



Whatever it takes: a shared commitment to supporting every child to succeed at school and in life

Whatever it takes to help young people fulfil their potential at school and in life



Each child is different, so supporting every child to fulfil their potential in life requires us to listen to children and young people, use our professional skills to carefully observe and analyse and then respond to their individual needs. In this post, Cheryl Vardon, Former Principal Commissioner of the Family and Child Commission (QFCC) and Margaret Gurney, Assistant Director-General, State Schools Operations at the Department of Education, talk about how they are doing whatever it takes to support Queensland's children. This is the second article in the 'Whatever it takes' series. You can read the first article, 'The turnaround power of education', [here](#).

“The next generation will be the leaders of tomorrow so we see it as our duty at the Commission to do whatever it takes to keep them safe and encourage them to grow, learn, and influence a strong society for the future,” explains Cheryl.

“To influence the world they live in means young people must have their voices heard when it comes to matters that affect them.

“The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12) talks about this and it’s something we take very seriously at the Commission.

“Our Growing up in Queensland survey, where every two years we invite children across the state to tell us what it’s like to grow up in Queensland, is one way we learn about what Queensland’s young people think and feel.

“Their perspectives help us understand how they experience life in their communities, their career aspirations, the barriers that might affect them, and what they think decision-makers should focus on.

“The project closed with over 8000 children and young people having their say, with an early analysis of nearly 4000 young people at the halfway point of the study highlighted in an interim report.

“Despite the challenges of 2020, early responses reveal the hope and resilience of young Queenslanders.

“Both younger children and teens talk about the importance of relationships with friends and family and their need for connection to community.

“They also reveal their concerns about the environment, and their hopes for their future occupations and our recovery from COVID-19.

“Some describe the challenges they have experienced at school especially in light of disruptions caused by the pandemic, and others talk about their need for support in helping them manage their mental health.

“These insights are important because they can help us create policies that mean something to our young people through addressing their aspirations and concerns.

“For us at the Commission, doing whatever it takes means understanding and listening to children so their voices are heard in everything we do.”

Responding to children’s needs

Margaret agrees. “As policy-makers, when we put children’s needs at the centre of everything we do, then we can respond in practical ways that can help young people overcome barriers that might otherwise see them drop out of school or struggle to find a learning or work pathway after they finish school.

“At the Department of Education, we focus on student engagement because helping kids stay at school and enjoy learning helps them get the most out of their education and can put them on a path to success in their post-school lives.

“To truly engage with all students, our schools need to offer the kind of high-quality cognitive, social and

emotional, and behavioural support that can respond to the needs of individual children.

“To help some of our most at-risk students, we are piloting FlexiSpaces in a small number of Queensland schools.

“FlexiSpaces are learning spaces at mainstream schools that can be adapted to suit the needs of students who are struggling to stay engaged with their learning.

“We have also introduced a Link and Launch program in 30 Queensland schools for Year 12 completers who have not yet made a transition to further study or work.

“This program provides one-on-one support to link these young people to study or work opportunities.

“The design of both these initiatives is based on a strong body of evidence of what works for young people. We are responding to the needs of young people in practical ways that will help them stick with their learning at school and find the right job or learning pathway after they finish school.”

Families are First

Both Margaret and Cheryl acknowledge that putting children first also means recognising parents and families as first teachers in our community .

With this in mind, the QFCC is leading an initiative, known as Families are First, that celebrates the strengths of more than 60,000 years of parenting wisdom held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

“We know that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities have raised generations of strong, thriving children and dealt with many challenges along the way,” explains Cheryl.

“Storytelling has been an important way to pass on knowledge among these communities for thousands of years.

“So we are gathering their stories to create a resource of their wisdom for all Queensland parents, carers and organisations to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices.

“Since last year, we have been collaborating with families in far north, north and north-west Queensland to tell their stories, their way.”

The Department of Education is using an online approach to focus on the parents and carers of those students who are struggling to stay engaged with their learning at school and are in some cases, refusing to attend school.

“Recognising the role of parents and carers is essential because research tells us they play a significant role in supporting their child’s engagement in education,” explains Margaret.

“That’s why we created the Spark their Future website. The site gives parents and carers of young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school, the kind of engaging and helpful information they need to help them support their child to get back on track with their schooling.

“We want these parents to know they are not alone and there is help available if they need it.

“Early findings from independent research indicate that parents value the site’s content because it normalises their experiences and helps them feel less alone.

“Parents have also told us the site normalises children’s involvement in alternative educating pathways and reduces the related stigma through talking about these pathways in a positive way.

“We are really encouraged by this feedback and will keep working hard to use this website to increase parents’ awareness of the services and support available to help them support their children.”

Whatever it takes

In their own way, and within their individual spheres of influence, both Cheryl and Margaret are doing whatever it takes to listen to young people and help them fulfil their potential at school and in life.

“Cheryl’s work at the Commission is valuable because it gives us so many insights into the hopes, aspirations and concerns of Queensland’s children, as well as the needs of their families,” says Margaret.

“At the Department of Education, we want to create an environment in which no child falls through the cracks, so it’s essential we take every opportunity to learn more about what children need from us.”

“We need to listen to the voices of young people so we can find policy responses that meet their needs and set them up for success,” says Cheryl.

“If we can all do whatever it takes for every child, by putting their views and their needs at the centre of every decision we make and every policy we create, then we will equip every child to succeed at school and in life, and create a society in which future generations can thrive.”

Find out more

Talking Families and Spark their Future are here to support you through the tough years of parenting.

<https://www.sparktheirfuture.qld.edu.au/whatever-it-takes>



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Last Updated: 14 July 2022