

# Key Issues Paper No. 1



## School Exclusionary Practices in Australia<sup>1</sup>

Australian schools use a range of exclusionary practices, such as suspensions, exclusions and expulsions, to 'manage' student behaviour. Such exclusionary practices involve the removal of students from school for a set period of time (Valdebenito et al. 2018). Recent research has revealed that these practices are commonly used across Australian schools, with increasing frequency in some jurisdictions (Quin 2019; Bleakley-Bleakley 2019). As a disciplinary strategy, school exclusions offer a response to students who disrupt the 'good order' of schools or threaten others' safety. The application of school exclusions is intended to help change unproductive student behaviours (Sullivan et al. 2014) or allow time for other strategies to be implemented to help avoid repeat situations.

### Definitions of school exclusions

Drawing on the work of Graham (2018), we provide the following definitions of school exclusionary practices:

1. **Fixed-term exclusions** involve removing a student from school for a set period of time during which the student is not permitted to be at school. Fixed-term exclusions can be short-term or long-term and include all forms of 'suspension' and some forms of 'exclusion' and 'expulsion'.
2. **Permanent exclusions** prevent a student from returning to a particular school or all schools within a sector. Permanent exclusions are used to respond to serious behavioural issues or when previous fixed-term exclusions have been unsuccessful in dealing with unproductive behaviour. Permanent exclusions encompass a range of practices that include 'cancellation of enrolment' and some forms of 'expulsion'.

### Terms used for school exclusions

Each Australian state and territory has its own legislation and policies which define and guide the use of exclusionary practices. Despite similarities about how exclusionary practices are described and applied across Australia, there are some key differences between them. Table 1 lists the terms used for exclusionary practices in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, illustrating both the variability and commonality between the four states.

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	Qld	SA	Vic	WA
<b>Fixed-term exclusions</b>	Suspension	Suspension	Suspension	Suspension
	Suspension – charge related			
		Exclusion		
	Exclusion - from particular state school	Expulsion - from particular state school		
	Exclusion - from all state schools	Expulsion - from all state schools*		
<b>Permanent exclusions</b>	Exclusion - from particular state school		Expulsion - from particular state school <sup>^</sup>	Exclusion - from particular state school
	Exclusion - from all state schools (includes Cancellation of enrolment*)		Expulsion - from all state schools <sup>^</sup>	

\* Applicable only to students above compulsory school age (17 years old+ in SA; 16 years old+ in Qld).

<sup>^</sup> Students 8 years or less cannot be expelled unless approved by the Secretary.

Table 1: Terms used for school exclusions in Qld, SA, Vic and WA.

## Grounds for using exclusionary practices

State and territory legislation guides schools on the appropriate use of exclusionary practices by describing the grounds on which these measures can be used. These grounds vary according to educational jurisdiction. Table 2 provides a comparison of the grounds on which suspensions can be implemented<sup>2</sup> in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

Grounds	Qld	SA	Vic	WA
Indifference/inattention		✓		
Disobedience/noncompliance	✓			
Misbehaviour	✓			
Disruption to good order	✓	✓		✓
Disruption to teaching & learning	✓	✓	✓	
Antisocial	✓		✓	
Safety/violence	✓	✓	✓	
Illegal activity	✓	✓	✓	

Table 2: Grounds on which students may be suspended in Qld, SA, Vic and WA

<sup>2</sup>The grounds listed in this table represent broader categorisations which capture the range of descriptions provided for grounds on which suspensions can be implemented within Qld, SA, Vic and WA legislation.

## Duration of exclusionary practices

The duration of fixed-term exclusionary practices is defined by legislation and there are variations across jurisdictions (see Table 3). Generally, the duration of fixed-term and permanent exclusions reflects the severity or frequency of serious acts which threaten the safety and wellbeing of students and staff.

Form of exclusion		Qld	SA	Vic	WA
<b>Fixed-term exclusions</b>	Suspension	0-10 days (short); 10-20 days (long)	0-5 days (max 15 days per annum in total or 4 separate occasions)	0-5 days (can be extended with approval to a max 15 days)	0-5 days; 6-10 days (can be extended with approval)
	Suspension (charge related)	after the charge is dealt with or until the principal decides			
	Exclusion/Expulsion from particular school	0-12 months	20-50 days or remainder of term (max 100 days per annum, can be extended with approval)		undefined
			6-18 months		
	Exclusion/Expulsion from all schools	0-12 months	1-5 years		
<b>Permanent exclusions</b>	Exclusion/Expulsion from particular school	permanent		permanent	
	Exclusion/Expulsion from all schools	permanent		undefined	
	Cancellation of enrolment	permanent			

Table 3: The duration of exclusionary practices in Qld, Vic, SA and WA.

## The authority to exclude

State and territory legislation determines who has the authority to exclude students from school. This authority is reserved for school principals and heads of state education departments. There are some differences about how this occurs across jurisdictions. For example, in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, school principals have the authority to enact all but the most severe forms of school exclusion. In Queensland, however, principals can cancel enrolments, that is, permanently exclude students above compulsory school age. Western Australia has the most restrictive authority to exclude. Some legislation includes a provision for delegatory powers<sup>3</sup>, which enable those in authority to delegate power to others to

<sup>3</sup>Legislation provides delegatory powers to principals in South Australia and Western Australia and to education department heads in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland.

exclude students. Table 4 outlines which personnel have the authority to implement exclusionary practices in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

Authority to exclude	Qld	SA	Vic	WA
<b>School Principal</b>	Suspension	Suspension	Suspension	Suspension
	Charge related suspension			
		Exclusion		
	Exclusion from particular state school	Expulsion from particular state school*	Expulsion from a particular state school^	
	Cancellation of enrolment*			
<b>Education Department Head Eg Director General/Chief Executive/Secretary</b>	Suspension			
	Charge related suspension			
	Exclusion from particular state schools			
	Exclusion from all state schools	Expulsion from all state schools	Expulsion from all state schools	Exclusion from particular state school

\* Applicable only to students above compulsory school age.

^ Students 8 years or less cannot be expelled unless approved by the Secretary.

Table 4: Personnel with the authority to apply exclusionary practices in Qld, SA, Vic and WA.

## School Exclusions Study Overview

The School Exclusions Study aims to investigate the extent to which exclusionary practices such as suspensions and exclusions are used by schools across Australia to discipline students and manage diverse student populations; the reasons why students are suspended and excluded; the profile of students who are suspended and excluded; and the impact on the health, welfare and academic achievement of children who are suspended and excluded from Australian schools. The research will provide the evidence base for policy and school-based interventions that enhance the success of vulnerable children in our schools.

An initial pilot study is focussing on Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia to examine the policies and practices that shape and influence the use of school exclusions to address problematic student behaviour. Data includes legislative constructions guiding school disciplinary practices, and publicly available school exclusions data.

For further information please see [www.schoolexclusionsstudy.com.au](http://www.schoolexclusionsstudy.com.au)

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- [UNICEF Australia](#)
- [The Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia](#)
- [Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia](#)
- [Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria](#)
- [Australian Secondary Principals Association](#)
- [Australian Primary Principals Association](#)
- [South Australian Secondary Principals Association](#)
- [South Australian Primary Principals Association](#)
- [Queensland Secondary Principals' Association](#)
- [Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association](#)

## References

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- [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006 \(Qld\)](#)
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