

## FACT SHEET

### SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIT



FACT SHEET – DECEMBER 2011

# Suspensions in NSW Schools

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) enables the school 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 and expulsion data is published by DEC on an annual basis. The inclusion of short suspension data for 2009 and 2010 is a welcome addition to the latest report.

Between 2009 and 2010, total long suspensions for NSW students across all grades (K to 12) have increased by 17.0%. In the five years to 2010, total long suspensions have increased by 55.1% from 11,216 to 17,397 while long suspensions as a percentage of student enrolments have increased from 1.5% to 2.3%. In 2010, physical violence and persistent misbehaviour accounted for 86% of long suspensions issued. In 2010 the average length of long suspension was 12.6 school days.

**Table 1: NSW DEC long suspensions in year bands - 2010**

Year	No. students receiving long suspensions	% of total long suspensions*	Long suspensions as a % of student enrolments
K-6	1,960	16%	0.7%
7-10	9,247	77%	6.0%
11-12	1,066	6%	1.3%
All grades	12,273		2.3%

Source: NSW DET (2011) *Long suspensions and expulsions 2010*, December.

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

Disaggregated long suspension data for 2010 highlights a number of issues of concern:

- As shown in Table 1, 1,960 primary school students (K-6) in NSW received suspensions ranging from 5 to 20 school days. Long suspensions as a percentage of student enrolments remained constant at 0.7%.
- In 2010, 28.5% of all students (K-12) long suspended (3,498 students) received more than one long suspension in a single year. This was an increase of 1.9 percentage points and raises 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 DEC regions. For example, in Northern Sydney 0.3% of students were long suspended in 2010 compared with 2.9% in New England, 2.8% in Western NSW and 2.4% in the Hunter Central Coast region. Variations in school education groups within DEC regions were even more pronounced. In 2010, Bourke (5.2), Eastern Lake Macquarie (4.9), New England West (4.2) and New England South (4.0) all had 4 or more students long suspended per hundred students enrolled.
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students are significantly overrepresented in suspensions data and account for 20.2% of long suspensions issued. In 2010, 2,480 (5.8%) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students received long suspensions. This was an increase of 8.5% compared to 2009 data.

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.

### Short suspensions

Between 2009 and 2010 the number of short suspensions (up to four days in duration) issued across all grades (K to 12) increased by 6.4% from 55,940 to 59,508.

### Expulsions

Unlike long and short suspensions, the number of students expelled from school fell from 343 to 310 (9.6%) between 2009 and 2010.

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