

2023 suspensions and expulsions



Introduction

In 2023, a new Student behaviour policy was implemented for the first full calendar year, outlining the suspension and expulsion procedures across NSW Government schools. This policy was only in effect between Term 4, 2022 and the end of 2023 (which was replaced by another policy in Term 1, 2024), and forms the basis for the data collection presented in this fact sheet. 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 requirements with vendors to align third-party systems with the new policy and implemented daily integration of behaviour and suspensions data back into the department. Daily integration was implemented to reduce the administrative burden on schools to enter their suspension data during census times (twice a year). 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.

Approximately 38% of schools were not able to validate or confirm the accuracy of their suspension data because of the inconsistencies between their own data and the data that was available in the department's system for correction and sign-off. In some cases, it was the third-party system errors which could not be fixed for this purpose.

Established validation processes were not able to be carried out to the same level as previous years' collections, despite significant efforts by schools throughout the year. 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 in 2023 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 grounds or descriptors are made in this fact sheet.

Expulsion grounds changed slightly between policy changes, however, can still be compared over time. Under the previous policy, Misbehaviour was an expulsion reason and in the 2023 policy this was changed to Serious behaviours of concern.

2023 enrolments

There were 786,434 students enrolled in NSW Government schools in 2023.

Table 1: Enrolments in mid-year census, 2023

Year	Male	Female	All students
K–2	103,234	96,452	199,686
3–6	143,276	131,493	274,769
Primary total	246,510	227,945	474,455
7–10	119,561	108,212	227,773
11–12	41,479	42,727	84,206
Secondary total	161,040	150,939	311,979
All	407,550	378,884	786,434

2023 suspensions

In NSW public schools, 1 in 23 students were suspended at least once in 2023.

Table 2a: All students suspended, 2023

All students	Semester 1 (Term 1 and 2)	Semester 2 (Term 3 and 4)	Full year
Number of suspensions			
Actual harm	8,991	7,540	16,531
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	20,245	22,879	43,124
Unknown / Not available	80	79	159
Total suspensions	29,316	30,498	59,814
Number of students suspended			
Actual harm	7,507	6,458	12,546
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	14,806	16,916	26,264
Unknown / Not available	70	67	134
All students	20,233	21,712	33,903
Suspension rate			
Actual harm	1.0%	0.8%	1.6%
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	1.9%	2.2%	3.3%
Unknown / Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All students	2.6%	2.8%	4.3%

Note: The ground 'Unknown / Not available' exists due to data issues across different third-party systems. This group represents a minor portion of the total suspended students, and when rounded to one decimal place, the value is displayed as 0.0%.

In 2023, approximately one in 66 primary school students were suspended at least once. There were 3,782 students suspended for 'Actual harm' and 4,723 students suspended for 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing'.

Table 2b: Primary students suspended, 2023

Primary students	Semester 1 (Term 1 and 2)	Semester 2 (Term 3 and 4)	Full year
Number of suspensions (Primary students)			
Actual harm	2,858	2,767	5,625
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	3,354	4,053	7,407
Unknown / Not available	20	7	27
Total suspensions	6,232	6,827	13,059
Number of students suspended (Primary students)			
Actual harm	2,181	2,188	3,782
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	2,481	3,030	4,723
Unknown / Not available	19	7	26
All students	4,093	4,685	7,138
Suspension rate (Primary students)			
Actual harm	0.5%	0.5%	0.8%
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	0.5%	0.6%	1.0%
Unknown / Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All students	0.9%	1.0%	1.5%

Note: The ground 'Unknown / Not available' exists due to data issues across different third-party systems. This group represents a minor portion of the total suspended students, and when rounded to one decimal place, the value is displayed as 0.0%.

In 2023, approximately 1 in 12 secondary school students were suspended. There were 8,764 students suspended for 'Actual harm' and 21,542 students suspended for 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing'.

Table 2c: Secondary students suspended, 2023

Secondary students	Semester 1 (Term 1 and 2)	Semester 2 (Term 3 and 4)	Full year
Number of suspensions (Secondary students)			
Actual harm	6,133	4,773	10,906
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	16,891	18,826	35,717
Unknown / Not available	60	72	132
Total suspensions	23,084	23,671	46,755
Number of students suspended (Secondary students)			
Actual harm	5,326	4,270	8,764
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	12,325	13,886	21,542
Unknown / Not available	51	60	108
All students suspended	16,140	17,027	26,766
Suspension rate (Secondary students)			
Actual harm	1.7%	1.4%	2.8%
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	4.0%	4.5%	6.9%
Unknown / Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All students	5.2%	5.5%	8.6%

Note: The ground 'Unknown / Not available' exists due to data issues across different third-party systems. This group represents a minor portion of the total suspended students, and when rounded to one decimal place, the value is displayed as 0.0%.

Actual harm, 2023 suspensions

In 2023, there were 16,531 suspensions relating to 'actual harm'. The table below displays a breakdown of suspensions by suspension descriptor.

Table 3: Number of suspensions by descriptor for 'Actual harm', 2023

Suspension descriptor	Number of suspensions
Aggressive behaviour	8,391
Assault	590
Bullying	58
Cyber bullying	27
Misuse of technology	66
Other – continuing, persistent behaviour posing unacceptable risk to another person's learning and/or wellbeing	440
Other – destruction of property that poses unacceptable risk to health and safety	83
Physical violence	6,184
Possession, supply or use of a suspected drug or illegal substance	193
Psychological abuse	60
Racism or discrimination	23
Serious behaviours of concern – pending expulsion decision	32
Serious criminal behaviour related to the school	93
Use of implement as a weapon	69
Use or possession of a prohibited weapon, firearm or knife	44
Verbal abuse	178

A total of 12,546 students received suspensions for 'actual harm'.

Suspensions due to 'actual harm' reveals a significant gender disparity across primary and secondary education levels. In primary education, males represent the majority of suspensions, representing 85.0% of suspended primary students compared to 15.0% for females. In secondary education, while the proportion of male student enrolments decreased, males still account for 67.3% of suspended students in grades 7 to 12, compared to 32.7% for females. When considering all scholastic years, males constitute approximately 72.6% of all suspensions for 'Actual harm', while females account for 27.4%.

Table 4: Students suspended due to 'Actual harm', by male and female, 2023

Year	Enrolments	Suspended males	Suspended females	All students suspended	% student enrolment
K-2	199,686	872	147	1,019	0.5%
3-6	274,769	2,344	419	2,763	1.0%
Primary total	474,455	3,216	566	3,782	0.8%
7-10	227,773	5,437	2,680	8,117	3.6%
11-12	84,206	457	190	647	0.8%
Secondary total	311,979	5,894	2,870	8,764	2.8%
All	786,434	9,110	3,436	12,546	1.6%

Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing, 2023 suspensions

In 2023, there were 43,124 suspensions due to 'unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing'. The table below displays a breakdown of suspensions by suspension descriptor.

Table 5: Number of suspensions by descriptor for 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', 2023

Suspension descriptor	Number of suspensions
Aggressive behaviour	17,478
Assault	253
Bullying	330
Cyber bullying	165
Misuse of technology	1,153
Other – continuing, persistent behaviour posing unacceptable risk to another person's learning and/or wellbeing	13,646
Other – destruction of property that poses unacceptable risk to health and safety	1,136
Physical violence	3,065
Possession, supply or use of a suspected drug or illegal substance	1,863
Psychological abuse	128
Racism or discrimination	211
Serious behaviours of concern – pending expulsion decision	117
Serious criminal behaviour related to the school	687
Use of implement as a weapon	147
Use or possession of a prohibited weapon, firearm or knife	663
Verbal abuse	2,082

A total of 26,264 students received one or more suspensions for 'unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing'.

Suspensions due to 'unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing' also reveals a significant gender disparity across both primary and secondary education levels. In primary education, males represent the majority of suspensions, with 83.4% of suspended primary students being male, compared to 16.6% for females. In secondary education, while the proportion of male enrolments decreased, they still accounted for 67.0% of suspended students in grades 7 to 12, compared to 33.0% for females. When considering combined scholastic years, males constitute approximately 69.9% of all suspensions due to 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', while females account for 30.1%.

Table 6: Students suspended due to 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', by male and female', 2023

Year	Enrolments	Suspended males	Suspended females	All students suspended	% student enrolment
K-2	199,686	937	163	1,100	0.6%
3-6	274,769	3,002	623	3,625	1.3%
Primary total	474,455	3,939	786	4,725	1.0%
7-10	227,773	12,949	6,477	19,426	8.5%
11-12	84,206	1,478	642	2,120	2.5%
Secondary total	311,979	14,427	7,119	21,546	6.9%
All	786,434	18,366	7,905	26,271	3.3%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, by suspension type and education level, 2023

In 2023, there were a total of 73,518 Aboriginal students in NSW Government schools. The term 'Aboriginal' refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Of these students, 12.3% were suspended at least once during 2023. Aboriginal students account for approximately 9.3% of all government school student enrolments and account for 26.6% of all students suspended.

Table 7: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students suspended, 2023

Aboriginal students	Semester 1 (Term 1 and 2)	Semester 2 (Term 3 and 4)	Full year
Number of suspensions (Aboriginal students)			
Actual harm	3,163	2,439	5,602
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	6,065	6,247	12,312
Unknown / Not available	43	15	58
Total suspensions	9,271	8,701	17,972
Number of students suspended (Aboriginal students)			
Actual harm	2,535	2,000	3,996
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	4,178	4,359	6,845
Unknown / Not available	36	15	49
All Aboriginal students suspended	5,880	5,749	9,010
Suspension rate (Aboriginal students)			
Actual harm	3.4%	2.7%	5.4%
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	5.7%	5.9%	9.3%
Unknown / Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
All Aboriginal students	8.0%	7.8%	12.3%

Note: The ground 'Unknown / Not available' exists due to data issues across different third-party systems. This group represents a minor portion of the total suspended students, and when rounded to one decimal place, the value is displayed as 0.0%.

Table 8: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students suspended due to 'Actual harm', 2023

Year	Aboriginal student enrolments	# Aboriginal students suspended	% Aboriginal students suspended
K-2	19,111	368	1.9%
3-6	25,655	1,026	4.0%
Primary total	44,766	1,394	3.1%
7-10	23,351	2,436	10.4%
11-12	5,401	166	3.1%
Secondary total	28,752	2,602	9.0%
All	73,518	3,996	5.4%

Table 9: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students suspended due to 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', 2023

Year	Aboriginal student enrolments	# Aboriginal students suspended	% Aboriginal students suspended
K-2	19,111	354	1.9%
3-6	25,655	1,309	5.1%
Primary total	44,766	1,663	3.7%
7-10	23,351	4,769	20.4%
11-12	5,401	414	7.7%
Secondary total	28,752	5,183	18.0%
All	73,518	6,846	9.3%

Students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability, by suspension type and education level, 2023

In 2023, 148,474, or approximately 18.9%, of all government school student enrolments were identified as students receiving adjustments due to disability (this excludes students with disability who are supported through quality differentiated teaching practice). Students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability account for 47.9% of all students suspended.

Table 10: Suspensions for students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability, 2023

Students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability	Semester 1 (Term 1 and 2)	Semester 2 (Term 3 and 4)	Full year
Number of suspensions (students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability)			
Actual harm	5,561	4,269	9,830
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	11,538	11,837	23,375
Unknown / Not available	60	43	103
Total suspensions	17,159	16,149	33,308
Number of students suspended (students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability)			
Actual harm	4,415	3,489	6,868
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing	7,876	8,201	12,671
Unknown / Not available	52	37	86
All suspended students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability	10,767	10,594	16,239
Suspension rate (students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability)			
Actual harm	3.0%	2.3%	4.6%
Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing Suspensions	5.3%	5.5%	8.5%
Unknown / Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
All suspended students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability	7.3%	7.1%	10.9%

Note: The ground 'Unknown / Not available' exists due to data issues across different third-party systems. This group represents a minor portion of the total suspended students, and when rounded to one decimal place, the value is displayed as 0.0%.

Table 11: Suspensions for students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability – ‘Actual harm’, by education level, 2023

Year	Enrolments of students with disability	# students with disability suspended	% students with disability suspended
K–2	37,695	829	2.2%
3–6	52,092	1,991	3.8%
Primary total	89,787	2,820	3.1%
7–10	44,811	3,799	8.5%
11–12	13,876	249	1.8%
Secondary total	58,687	4,048	6.9%
All	148,474	6,868	4.6%

Table 12: Suspensions for students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability – ‘Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing’, by education level, 2023

Year	Enrolments of students with disability	# students with disability suspended	% students with disability suspended
K–2	37,695	860	2.3%
3–6	52,092	2,559	4.9%
Primary total	89,787	3,419	3.8%
7–10	44,811	8,594	19.2%
11–12	13,876	662	4.8%
Secondary total	58,687	9,256	15.8%
All	148,474	12,675	8.5%

Data by SA4 groups, 2023

The NSW Department of Education uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS - 2021) to report data by geographical area. ASGS Statistical Area 4 (SA4) boundaries in NSW are combined into 11 groups for reporting.

Map 1: SA4 groups map



In 2023, Sydney-North had the lowest suspension rate for 'Actual harm' with 0.3% of students suspended, while North West NSW had the highest suspension rate for the same category, with 3.8% of students receiving suspensions. Sydney-North also had the lowest suspension rates for 'Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing', with 0.9% of students suspended. Students in North West had the highest suspension rate for the same category, with 6.3% of students receiving a suspension.

Table 13: Suspensions due to ‘Actual harm’ by SA4 Groups, 2023

SA4 group	Total suspensions	Total number of students suspended	Students suspended as % of SA4 group enrolment
Sydney-North	342	287	0.3%
Sydney-Inner	504	384	0.7%
Sydney-South	713	559	0.8%
Sydney-South West	1,764	1,401	1.5%
Sydney-West	1,179	929	1.0%
Sydney-North West	627	515	0.8%
North East NSW	2,233	1,621	2.9%
North West NSW	3,180	2,401	3.8%
South West NSW	1,760	1,297	2.6%
South East NSW	1,984	1,513	2.2%
Central Coast, Newcastle	2,245	1,658	2.2%
Grand total	16,531	12,546	1.6%

Table 14: Suspensions due to ‘Unacceptable risk to health and safety / wellbeing, by SA4 Groups, 2023

SA4 group	Total suspensions	Total number of students suspended	Students suspended as % of SA4 group enrolment
Sydney-North	1,085	775	0.9%
Sydney-Inner	1,697	1,090	2.0%
Sydney-South	3,146	2,049	2.8%
Sydney-South West	4,968	3,095	3.4%
Sydney-West	3,600	2,315	2.4%
Sydney-North West	2,413	1,545	2.3%
North East NSW	5,898	3,334	5.9%
North West NSW	6,979	3,975	6.3%
South West NSW	3,507	2,115	4.3%
South East NSW	4,587	2,895	4.2%
Central Coast, Newcastle	5,244	3,189	4.2%
Grand total	43,124	26,264	3.3%

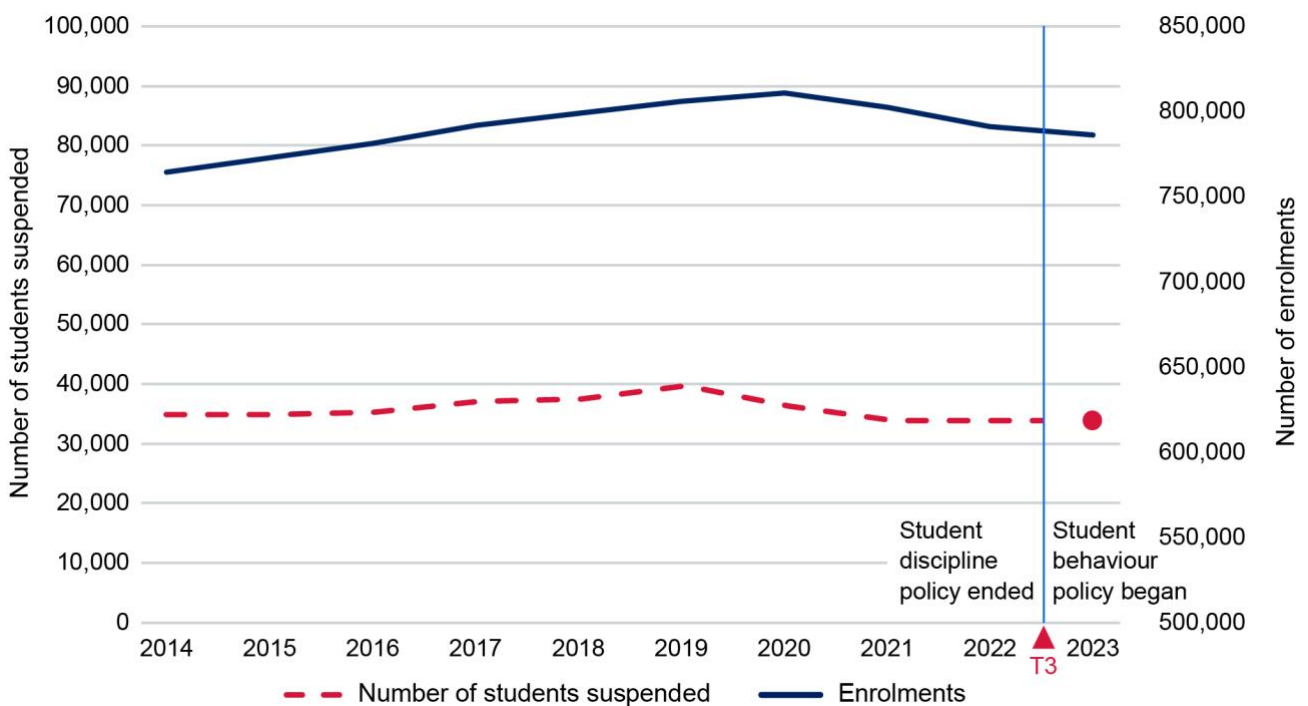
Students suspended

The number of students suspended relative to enrolment has remained consistent over the past 10 years.

As mentioned above, the number of suspensions in 2023 must not be compared to previous years, and therefore, not represented in this fact sheet. Various changes in policy have broken the time series and comparisons should not be made between years.

While the number of students suspended appear to have declined from 2019 to 2023, it is important to recognise that various factors contribute to this trend. External influences including, but not limited to, COVID illnesses from 2020 to 2022 that affected student attendance and extended learning from home periods in 2020 and 2021, may affect suspensions rates and are unrelated to behaviours policies and management practices in schools. The prevalent data issues from Term 4 2022 and throughout 2023 also affected the count of suspension records. Care needs to be taken in interpreting changes in suspensions across 2019 and 2023.

Figure 1: Number of students suspended and enrolments at NSW Government schools, 2014–Term 3 2022 and 2023



Note: The vertical axes have different scales. This should be considered when interpreting the graph.

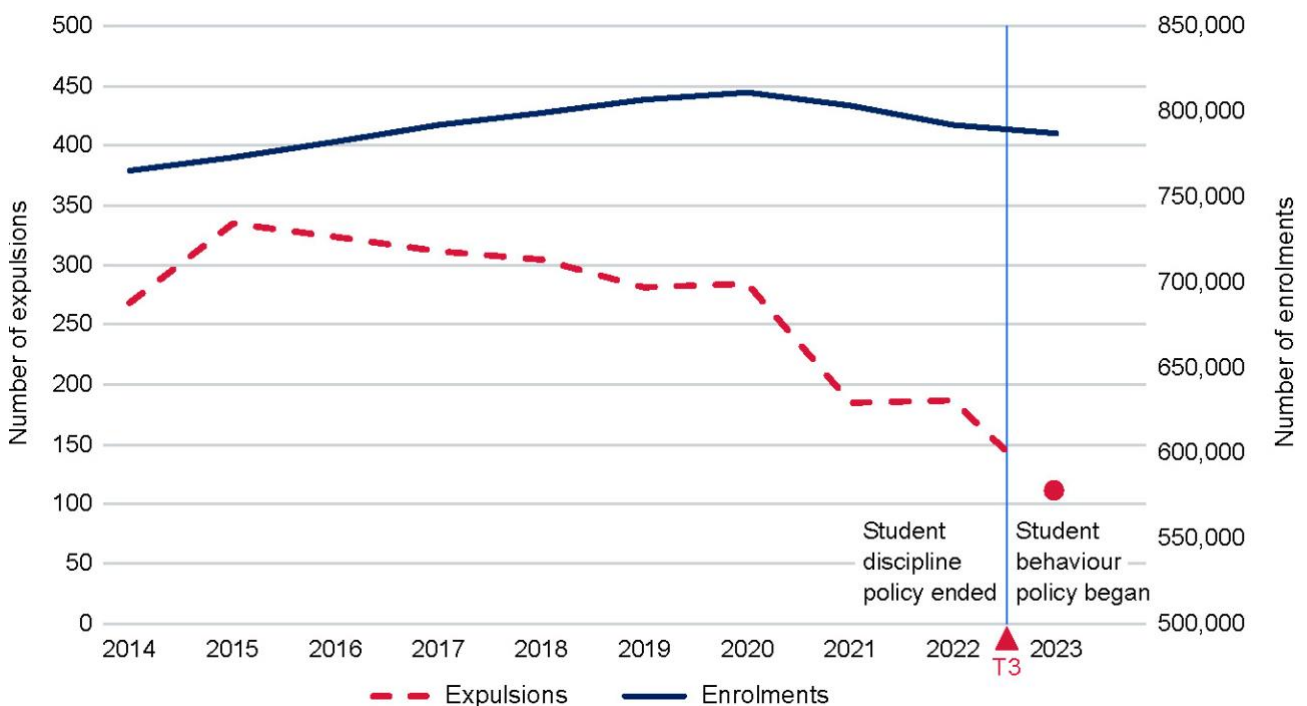
Students expelled

In 2023, a total of 103 students were expelled from NSW Government schools. Of these, 48 expulsions were for Serious behaviours of concern and 55 were for Unsatisfactory participation for students 17 years and over.

Expulsion figures represented in 2022, are for Terms 1 to 3 and not a full year. In Term 4 2022, Misbehaviour as an expulsion ground was changed to Serious behaviours of concern. Expulsion grounds figures should not be compared to previous or future years for this reason.

While the number of expulsions indicate a decline from 2019 to Term 3 2022 and then 2023, it is important to recognise that various factors contribute to this trend. External influences including, but not limited to, COVID illnesses from 2020 to 2022 that affected student attendance and extended learning from home periods in 2020 and 2021, may affect expulsion rates and are unrelated to behaviours policies and management practices in schools.

Figure 2: Number of expulsions and enrolments at NSW Government schools, 2014–Term 3 2022 and 2023



Note: The vertical axes have different scales. This should be considered when interpreting the graph.

Notes:

1. The new suspension policy, Student behaviour policy, was implemented at the beginning of Term 4 2022, resulting in a change from suspension types and reasons to suspension grounds and descriptors.
2. From 2019, resources were available to conduct quality checks prior to the collection opening, as well as the usual post-collection checks. This resulted in more complete data, giving the appearance of an increase in suspensions for some grades. These additional checks were not carried out in earlier years.
3. 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'.
4. Support students at mainstream schools are reported by their underlying grade of enrolment.
5. Data for students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability is taken from the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) data collection, which takes place in the first week of August each year.
6. Data is included for students identified as requiring supplementary, substantial or extensive levels of adjustment. Students who require quality differentiated teaching practices (QDTP) are not included in the data.
7. The NCCD is a count of the number of students with disability receiving adjustments to access and participate in education. The NCCD draws on teachers' professional judgement to determine the level of adjustments students with disability receive, in both the classroom and whole-school context, as well as the broad category of disability that relates to the adjustments. The model for the NCCD is based on mandatory obligations to students under the national Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and Disability Standards for Education 2005.
8. Table headings have been shortened due to formatting constraints. References to 'students with disability' should always be read as 'students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability'.
9. For more information on the NCCD, including level of adjustment descriptors and disability categories, please refer to the NCCD Portal.
10. Suspensions issued to students identified as receiving adjustments due to disability are included in this publication if the student record was reported to the Australian Government in the NCCD (refer to note 6). The publication will include suspensions across different schools, regardless of which school reported them under NCCD.
11. 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 and SA4 groups) over the course of the year.
12. 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.