

Term 4 2022 suspensions and expulsions



Introduction

The suspension and expulsion of NSW Government students is an area of increased public interest. In 2022, schools in NSW followed 2 different suspensions policies:

1. Student discipline in government schools policy (2011), in Terms 1 to 3
2. Student behaviour policy (2022), introduced in Term 4.

This Student behaviour policy (2022) was in effect between Term 4 2022 and the end of 2023 (replaced by another policy in Term 1 2024), and therefore forms the basis for the data presented in this standalone fact sheet for Term 4 2022.

Under this policy, a student was able to be given a suspension if their behaviour:

- causes harm to any person; or
- creates an unacceptable risk to the health and safety, learning or the wellbeing of any person.

The duration could be:

- up to 5 consecutive school days for students in Kindergarten to Year 2
- up to 10 consecutive school days for students in Year 3 to Year 12.

The new Student behaviour policy introduced significant changes to the previous Student discipline in government schools policy. This included the introduction of formal cautions, which were required prior to suspension for low-level behaviours unless there was an immediate risk to the health and safety of staff or students, changes to the grounds of suspensions and the length of suspensions. Due to the change in policy, it is not possible to compare suspensions data in the same way as done in previous years.

IT system changes were required to implement the policy changes, and the department communicated the requirements with vendors to align third-party systems with the new policy. Vendors were required to implement daily integration of behaviour and suspensions data back into the department to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools. Previously, schools were required to enter suspension data in their third-party system as well as the department system (ERN) during census times (twice a year).

Unfortunately, changes in vendor systems were not implemented consistently, resulting in issues for schools trying to record suspensions data accurately to meet new policy requirements.

The issues which impacted data quality include:

- duplicate suspensions recorded across systems
- overlapping suspensions recorded across systems
- formal cautions incorrectly entered as a suspension record
- suspension extension(s) recorded as a new suspension
- deleted suspensions being sent from vendor system
- incorrectly recorded grounds for suspension.

These issues were introduced with the implementation of the policy in Term 4 2022 and persisted throughout Semester 1 and Semester 2 2023.

Established validation processes were not able to be carried out to the same level as previous years' collections, despite significant efforts by schools. The above issues, combined with the change in policy, impacted the accuracy of suspensions counts and number of students suspended.

For these reasons, suspension data from Term 4 2022 to Term 4 2023 (inclusive) needs to be treated with caution and must not be compared to previous or future years, and therefore, no comparisons of suspensions or student counts across years are made in this fact sheet.

2022 enrolments

In 2022, there were 791,435 students enrolled in NSW Government schools.

Table 1: Enrolments in mid-year census

| Year | Male | Female | All students |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| K–2 | 105,104 | 97,702 | 202,806 |
| 3–6 | 143,687 | 132,783 | 276,470 |
| Primary total | 248,791 | 230,485 | 479,276 |
| 7–10 | 120,184 | 109,391 | 229,575 |
| 11–12 | 40,351 | 42,233 | 82,584 |
| Secondary total | 160,535 | 151,624 | 312,159 |
| All | 409,326 | 382,109 | 791,435 |

2022 suspensions, Term 4

In Term 4, students received a total of 9,020 suspensions in NSW Government schools.

7,922 students were suspended on one or more occasion.

Table 2: Students receiving suspensions by suspension ground, Term 4 2022

| All students | Term 4 |
|---|--------------|
| Suspensions – Actual harm | 3,204 |
| Suspension – Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing | 5,816 |
| Total suspensions | 9,020 |
| Students suspended – Actual harm (n) | 2,999 |
| Students suspended – Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing (n) | 5,236 |
| Total students suspended | 7,922 |
| Students suspended – Actual harm (%) | 0.4% |
| Students suspended – Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing (%) | 0.7% |
| All students suspended | 1.0% |

In Term 4 2022, 426 K to 2 students were suspended, representing 0.2% of all K to 2 students. In total, 1,931 (0.4%) of primary students were suspended in Term 4.

For secondary students, 5,743 (or 2.5%) Year 7 to 10 students were suspended in Term 4, compared to 248 (0.3%) Year 11 to 12 students.

Overall, 1% of all students were suspended in Term 4.

Table 3: All students suspended, Term 4 2022

| Grade | Enrolments | Students suspended | % students suspended |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Primary K–2 | 202,806 | 426 | 0.2% |
| Primary 3–6 | 276,470 | 1,505 | 0.5% |
| Primary total | 479,276 | 1,931 | 0.4% |
| Secondary 7–10 | 229,575 | 5,743 | 2.5% |
| Secondary 11–12 | 82,584 | 248 | 0.3% |
| Secondary total | 312,159 | 5,991 | 1.9% |
| All students | 791,435 | 7,922 | 1.0% |

Expulsions in Term 4 2022

In Term 4 2022, a total of 30 students were expelled from NSW Government schools.

Of these, 18 expulsions were for serious behaviours of concern and 12 were for unsatisfactory participation for students 17 years and over.

Notes:

1. Data only includes up to and including Term 4 Week 8 2022.
2. Where a student receives both a suspension for 'Actual harm' and 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', the student is only counted once in the 'all students suspended' data but will appear in both the students suspended for 'Actual harm' and 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing' data. Therefore 'all students suspended' is not the sum of students suspended due to 'Actual harm' and 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing'.
3. Support students at mainstream schools are reported by their underlying grade of enrolment.
4. Grand totals involving the number of students suspended may not match the total when adding up individual rows. This occurs when students are suspended across different categories (such as educational levels) over the course of the year.
5. The total number of enrolments throughout this fact sheet is based on head count rather than full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolments. Care should be taken as the enrolment figures may differ from enrolment numbers in other publications.
6. While students suspended on more than one occasion are only counted once in this dataset, students suspended in Terms 1 to 3 and in Term 4 will be presented in each factsheet (published separately). Therefore, combining data for Terms 1 to 3 with Term 4 will result in double counting for any student suspended in Terms 1 to 3 and again in Term 4.
7. System issues had enabled schools to enter suspensions under the previous policy. These records have been included in the columns 'Total suspensions' and 'Total / All students suspended'.

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