

Schools unfairly targeting vulnerable children with exclusion policies

November 10 2020, by Annabel Mansfield



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Australian schools are unfairly suspending and excluding students—particularly boys, Indigenous students, and students with a disability—according to new research from the University of South

Australia.

Auditing exclusionary policies and practices in Australian schools across 2019, researchers found that discrimination is disturbingly prominent across the Australian education sector.

Of all suspensions and expulsions researchers found that:

Indigenous students received:

- 25% of all suspensions and permanent exclusions in Queensland, despite comprising just over 10% of student enrolments;
- 25% of all suspensions in New South Wales (NSW), despite representing just eight% of student enrolments;
- 6.5% of all expulsions in Victoria (a large percentage given the group represents only 2.3% of the student population).

Male students received:

- 77% of all suspensions in South Australia (three times that of girls);
- Over 80% of permanent exclusions in Victoria (four times that of girls);
- Around three quarters of all suspensions in NSW.

Students with disability funding received 14% of all permanent exclusions in Victoria, while comprising only 4.5% of all government school enrolments.

Lead researcher and Director of UniSA's Research for Educational and Social Inclusion Group, Associate Professor Anna Sullivan says the research will establish an [evidence base](#) for policy and school-based interventions to enhance the health, welfare and academic achievement

of [vulnerable children](#) in our schools.

"Every child has a right to education and to participate in a [school environment](#) that is safe, fair and supportive," Assoc Prof Sullivan says.

"Yet what these statistics show is that disciplinary actions are being disproportionately applied to certain groups of students in Australia, and concerningly, marginalized groups including Indigenous children and children with a disability. Of course, Australian schools, like elsewhere, commonly use exclusionary practices, such as suspensions and exclusions to help address poor [student](#) behavior. But how these are applied, and which students are impacted is quite clearly unfair. We need to find ways for vulnerable children to be better supported at [school](#), and ways for schools to better manage challenging behaviors. Only when we have a fair and equitable education system will Australian children, from all cultures, backgrounds and of all abilities be able to thrive and survive."

More information: School Exclusions Study: Exclusionary policies and practices in Australian schools and the impact they have on vulnerable children: www.schoolexclusionsstudy.com.au/

Provided by University of South Australia

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