

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF) Fact Sheet

Suspensions in NSW Schools

The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) enables the school principal or relieving principal to temporarily remove a student from school for up to 4 school days (a "short suspension") or in instances of serious or sustained misbehaviour for between 5 and 20 school days (a "long suspension"). A summary of long suspension data only is published by DET on an annual basis.¹

Between 2005 and 2009, total long suspensions for NSW students across all grades (K to 12) have increased by 32.7% from 11,216 to 14,887. Physical violence and persistent misbehaviour have accounted for between 83 and 87 percent of long suspensions issued over the four year period. In 2009 the average length of long suspension was 12.6 school days.

Table 1: NSW DET long suspensions in year bands - 2009

Year	No. students receiving long suspensions	% of total long suspensions*	Long suspensions as a % of student enrolments
K-6	2,043	20%	0.7%
7-10	8,139	75%	4.9%
11-12	688	5%	0.9%
All grades	10,878		1.5%

Source: NSW DET (2010) *Long Suspension and Expulsion Summary 2009*.

* Total long suspensions include students placed on long suspension on more than one occasion.

Disaggregated long suspension data for 2009 highlights a number of issues of concern:

- As shown in Table 1, 2,043 primary school students (K-6) in NSW received suspensions ranging from 5 to 20 school days.
- In 2009, 26.6% of all students (K-12) long suspended (2,894 students) received more than one long suspension in a single year raising concerns about the efficacy of interventions.
- There are sharp variations in the number of students receiving long suspensions as a percentage of school enrolments across DET regions. For example, in Northern Sydney 0.4% of students were long suspended in 2009 compared with 2.7% in Western NSW, 2.6% in New England and 2.1% in the Hunter Central Coast region.
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students are significantly overrepresented in suspensions data. They are 3 ½ times more likely to be suspended than non-indigenous students and account for 22% of total long suspensions issued. In 2009, 2,286 or 5.6% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students received long suspensions.

The continued overrepresentation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students in school suspension data is of particular concern to UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families in the context of government commitments to 'Closing the Gap'. In 2006, an issues paper produced by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) for the NSW Government drawing on 2003 data showed that for Aboriginal males in Years 7-10 there were 629 short suspensions for every 1,000 males compared with 188 suspensions per 1,000 non-Aboriginal males.

The AECG Paper pointed to worrying increases in the use of both short and long suspensions in the early years of school. In the years from Kindergarten to Year 2, the rate of suspension for Aboriginal females is 9 times higher for short suspensions and 6 times higher for long suspensions than for non-Aboriginal females. Aboriginal males in years K to 2 receive four times as many short suspensions and twice as many long suspensions as their non-Aboriginal male counterparts.

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¹ NSW Department of Education and Training, Long Suspension and Expulsion Summary 2009 https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/detresources/suspexpul2009_oEuDLGhsYu.pdf