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School Suspension

Youth Action Policy Paper

YOUTH ACTION

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About Us

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Youth Action works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. To achieve this, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
 2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
 3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
 4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
 5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
 6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
 7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.
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Recommendations.....	1
Introduction	3
Identifying the issue:.....	5
The effectiveness and impacts of school suspensions and expulsions.	5
Current NSW Government policies.....	6
Suspension and Expulsion of school students – Procedures.	7
YAPA Survey of school suspension policy implementation.....	11
Individual responses to YAPA survey of school suspension.....	12
Current NSW Government provision for students prior, during and after suspension.	15
Solutions:	16
Review of NSW Government Policies.....	16
Enhance NSW Government provision for students prior to, during and after suspension.	18
The role of community services in the solution.	21
Bibliography	23



Recommendations

1. That the NSW government conduct a public review of the School Suspension and Expulsion Policy.
2. That the NSW government increase funding for school counsellors to:
 - a. lower the ratio of counsellor to student to 1:500
 - b. establish permanency for one school counsellor working full time in a high school.
3. That every young person is part of the decision making process around their behaviour management.
4. That the NSW government increase and enforce collaboration between parents and school prior to suspension and/or expulsion, including the development of other behaviour management options.
5. That the NSW government increase and enforce collaboration between parents and school post suspension, including the development of re-integration plans.
6. That the NSW government develop and enhance policies and practices that focus on positive behaviour in the classroom and school environment.
7. That schools must ensure every student has up to date and adequate school work, as well as a safe and supervised space while on suspension.
8. That the NSW government continues to provide funding and support for the ongoing professional development of teachers.
9. That NSW schools develop community partnerships to
 - a. increase support strategies, programs and services for students
 - b. increase the use of alternative programs prior to suspension

- c. address specific cultural needs of students i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
 - d. include community members from specific groups i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, when considering disciplinary and behaviour management actions
 - e. increase the use of alternative programs whilst a student is on suspension.
10. That the NSW School Suspension policy is developed to include a framework and capacity to incorporate students social, cultural, economic, geographic factors and learning difficulties when considering suspension and/or expulsion.

Introduction

“Schools need to be a safe and happy place for students and their teachers”¹.

The use of 'excluding a student', through the use of suspensions, was previously set aside for behaviours that put the school community at risk, however there is an “alarming tendency...[to use]...school suspension as punishment for other, less severe, behaviours (Lloyd et al. 2003)”².

Suspensions and expulsions affect the whole student body, school staff, families and the community at large³.

Students can be issued with a short suspension of up to and including four days, or a long suspension, up to and including 20 days at the discretion of their school principal. If more than two short term suspensions are issued in a 12 month period, or more than one long suspension is issued, approval is required from the School Education Director, who sits at a regional level. The guidelines for suspensions are outlined in the *School Suspension and Expulsion – Procedure*⁴. However, discipline policies which determine how a school responds to behaviours up until the point of considering a suspension are individual to each government school, and are developed off guidelines including the *Student welfare, effective learning and good discipline*⁵.

In 2011 in NSW, 16 814 long suspensions were issued⁶, with the average of 12.6 days per suspension. This means 2.3% of students were missing an average of 6.3% of learning days at school from long suspensions. 23% of these students were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, whereas the percentage of total enrolment they represent, across both primary and high schools is only 6.1%⁷. Additionally, 77% of long suspensions were issued to students in years 7-10, meaning that 4.1% of student in these years are being

¹ NSW Department of School Education, 1996, p.3

² Michail, 2011b, p.158

³ Sautner, 2011.

⁴ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011.

⁵ NSW Department of School Education, 1996.

⁶ NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2011

⁷ NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012.

suspended⁸. Of these students to receive a long suspension, 27.5% received more than one, 'Persistent misbehaviour' was the reason 47% for long suspensions. These statistics do not include the number of students issued with short suspensions as these statistics are not released to the public.

The above statistics shed some light on the impact school suspensions are having in our schools and community. School suspensions have adverse short-term and long-term effects, not only on the student themselves, but on the family, school and community at large⁹. School suspensions impact the social and emotional well-being of a student, their learning outcomes, school drop-out rates and lead to marginalisation, disengagement and crime as well as alcohol and drug use¹⁰. "In Australia, a study of truancy and criminal behaviour found that 'excluding a student was 4.5 times more likely to result in criminal behaviour than if a student truanted for the same period of time'¹¹. In addition, there are also correlations between the suspension rates and schools being located in disadvantaged regions¹². Further to this, they also affect the ability of a student to transition to programs and services provided to assist a student including mentoring and support services for the family¹³

YAPA conducted a survey¹⁴ in July and August 2012 of all youth services in NSW. Over 250 people responded to the survey. Of these respondents only 13.5% were unaware of the NSW governments current policies on suspension and expulsion. However, of those who responded that indicated awareness of the policies, 51% said they do not feel they have an adequate level of understanding to support young people who are risk or have been suspended. Several comments made by respondents included the way in which schools individually interpret the policy and argued they were not following the policy accurately. Further to this, several youth sector workers highlighted the

⁸ NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2011

⁹ Hemphill et al., 2010.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Stranger 2002, in Riordan, 2006, p.246.

¹² Michail, 2011b, p.159-160

¹³ Michail, 2011a, p.1

¹⁴ Copy available on request from YAPA.

number of young people they work with who have limited understanding of the suspension and expulsion policy.

Pacific Islanders, students with complex needs including disabilities and behavioural issues, and young women were identified as being groups of young people suspended at a higher rate. Young people at risk of becoming homeless, living in out of home care or from a low socio-economic background were consistently identified as a group of young people suspended at a much higher rate than other young people. These groups were also over-represented in anecdotal stories of young people being suspended.¹⁵

Identifying the issue:

The effectiveness and impacts of school suspensions and expulsions.

Research, although limited, has been conducted into the effectiveness of school suspensions. "Referencing five major studies published in 2000, Gladden concluded that the 'widespread use of suspensions is deeply troubling because suspensions have not been shown to modify behaviour, can undermine students' academic achievement, and are disproportionately applied to minority students (2002)'"¹⁶. In addition to this, Bock, Tapscott and Savner¹⁷ illustrate the ineffectiveness of school suspension, stating that it has a detrimental effect on learning¹⁸, recidivism, increases the number of drop outs¹⁹ and has an in-discriminant use. Emotional feelings such as shame, resentment, frustration, anger and powerlessness are often experienced by the suspended student and their parents²⁰

The ineffectiveness of school suspensions can be greatly demonstrated by

¹⁵ Copy available on request from YAPA.

¹⁶ Riordan, 2006, p. 246.

¹⁷ Bock, Tapscott and Savner, 1998, p.51.

¹⁸ Hemphill et al., 2010; Riordan, 2006.

¹⁹ Hemphill et al., 2010.

²⁰ Michail, 2011 b, p.159; Hhemphill and Hargreaves, 2011

the impact they have on the individual, their community and family, as well as their school²¹. These effects are both short term and long term²². Impacts on the community are exacerbated in areas of low socio-economic status (SES), as they students with lower SES are more likely to be suspended²³.

"In Australia, a study of truancy and criminal behaviour found that 'excluding a student was 4.5 times more likely to result in criminal behaviour than if a student truanted for the same period of time'²⁴. Suspensions may also increase a student's perception of alienation from the school, disengagement from school, and "appears to be a factor in student involvement in risky or anti-social behaviour; may precipitate more serious crimes in the community... may increase aggressive or avoidance behaviour"²⁵ as well as alcohol and drug use²⁶. Hemphill and Hargreaves²⁷ study found that students who had been suspended from school, within the 12 months following the suspension, were 50 percent more likely to play a part in antisocial behaviour and 70 percent more likely to use violent behaviour.

School suspensions can also be seen as a 'tool' to coerce a student from leaving the school²⁸. However, suspensions also affect the ability of a student to "transition to school services, mentoring and homework problems, as well as the suite of services provided to families"²⁹

Current NSW Government policies.

The NSW government has three main policies related to the suspension and expulsion of students; the *Suspension and Expulsion of School students – Procedures*³⁰, *Student Discipline in Government Schools*³¹ and *Student*

²¹ Michail, 2011a; Michail, 2011b

²² Ibid.

²³ Hemphill et. Al, 2010, p.16

²⁴ Stranger, 2002 in Riordan, 2006, p.246

²⁵ Sautner 2011, p.211

²⁶ Hemphill et. Al. 2010A

²⁷ Hemphill and Hargreaves, 2009.

²⁸ Bock, Tapscott and Savner, 1998.

²⁹ Michail, 2011a, p.1

³⁰ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011.

³¹ New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2011

*Welfare, Good Discipline and Effective Learning*³², both of which are part of the School Welfare Directorate. In addition to these, individual schools have discipline policies that feed up to the NSW Government's main policies.

Suspension and Expulsion of school students – Procedures³³.

This procedural document provides guidelines for all government schools in New South Wales. This document applies to students on their way to and from school, while at school and on excursions. It also applies to students while using social networking sites, mobile phones or other technology which could be used for bullying and harassment in a school context. The NSW government states collaboration between school staff, students and parents is an important part of school discipline, however as demonstrated below no formal requirements for collaboration are included in the policy.

The document provides an overview, as well as the provision of individual assessments of cases, of procedures related to suspensions. A summary from the document answers the following questions:

Why is a student suspended and/or expelled?

This document states:

“there will be cases of unacceptable behaviour where it will be in the best interests of the school community and/or the student involved, for the student to be removed from the school for a period of time or completely. Suspension and expulsion are options available to the principal in these situations”³⁴.

Further to this, it is stated that suspension is not a punishment, rather it is one strategy of an array of differing discipline strategies to manage unacceptable behaviour within a school.

³² Student Welfare Directorate, 2011.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011, p.2

The presented view of suspension is that it “is most effective when it highlights the parents' responsibility for taking an active role, in partnership with the school, to modify the inappropriate behaviour of their child”³⁵.

Suspension is also used by the school to provide time for a school to plan behavioural management for the student upon their return to school.

Suspension gives the student time to reflect on their actions, which develops the students “to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the behaviours which led to the suspension, and to accept responsibility for changing their behaviours to meet the school's expectations in the future”³⁶. This includes accessing other support staff such as an Aboriginal community Liaison Officer.

A school can impose up to two short suspensions and one long suspension in any twelve month period. If another short or long suspension is necessary, the school education director will need to give approval.

What are the reasons for a student being suspended?

Behaviour which warrants an immediate suspension includes a student being physically violent; possessing a weapon or firearm; possession, use or supply of an illegal or restricted substance or engaging in serious criminal behaviour in a school context.

Short suspensions, that is a suspension up to and including four school days, can be issued for 'continued disobedience' or 'aggressive behaviour'.

Long suspensions, that is a suspension up to and including 20 school days can be issued for physical violence, use or possession of prohibition weapon or use or possession of prohibited substance. A principal 'may impose' a long suspension for use of an implement as a weapon and 'persistent or serious' misbehaviour.

What are the requirements before a student is suspended?

³⁵ Ibid., p.3

³⁶ Ibid., p.3

Before a suspension is imposed a school must “ensure discussion has occurred with the student and parents regarding specific misbehaviour which the school considers unacceptable and which may lead to suspension; develop, in conjunction with the school learning support team or appropriate school or departmental personnel, a specific behaviour management plan to assist the student to manage inappropriate behaviour”³⁷. In addition to this, it is intended that schools will aim to reduce the number of days a student is suspended.

Before a principal issues a suspension they must initiate and document the following:

- That school welfare strategies and discipline options involve relevant support personnel;
- That discussion with the parent and student about behaviour which may lead to suspension;
- That the school learning support team or departmental personnel have developed an appropriate behaviour management plan;
- That, where persistent misbehavior is the cause of the suspension, a formal written caution has previously been provided for inappropriate behaviours, including expectations for behaviour change.
- However, in some instances a school may immediately suspend a student.
- A principal must hold a 'formal disciplinary interview' with a student prior to issuing a suspension. This interview is documented, and if necessary a parent may attend the meeting. The student must be given the opportunity to consider and respond to the information about their behaviour.
- A principal must also send written notification to the parents within 24 hours following verbal notification to the parents. However verbal notification is only required when it is necessary that a student leave school immediately, before school hours have elapsed. This written

³⁷ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011, p.5

notification includes the reason for suspension, probable duration of suspension, reason for suspension, expectations that the student will continue studies while suspended or in the instance of a long suspension that a study program is provided, importance of collaboration between parents and school, parents responsibility for the care and safety of the student while on suspension and information about appeal rights among other information. The schools discipline code must also be provided.

What are the requirements while a student is on suspension?

This document does not outline the provision of schoolwork to students while they are on suspension. The document also does require the provision of a supervised and safe area for students while on suspension. The written notification of short or long suspension sent to parents includes “the clear expectation that the student will continue with studies while suspended and, in the case of a long suspension, that a study program will be provided.”³⁸ However, the policy document further states it is the “parents responsibility for the care and the safety of the student while under suspension”³⁹

What are the requirements when a student returns to school?

A 'suspension resolution' meeting must be established by the principal, at the earliest time available. This meeting must include school welfare personnel, “guidance of the student”⁴⁰, and parents. If parents do not attend “the principal should consider the individual merits of the case and attempt to ensure that the student is back at school on or before the concluding date of the suspension period”⁴¹. Where this is not possible, the School Education Director must be contacted. Other provisions such as a student nominating a different support person is also provided for. A copy of the notes of this

³⁸ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011, p.???

³⁹ Student Welfare Directorate, 2011, p.11

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.12

⁴¹ Ibid.

meeting must be provided to the student and parents.

A student and parent may appeal a suspension in writing to the school education director or the regional director. Procedures are outlined in this document as to the response time and communication guidelines for the department following an appeal.

Individual school discipline policies

As mentioned, schools develop their own school discipline policy. This is developed in line with the framework provided in the *Student Discipline in Government Schools*⁴². The discipline policy must include strategies and practices to promote positive student behaviour, including specific strategies to maintain a climate of respect; strategies and practices to recognise and reinforce student achievement; and strategies and practices to manage inappropriate behaviour.⁴³

YAPA Survey of school suspension policy implementation

YAPA conducted a survey of youth services and young people across NSW in July and August 2012⁴⁴. 90.5% of youth workers who responded reported working with young people who have been suspended – pointing to a strong correlation between young people who receive support from youth services and young people who receive suspensions.

In response to the question '*Are there any particular examples of a suspension or expulsion that you feel was unfair?*', an alarming 74% of those who responded indicated one or more stories of unfair suspensions. The main reasons for this include schools using suspensions in the following situations: when the school is unable to develop effective behaviour management plans for students with disabilities and complex needs including Aspergers and other autism spectrum disorders.

- As a consequence for truanting.

⁴² NSW Department of Education and Training, 2011

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Copy available on request from YAPA.

- When a victim retaliates against a bully.
- No return date provided to students when suspended.
- For smaller indiscretions including arriving late regularly, swearing in school when students swear at a teacher.
- Lack of understanding of the impact of students circumstances including homelessness, individual mental health issues and mental health issues of a parent.

The reason most reported on in the survey was the difference in the way schools, and principals in the same school, implemented the school suspension and expulsion policy.

Individual responses to YAPA survey of school suspension

“A young person in my care was once suspended for truanting. Although I don't think it was unfair for the school to issue a consequence, I considered it counter-productive to tell a young person with an attendance issue that they needed to stay away from school for a week” *Survey respondent from Illawarra South East region.*

“Often young people for whatever reason, eg. Homeless or family homelessness, current family violence; go to school unprepared, they may be out of uniform or not have their school books etc with them and seem to be singled out and often this attended leads to a suspension. I have also observed that young people are suspended for truanting, which seems like an oxy-moron” *Survey respondent from Illawarra South East region.*

“Lack of consistency about what is a reason for suspension. This is within and across schools” *Survey respondent from Hunter Central Coast region.*

“Suspensions seem to be very arbitrary depending on the school/principal/deputy.” *Survey respondent from Hunter Central Coast region.*

“I feel that some students can be reactive to their environment based on fear,

frustration, and sadness etc and once labelled that it has sometimes been assumed that they are at fault and if the student has not given space/time and support to talk about their own sense of injustice they make choices out of emotion not logic.” *Survey respondent from Western Sydney region.*

“Young people being suspended for swearing near a teacher or at a teacher. I agree it is not acceptable behaviour and shouldn't be tolerated, however missing out on education is perhaps not the answer, particularly when it is implied that the teacher does not like the student.” *Survey respondent from Hunter Central Coast region.*

“21 day suspensions are ridiculous and makes it worse for the students to try and settle back into the classroom. Then they commit one minor indiscretion and are given another 21 days. A number of our students have been in this predicament and that is why he is here.” *Survey respondent from Hunter Central Coast region.*

“A young man was asked to go home and change into his correct uniform when the young boy refused he was suspended.” *Survey respondent from Sydney Metro region.*

“I think schools suspend to get rid of an issue where as we work with to resolve the issue/s, I have met with young people who say they were suspended for wearing the wrong clothing. given that affordability is an issue, this is very unfair.” *Survey respondent from Illawarra South East region.*

“At present I have a 14 year old boy who had a behaviour plan in place due to his mental health issues. An on call part time teacher had this young person was not aware of his behaviour management plan and an incident ensued where the young person pushed the teacher with his bag once provoked. This young person has now not being allowed onto the school property for over 12 months even though he is not expelled.” *Survey respondent from North Coast region*

“Young people with histories of complex trauma, sometimes diagnosed conduct disorders, oppositional defiance and often attract unqualified diagnoses from principal(s) such as "drug-induced psychosis" or "highly violent". Receive suspensions and/or "rest at home" instead of supporting warm referrals to mental health treatment and assessment or case coordination with in-school counsellors is often sorely lacking. E.g. a 15yo boy with trauma history punches a fire hydrant and immediately suspended for threatening behaviour. Specialist behaviour plans are implemented by some schools and not others – inconsistent.” *Survey respondent from South Western Sydney region.*

“One of the young persons I work with attends a Behavioural school 3 times per week and a mainstream high school 2 days per week. He has been on long term suspension for the last 5 months. The mainstream school does not want to allow him to return due to his behaviours but are not willing to try any program to help him return.” *Survey respondent from Sydney Metro region.*

“There are suspensions that seem unfair, but schools sometimes don't have any other options, due to other children's welfare, or teachers welfare or to give the time to look into other supports that can be put in place. The DEC need to look into this issue and address it...as the schools are trying to deal with it with the resources they have available to them.” *Survey respondent from Hunter Central Coast region.*

Survey respondents also identified the impact of the school leaving age increase:

“It is good in some ways that the new laws impose a societal expectation that our young people will complete year 12. Having said this, there will always be children that do not complete year 12 and the aforementioned societal expectation leads to further marginalisation of these kids. Furthermore, the impost on schools to manage some children that cannot cope in a formal school environment is unreasonable. The new laws were obviously well intended, but the implementation and support strategies do not seem to exist

in a functional way. I realise that there are new vocational education and training opportunities out there, but they are not practically available to our most marginalised clients.” *Survey respondent*

Current NSW Government provision for students prior, during and after suspension.

There are current provisions for a meeting between school, student and parents during suspension to ensure a smooth transition when re-entering school⁴⁵. The *School suspension and expulsion- procedure*⁴⁶ made reference to the student learning support team, which is a team of selected staff who assist in the development of behaviour management plans to manage students inappropriate behaviour. However there are no government standards as to the composition or qualification of staff on this team. It is outlined, in the *School suspension and expulsion – procedure* that schools will include the school counsellor in the behaviour management plan and they will sit on the student learning support team, that is when a school has a counsellor allocated.

The relative merits of of in-school or out-of-school suspensions are a source of some debate. Out-of-school suspension are a type of suspension where a student does not enter the school grounds for a specified period of time, whereas an in-school suspension separates the student from the rest of the student body, but still allows the student to remain at school⁴⁷. In school suspensions can be a way of supporting disadvantaged communities, where families may have complex needs which hinder their ability to support the student while they are prohibited from attending school⁴⁸. However, schools may not have a sufficient amount of resources to provide adequate supervision while a student is attending an in school suspension⁴⁹.

As mentioned previously, there is no policy provision of the school to provide

⁴⁵ School Welfare Directorate, 2011.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Michail, 2011b

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid.

students with schoolwork while on a short suspension, where they are only expected to 'continue with their study'.

Solutions:

Review of NSW Government Policies.

The review of NSW government policies, especially the *School Suspension and Expulsion – Procedure* is necessary to ensure school suspension is a useful tool in the management of inappropriate student behaviour. The policy should be publicly reviewed, that is given the opportunity for public comment to utilize the expertise of workers in related fields. It should also be released for public review as this is a policy that affects the educational outcomes of all NSW students. The following aspects should be included and/or reviewed:

The preferability of in-school suspensions over out-of-school suspensions. While YAPA acknowledges the limited resources currently available to schools and teachers, evidence demonstrates to negative effects of removing vulnerable young people at risk of disengaging from education from the school environment for long periods of time.

The provision and understanding of students backgrounds and the impact this has on their behaviour and learning⁵⁰, and whether this should be taken into account before issuing a suspension. This includes student's geographical factors, family economic status, learning difficulties, disability and/or mental health issue⁵¹. This would lead to the implementation of tailored approaches, which are more effective at reducing challenging behaviours as they “address the learning and individual social wellbeing of students”⁵². These programs are more holistic.

The provision for greater collaboration between parents and school.

⁵⁰ Sautner, 2011.

⁵¹ Beresford and Partington, 2003

⁵² Michail, 2011a, p.3

The policy currently states a suspension is best issued when it promotes parental responsibility for the student's inappropriate behaviour. However, as Hemphill and Hargreaves⁵³ state:

“for students at risk of engaging in challenging behaviour, an effective approach can be collaborative work with parents to address the students' issues as a shared problem. Using this approach, placing the blame and responsibility on either home or school is avoided. Parents are informed that their child's behaviour is being monitored and are invited to attend regular staff-parent meetings...” (Hemphill and Hargreaves, p.9).

This is an approach that should be adopted under the review of the policy.

The provision for greater community involvement in student's behaviour management⁵⁴. This could include an Aboriginal representative sitting on the student learning support team, or being contacted in the instance of an Aboriginal student's behaviour escalating.

The provision for appropriate and adequate schoolwork while they are suspended. Suspension has both short-term and long-term effects on the student, including their learning ability⁵⁵. By providing adequate schoolwork, the detrimental impact of suspension on school learning should decrease.

The provision of counseling and mentoring for the student⁵⁶, This would assist in the reintegration process on returning from suspension.

Provision of a supervised and safe environment while a student is on suspension⁵⁷. A school has a duty of care to students while they are attending school. The safety of students should also be taken into

⁵³ Michail, 2011a, p.9

⁵⁴ Beresford and Partington, 2003.

⁵⁵ Michail, 2011a and Michail 2011b

⁵⁶ Hemphill and Hargreaves, 2009

⁵⁷ Hemphill et al., 2010

account when suspending a student.

Enhance provision of young peoples' involvement in the decision making process concerning behaviour management plans⁵⁸. The *Good Discipline and effective learning*⁵⁹ encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. In addition it states students are 'active participants' in their learning, and good discipline includes promoting student participating and engagement. This should also be reflected in the *School suspension and expulsion – procedure* and enforced throughout all levels of behaviour management in a school.

Promote alternatives to school suspensions⁶⁰ in the guidelines, *Student Welfare, Good Discipline and Effective Learning*⁶¹. This would ensure positive behaviour programs are promoted⁶² and schools continue to use suspension and expulsion as the last step in students behaviour management. Alternatives could include behaviour contracts, anger management training and removing student privileges⁶³

Enhance NSW Government provision for students prior to, during and after suspension.

The NSW government policies should be adapted to include the provision of greater support, inclusion of parents and community and alternatives to school suspensions. In addition to this, it should also include the young person in the decision making process⁶⁴.

Prior to suspension, a school should be focusing on positive classroom management⁶⁵, which may include leadership and mentoring. This has been a known strategy to reduce negative behaviour, and is reflected in the

⁵⁸ Michail 2011b

⁵⁹ NSW Department of School Education, 1996.

⁶⁰ Hemphill and Hargreaves, 2009

⁶¹ NSW Department of School Education, 1996.

⁶² Riordan, 2006.

⁶³ Hemphill and Hargreaves, 2009.

⁶⁴ Michail, 2011b

⁶⁵ Riordan, 2006

governments 'Positive behaviour for learning' program⁶⁶. The National Safe Schools Framework “provides a vision and a set of guiding principles for safe and supportive school communities that also promote student wellbeing and develop respectful relationships”⁶⁷. Reference to this framework should be made and indicated in NSW government policies.

As mentioned under policy review, a school should ensure a student is provided with a supervised and safe environment while on suspension⁶⁸. This could include the use of more in-school suspensions. However, it would also require the use of greater collaboration between parents and/or relevant community representatives, i.e. Aboriginal Elders, to ensure the safety of the student while under an out of school suspension.

The inclusion of parents and community was also mentioned in the review of government policies. Working in partnership with parents and the community will greatly assist in addressing the learning problems and misbehaviour of students⁶⁹. Michail⁷⁰ reiterates this point, stating that “...strong links between community, school and family are indispensable and fit well within a model of inclusive practice”⁷¹This would also be a multi-tiered way to address a students challenging behaviours⁷², especially if it is done in a manner which does not place blame either party⁷³ and is considered a shared process⁷⁴

The provision of re-integration plans must also be enhanced. This includes addressing both the emotional and social well-being of the student, as well as learning needs⁷⁵. This could include “modifying the curriculum and teaching methods; working with external agencies to assist the school and the student in responding to the learning and behaviour needs of the student; [and]

⁶⁶ NSW Department of School and Education, 2009

⁶⁷ Urbis, 2011, p. 55

⁶⁸ Hemphill et al. 2010.

⁶⁹ Riordan, 2006, p.249; and Michail 2011 (either a or be)

⁷⁰ 2011 (either a or b)

⁷¹ Michail 2011b, p.167

⁷² Michail 2011b

⁷³ Michail, 2011b, p.168

⁷⁴ Beresford and Partington, 2003.

⁷⁵ Riordan, 2006

developing and implementing support strategies for students”⁷⁶

The provision of professional development for teachers must be maintained and enhanced. The professional development of a teacher ensures they are best equipped to address “poor student learning outcomes and problem behaviour”⁷⁷.

A greater provision for alternatives to school suspension must also be promoted throughout NSW government schools. As mentioned previously, this could include reviewing the *Student Welfare, Good Discipline and Effective Learning* policy. An example of an alternative to suspension is the NSW government *Positive behaviour for learning* program which operates in Western Sydney. It was introduced as an alternative to school suspension and “encourages schools to manage student behaviour by gathering observational data and evaluating specific outcomes on the basis of the data collected. It aims to equip schools to identify and teach behaviours that they have determined are appropriate for their students (Mooney et al 2008: 2-4)”⁷⁸

The NSW government should also augment the training of staff members on the school learning support team and their understanding of relevant guidelines. “School learning support teams are formed with the purpose of addressing the learning support needs of individual groups of students through the coordination, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational programs (NSW Government 2010: 39).

Membership of the learning support team is determined by each school according local needs, although the team usually includes a team facilitator (usually a member of school executive), school counsellor, teacher representatives, and specialist personnel...”⁷⁹ The NSW government should ensure staff on this team have additional training provided, and in addition provide clarity of the roles of school staff in behaviour management and

⁷⁶ Riordan, 2006, p.249

⁷⁷ Riordan,2006, p.248

⁷⁸ Urbis, 2011, p.57

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.58

intervention⁸⁰. The NSW government should also open membership up to community members to ensure greater outcomes for marginalised students including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

School counsellors also form an integral part of managing students inappropriate behaviours. School counsellors have qualifications in both teaching and psychology⁸¹, and their major purpose is to provide counselling and a psychological assessment service to students⁸². “In NSW, there is an average counsellor/student ratio of 1:1050, and school counsellors typically also provide services to the feeder primary schools of the high schools in which they are based (Parliament of NSW, 2009:55). The NSW Commission for Children and Young People has recommended that the current counsellor/student ratio of 1:1050 be improved to 1:500 (Parliament of NSW 2009:55)”⁸³. In addition to this, the NSW Secondary Principals Council report on *Student Behaviour Management*⁸⁴ discusses the “unclear methods used to allocate student service resources, including counselling and support teacher behaviour services”⁸⁵. Reducing the ratio to 1:500 would enhance the provision of services including counsellors services, as well as the student learning support team.

The recent announcement of a \$1.8 Billion reduction in funding for the NSW Department of Education and Communities is concerning. This reduction in funding has the potential to reduce the level of support available to vulnerable and marginalized young people; where it is vital that schools, particularly those in low-SES communities, are given additional resources.

The role of community services in the solution.

Community, and in specific youth services, must introduce their service to the local schools. Where this has not occurred, it will enhance schools

⁸⁰ Frew, 2009

⁸¹ Urbis, 2011

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Urbis, 2011, p.62

⁸⁴ Frew, 2009.

⁸⁵ Frew, 2009

understandings of the services available in the area and their role in addressing issues related to young people.

Depending on service capacity, organisations should offer to run a small course during teacher development days for the school to better understand young people at risk. This includes addressing issues such as the impact of family homelessness, being in Out-of-Home Care and the impact of family violence.

Further to this, depending on service capacity, organisations should offer to sit on the student learning support team or school welfare team. They would sit on this panel to offer expert advice on the impact young people's circumstances have on their learning and behaviour in the classroom, and ensure the young people's rights are upheld.

Services should seek to provide as much information as possible to students and/or parents asking them for assistance when a student has been suspended. This includes providing them with the Suspension and Expulsion Policy and ensuring the young person understands their right to be heard and be part of the solution. Services should refer parents asking for further clarification to YAPA or the Department of Education and Communities.

YAPA, as the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW, should produce materials for youth workers, parents and students on their rights, responsibilities and options in regards to school suspension.

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