

# Kids want to be seen and heard



Moerlina Primary students Niamh Tooher, Maxine la Fontaine, Julian Pivac, and Hani Ketelsen. Picture: Kelsey Reid

## Children try to find voice as population grows

RIHANNA MITCHELL

What do the kids of today want? To be heard.

The number of six to 11-year-olds living in WA has risen 19 per cent in the past decade, a trend Commissioner for Children and Young People Colin Pettit said confirmed the need to give them a louder voice.

New data published by the commissioner also shows 610,000 people under 17, or almost a quarter of the State's population, call WA home.

The 2021 Profile of Children and Young People shows 17 per cent are living below the poverty line, with 7469 children on the public housing wait list, 7271 presenting at WA homelessness services, and almost 5500 in out-of-home care.

The commissioner's office is surveying almost 15,000

young people across WA for the second Speaking Out survey, which will be tabled in Parliament later this year.

Key issues to emerge so far include mental health, the safety of girls and young women, and concerns for those living in disadvantage.

Mr Pettit said it was vital young people were given a seat at the table when it came to planning WA's future.

He said some local councils had started giving children a voice at the planning stage of new developments, and he wanted to see all organisations involved with children go down this path.

"Sit down with them and have a discussion in a meaningful way, people will be surprised at how logical and reasonable they are," Mr Pettit said. "What we are seeing is they do have a lot to offer, they are confident when asked with real purpose, and

they've got some strong ideas about their lives."

Eleven-year-old Julian Pivac, from Moerlina Primary School in Mt Claremont, said the days of "children should be seen and not heard" were well and truly over. "Sometimes it's not only the adults who have good ideas, sometimes the kids might have even better ideas," he said.

Maxine la Fontaine, also 11, said "adults should understand what kids are feeling, instead of worrying about the problem, what happened, first". Six-year-old Niamh Tooher said: "Sometimes, if you're not really enjoying something and there's a problem they (adults) don't understand, you have to go deeply and talk about what's going on."

Moerlina principal Perette Minciullo said environmental sustainability, gender eq-

uity, social responsibility, and bullying in schools were key issues raised by children at her school.

"The children think not enough is being done to address pollution issues in sustainable ways that will make a real difference," Ms Minciullo said.

"They believe many adults don't understand enough about what is happening, or are not taking it seriously enough to take action and make a difference. Many parents can't educate their children because they don't know the issues well enough themselves.

"Our children are really capable and passionate when they are given opportunity to truly make a difference to something that matters to them, and they can see the adults around them believe they can do it — and this starts from a very early age."