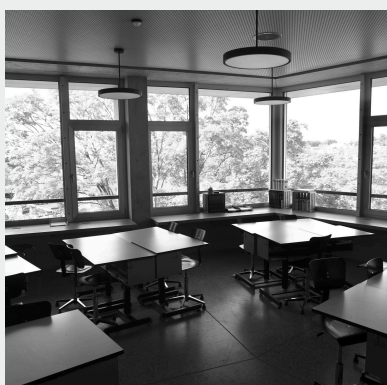# EDUCATION**ECONOMY**

Creating the conditions for quality teaching, engaged learning and whole-school wellbeing.

Reimagining Public Education Beyond Mainstream Schooling - a Department for Education | South Australia - 'your SAy' initiative.

Date: 30th September 2025

Contact:
Ben Sacco - Managing Director

E: enquiries@educationeconomy.com.au
A: Suite 78/135 Cardigan Street, Carlton Victoria, 3053
W: www.educationeconomy.com.au

Submitted to:
Government of South Australia | Department for Education

EDUCATION**ECONOMY**

Supporting every learner: preventative and inclusive education practices.

Introduction

This submission responds to the South Australian Government's review of education settings outside mainstream schools, with a commitment to ensuring every child and young person is supported to thrive, regardless of their educational pathway. It recognises the opportunity to strengthen alignment across the system, fostering coherent, inclusive, and equitable approaches that reflect best practice and evidence-based strategies.

The review represents a significant moment to collectively reflect, reimagine, and design for the future of education outside mainstream settings. It seeks to celebrate successful practices and understand the factors contributing to their effectiveness, while identifying areas where new or adapted approaches may be required to strengthen alignment with broader strategic goals.

Our contribution to this review is grounded in evidence that children and young people who experience adversity often struggle to engage with what we term 'mainstream schooling'.

For these students, alternative education settings must be both adaptive and aligned with the broader system, ensuring that education is truly for every child.

As discussed in the book "Disruption in Schools: Understand me before you mark me!", most behaviours we observe in children and young people stem from their developmental journey. From early infancy to adolescence, each stage of growth brings new cognitive, emotional, physiological and social changes that influence how they interact with their peers and the world around them.

The earliest interactions and environments play a fundamental role in brain and body development, shaping emotional regulation, social skills, and behavioural responses. Though students may not explicitly recall early adversities, the effects can surface in ways that challenge their ability to engage, trust, and self-regulate in the classroom and in society.

Reframing the language.

Current terminology that distinguishes mainstream from non-mainstream education often unintentionally reinforces a deficit-based mindset. By labelling some children and young people as 'outside' the norm, such language can amplify feelings of exclusion, diminish a sense of belonging, and inadvertently stigmatise the very supports designed to help these students thrive.

This framing risks positioning students' needs as problems, rather than recognising the diverse strengths, experiences, and potential each learner brings to the education system.

Education Economy advocates for a deliberate shift towards inclusive, strengths-based language and societal messaging; one that recognises all learning environments as legitimate, valuable, and interconnected parts of a broader education system.

Reframing how we talk about learning pathways is not simply a matter of semantics. It is a foundational step in shaping culture, expectations, and practice across schools, families, and communities.

When language reflects inclusion, it:

- Affirms every child's pathway as valid and worthy, ensuring that all learners feel their educational journey is recognised and respected.

- Connects families to the education system, fostering trust, engagement, and collaboration rather than feelings of marginalisation or alienation.

- Empowers education professionals, promoting their role as integral contributors to a unified system that values all learners equally.

- Reduces stigma for children and young people, affirming their right to belong, participate, and succeed in ways that honour their unique experiences and potential.

> "
> *Language influences culture; words can either isolate or include.*
> "

1. How does your work intersect with education settings outside of mainstream schools?

Education Economy's work spans both mainstream and non-mainstream education settings, focusing on the whole-school context to meet the diverse needs of students, staff, and communities.

We partner with a range of education settings to design and implement high-quality, engaging teaching and learning environments that prioritise inclusion, wellbeing, and academic growth.

Our Preventative Measures to Adversity (PMA) framework supports education professionals to proactively respond to behaviours of concern, recognising the layered adversities many learners face and the critical role of education professionals in fostering safe, supportive, and engaging classrooms.

By combining neurobiology guided practice and developmentally-attuned strategies with practical coaching and in-class modelling, we ensure that programs are not only theoretically sound but directly responsive to the unique context of each school.

This approach strengthens connections among students, education professionals, and communities, enabling every learner to access meaningful education and every educator to deliver quality, impactful teaching.

The PMA framework is helping schools who often struggle to respond to behaviours of concern because they don't have clear, preventative systems in place.

The PMA framework
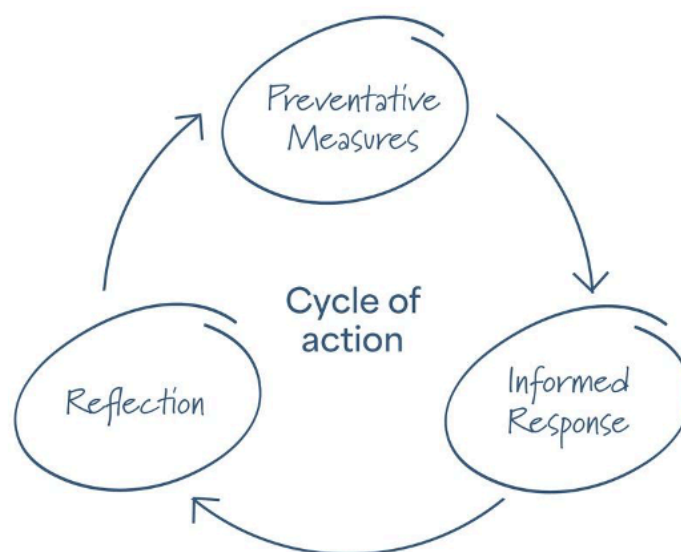
2. What connection have you had with the in-scope settings or cohorts engaged with them?

Education Economy has extensive experience working across a wide range of in-scope settings nationally, giving us a deep understanding of the contextual factors, operational dynamics, and diverse needs within these environments.

Through strategic consultancy, professional learning, and program development, we have partnered with educational settings that closely align to the mission and vision of similar settings to the Department for Education sites.

In these contexts, we help education professionals embed regulation, relational practice, and strengths-based approaches so learners can engage meaningfully and, where appropriate, transition successfully between specialised and mainstream settings.

Our work consistently emphasises the importance of connection, predictability, co-regulation, and continuity, ensuring that students experience coherent, high-quality teaching and learning pathways regardless of the setting.

By working across diverse contexts, we have developed a nuanced, evidence-informed understanding of how education settings can support every learner and strengthen the capability and capacity of education professionals to deliver engaging, inclusive, and effective educational programs.

" Continuity across education settings is key. Without it, students experience fractured pathways and further exclusion. "

3. For those supporting children and young people, what approaches and strategies would support them to thrive in educational settings?

Supporting children and young people to thrive requires a shift from punitive, exclusion-based approaches towards preventative, strength-based ones.

Neurobiology-guided practice is essential, helping staff to understand how adversity shapes learning, behaviour, and memory.

When teachers can explicitly identify when the behaviour is a form of communication rather than as defiance, they can respond with strategies that regulate and reconnect rather than escalate and exclude.

Equally important is student voice and agency. Young people must be active participants in co-designing expectations, routines, and supports so that they feel a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Wrap-around collaboration between schools, families, and external services also provides a holistic layer of support for children whose barriers to learning are complex and multifaceted.

Finally, practices that emphasise reconnection and re-entry, rather than repeated exclusion, enable students to maintain dignity and continuity in their education.

4. For those supporting families, what supports and strategies would support them in engaging with non-mainstream settings and/or enable them to engage in mainstream education?

Families are critical partners in children's learning journeys, yet they often feel excluded or blamed when children struggle in education settings. To address this, transparent and consistent communication must be prioritised, ensuring that families are informed and engaged not only during crisis points but throughout the learning process. Strength-based engagement that acknowledges family expertise helps to maintain trust.

Families also require navigation supports to help them move confidently between varying educational pathways. Dedicated liaison roles or case managers can ensure families are not left to interpret complex systems alone. Practical flexibility, such as accessible meeting arrangements and tailored communication, acknowledges the additional pressures faced by families caring for children with health, behavioural, or justice-related challenges.

5. For those supporting staff, what would enable them to support children and young people facing additional barriers both within and outside mainstream education?

Staff in non-mainstream education settings often carry significant responsibility and require more than policy documents to guide their practice.

Professional development delivered in context, through in-class coaching and modelling, as seen in our 'Disruption in Schools' professional learning program, helps bridge the gap between theory and practice.

By seeing effective strategies applied in real time, teachers build confidence and consistency in the process and system that is designed to support them to respond to the needs of their students without experiencing diminished health and wellbeing outcomes.

A relational practice approach also empowers staff to prioritise connection over compliance, viewing behaviour through the lens of development and communication.

This shift requires consistent frameworks across the system, such as the Preventative Measures to Adversity framework, so that staff in different settings are not working in isolation or contradiction.

Staff wellbeing must be protected.

Reflective supervision, peer networks, and workload protections are essential to sustain those working in high-needs contexts.

In addition, access to strong data systems allows staff to identify patterns, track progress, and adapt strategies responsively, ensuring their efforts are targeted and effective.

> "
> The psychological, physiological and environmental needs of education professionals must be a priority.
> "

Key considerations or recommendations

Effective approaches must recognise the complexity of human behaviour, the developmental needs of children and young people, and the vital role of relationships in fostering safe and supportive environments.

Education Economy recommends the following to strengthen education outside mainstream schooling and its alignment with the broader system:

1. Embed frameworks that have a greater focus on Prevention.
Embed preventative frameworks such as the Preventative Measures to Adversity (PMA), ensuring every setting has proactive, not just reactive, responses to student need.

2. Strengthen system alignment.
Ensure pathways between alternative and mainstream settings are coordinated, reducing fractured transitions for children and families.

3. Prioritise professional development.
Enable real-time coaching and modelling, giving staff confidence to implement strategies consistently.

4. Develop robust data systems.
Allow for early identification, clear tracking, and responsive planning across state-wide education settings.

5. Partnership and consultation
Principal associations should be active partners in this process, ensuring school leaders are supported to uphold wellbeing, safety, and inclusion without adding unnecessary administrative burden.

6. Evidence-informed, practice-driven
Policy must reflect the latest research in neuroscience, neurobiology, psychology, behaviour science and education and it must also be shaped by what works on the ground.

7. Protect staff wellbeing.
Implement provisions for reflective supervision, peer support networks, and manageable workloads, especially in high-needs contexts.

8. Invest in family engagement supports.
This could include liaison roles, flexible communication options, and co-designed transition plans.