

# Sunday Mail

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## **\$1250 truant fine for parents**

by Rachel Hancock  
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**PARENTS of truant children face fines of up to \$1250 under proposed changes to the Education Act.**

The clampdown also would see children who repeatedly failed to attend school without a valid reason front a truancy panel.

State Education Minister Malcolm Buckby said the proposed changes were in response to strong community pressure to strengthen truancy rules.

More than 5000 submissions were received by the Government as part of the Education Act review public consultation process.

Under the changes, the Minister would be given the power to convene a truancy panel, consisting of an experienced teacher outside the child's school, a behavioural expert, a skilled child support services representative and anyone else the Minister considered necessary.

The Minister also may require a parent or guardian and a child to appear before the panel. Parents who do not co-operate with ensuring their child's regular school attendance would be fined up to \$1250.

"Truancy is a concern because those children slip out of the system and their opportunities later in life are diminished," so if we can re-engage them into schools it's going to be to their benefit," Mr Buckby said.

"A fine would only come into place if a parent refuses to have any part in the process. It would only be used as a last resort."

Australia has one of the highest truancy rates in the world, with 7 per cent of children playing truant on any one day.

In SA last year, 1566 students were referred to the department's school attendance counsellors.

Of these, an estimated 300 may be referred to the proposed panels for additional intervention.

Under an agreement with the Education Department, police have discretionary powers to talk and detain students not in class during school hours.

Australian Education Union president John Gregory said fines and panels were punitive measures and just a small part of the answer.

"The most important step will be the appointment of primary school counsellors who can liaise with community agencies and persons to get truant children to attend school through support and encouragement," Mr Gregory said.

SA Association of State School Organisations executive director Mark Woolcott said the association supported the moves.