

Stay small and gain - school plea

**TIM WILLIAMS
EDUCATION REPORTER**

DISADVANTAGED students will be worse off if more South Australian schools are merged, a key parent group says.

In a briefing paper on school size based on recent OECD research, SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey writes smaller schools are "especially beneficial for students from poorer areas and minority students".

The wider range of subject choices in larger schools tends to benefit better-off students, Mr Knuckey writes, while small schools do better in attendance, behaviour and student attitude and "may help achieve better results for all students".

The paper comes after Education Minister Susan Close argued for mergers as a way of injecting socio-economic diversity into public schools in poorer areas.

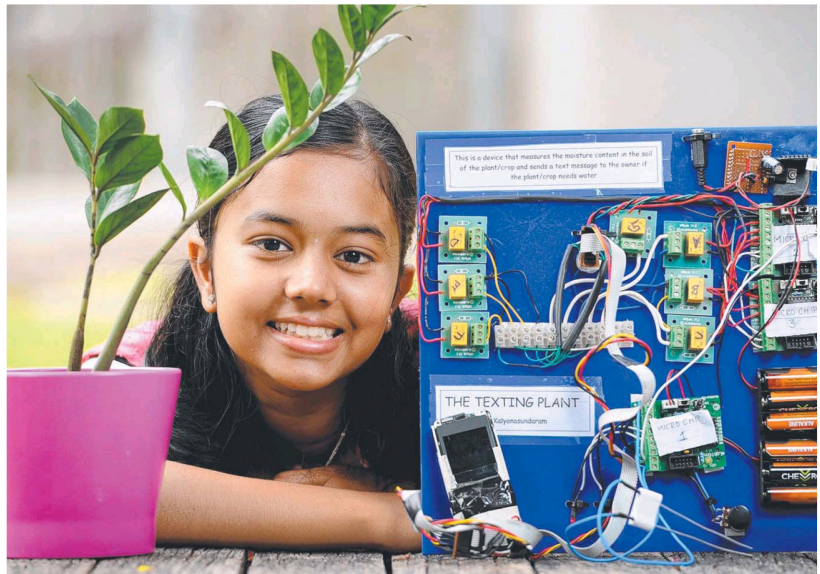
Ms Close recently told a meeting of primary principals that disadvantaged students were too heavily concentrated in some public schools as parents who could afford it opted for private ones.

Yesterday Ms Close said the Government would continue to support schools of all sizes.

"Our policy is to encourage amalgamations on a purely voluntary basis, and we urge schools to consider all pros and cons before making a decision," she said.

The OECD review said smaller schools "can focus on a core academic curriculum and they know every student; small schools can offer success for each of them". However, it concluded there was "no one-size-fits-all solution to the question of school size".

Mr Knuckey said it confirmed "what other Australian studies have been saying for years" and explained why other nations were reversing amalgamation policies.



OMG I'M THIRSTY: Kaviya Kalyanasundaram with her moisture-monitoring invention.

Picture: KERYN STEVENS

Texting plant sending right message

**AMY MORAN
GUARDIAN MESSENGER**

HELPING the elderly and farmers is at the top of young inventor Kaviya Kalyanasundaram's agenda.

The Australian Science and Mathematics School student is

working on two projects after winning a \$5000 grant to build prototypes of a voice-controlled wheelchair and what Kaviya calls a "texting plant".

The texting plant, which monitors the moisture in soil and notifies the gardener when the plant needs water, won

Kaviya the Junior Technology Prize at the Royal Adelaide Show in 2011.

She has since modified it and is working on further improvements, such as bluetooth connectivity and making it solar powered, to get the device ready to sell.

Kaviya, 15, got the inspiration for the texting plant after talking to her parents Kavitha and Kalyanasundaram, both agriculture professors.

Kaviya, of Mitchell Park, hopes to study electronics or electrical engineering

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