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Embargoed until 10:30am 22nd October 2008

NSW Ombudsman **Annual Report 2007-2008**

Looking out for children and young people

The NSW Ombudsman today tabled his Annual Report for 2007-2008.

The Ombudsman is responsible for undertaking a wide range of work involving children and young people.

“Strong, effective systems for the care and protection of children are essential” the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, said. **“Our work allows us to identify actual and potential weaknesses in the system, and work with agencies to close those gaps”**

This year:

- We investigated how the Department of Education handles long suspensions. While there are procedures in place to provide schools with guidance in managing suspensions, they are not always followed. **“Where schools have to resort to suspending a student, the process needs to be carefully managed to avoid causing further damage”** Mr Barbour said. Our findings have been received positively by the Department, which is now improving the way it manages suspensions.
- We made 17 visits to juvenile justice centres. During these visits we speak with detainees, inspect the centre and raise any complaints or problems on the spot. We continue to see the impact of overcrowding in centres. It reduces the support provided to detainees, and puts additional pressure on resources and staff. **“Overcrowding in our juvenile justice centres is an ongoing problem, and we will continue to monitor its negative impacts”** Mr Barbour said.
- We continued our research into grooming behaviour (behaviour aimed at developing an inappropriately close relationship between a child and an adult). This behaviour places children in a position where they are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse and psychological harm. **“Case studies in the report demonstrate the importance of taking action early when grooming is identified”** said Mr Barbour. **“We must do everything we can to understand, recognise and respond to such behaviour.”**

- We completed our review of the issues affecting foster carers looking after Aboriginal children. The final report identifies service gaps, and stresses the importance of Aboriginal children in care having adequate cultural contact, health care and education supports.
- We published guidelines for dealing with complaints from children and young people, which were distributed to 3,000 oversight bodies, government agencies and community service providers across the country. The guidelines have been very successful, with an additional 2,000 requests for copies from a wide range of public and private organisations.

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