in 2019. The SOS19 revealed the disturbing gender gap between male and female students, with female students consistently rating their wellbeing considerably lower than male students. Further research since SOS19 confirmed that gender wellbeing gap. The current report provides a set of recommendations designed to improve girls' wellbeing and directs these recommendations to young people, families, other adults and schools. This emphasises that the wellbeing of children and young people is an issue for the whole community.

Another important research report released by the commissioner this year was the *I just want to feel equal to others* report, which relayed the results of consultations with trans and gender-diverse children and young people. The report focuses on the experiences and perspectives of trans and gender-diverse children and young people and identifies ways to improve their wellbeing.

The commissioner's office received funding to extend the Speaking Out Survey to several groups of children and young people outside the mainstream schooling system. Two reports resulted from these extensions—*The health and wellbeing of children and young people with disability and complex needs: Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021*, and *The views of home educated children and young people on their wellbeing*. Both these reports provided important insights into the wellbeing of these groups of children. I commend the commissioner and her office on their efforts to reach these groups and give these children a voice.

Finally, the *Talking about vaping* survey and report gives a voice to 3 303 participants aged between 12 to 18 years who gave their opinions on vapes and vaping. This is valuable research that I hope will inform policy as we move forward with managing the impact of vapes and vaping on the health and wellbeing of our children and young people in Western Australia.

I thank the commissioner and her staff for the ongoing important work they do in engaging with our youth, hearing their voices and making their views not only heard but feel important. It is vital that our young people have the opportunity to say what is affecting them either positively or negatively. This is an ongoing project that needs to continue. I commend the report to the house.

MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany) [10.25 am]: I rise, too, as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People to make a contribution to the debate on the *Report review 2023: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*. It is a privilege to serve on committees and I really enjoy the work that we get to do around the state, especially with the commissioner.

I will just highlight some of the things that the commissioner has done over the last 12 months. Many people do not see on the ground what she is doing out and about in the regions. One thing she is doing is promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people. During 2022–23, the commissioner continued her listening tour across the state, visiting schools, advisory groups and support services throughout the metropolitan area, as well as Kalgoorlie, Albany, Esperance, northern Broome, Balgo, Merredin and the south west region. I had feedback from my community that when the commissioner was in Albany, she really did get to hear from those young people. She was able to hear from 4 512 children and young people around the state.

Another thing the commissioner has been able to do is hold “Stand up, be heard” forums. In June 2023, the commissioner hosted a forum for young people to explore what youth advocacy is, what the barriers are to young people speaking up and how barriers could be overcome to enable young people to have their say about issues that

are important to them. The forum is called “Stand up, be heard” and involved 97 year 9 students from 13 schools in the metropolitan area. Many young people feel confident in speaking up about issues that are important to them, but are unsure how to do so effectively, believing they would not be listened to if they did voice their opinions. Having parents and friends support them through encouragement and listening would help build their confidence and skills in advocacy. Young people at the forum stated a preference of advocacy platforms that offer autonomy. I know as a parent of a year 9 student that these young people have incredible ideas and are trying to find a way to navigate their voices in what is a big and scary world.

Another thing the commissioner does that is close to my heart is the girls’ wellbeing survey. This survey followed from the previous commissioner’s Speaking Out surveys in 2019 and 2021. Those surveys discovered that females consistently rated their wellbeing below that of their male peers, and the girls’ wellbeing survey conducted in 2022 therefore asked young people questions about self-esteem, the transition from primary to high school, belonging, and gender equality. The report from the survey, *Speaking out about girls’ wellbeing*, was published at the end of 2023, and a survey was developed in response to findings in recent literature that a steady decline had been marked in girls’ wellbeing experienced in various aspects of their life as they mature into adolescence and enter high school. Again, as a mother of a child in year 6 who has their daunting year 7 progression next year, I can see the challenges they face. There is a decline in wellbeing that is not as apparent in many men. Although girls and boys in primary school report similarly high levels of self-esteem, interpersonal connection, safety and belonging, this changes as they enter high school, with many young women consistently rating their wellbeing and life satisfaction below that of young men. The survey received 938 participant responses. I encourage everyone to go and have a look at that report.

Another thing that was great last year is we were able to meet some young Aboriginal people from Kalgoorlie who, with the commissioner, are undertaking the Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community project.

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Seven young Aboriginal women from the goldfields were trained as peer researchers to investigate issues of girls’ wellbeing. The group members were able to create their own survey of their voices and peer support other people in their community. They came up to Parliament; it was fantastic to see. They surveyed 54 young people and presented the report and their findings to the committee in November. We could see how proud they were to be involved in such a great process. I know that the skills they learned during that process will be used in other areas of their lives.

I thank the Commissioner for Children and Young People for the work she does and her team, which does some of this incredible work that forms policy within government. I commend the report to the house. I draw members’ attention to the committee’s work on another inquiry into the trauma in migrant communities. I encourage anyone to have a look at that and make submissions to our ongoing inquiry.