

Experiences of school exclusions: The impact on families and students¹

Why does it matter?

Australian schools, like elsewhere, commonly use exclusionary practices, such as suspensions and exclusions, to help 'manage' student behaviour. Designed to 'support a change in the behaviour of students', these disciplinary practices involve removing students who disrupt the 'good order' in schools and threaten others' safety. In 2019, over 113,000 students were removed from state schools in Australia either for a set period or permanently, representing 4.3% of all state school enrolments.

Research shows that the experience of being excluded or suspended from school can negatively impact on students in a range of ways, including:

- alienation from school (Hemphill et al., 2013).
- involvement with antisocial peers (Hemphill et al., 2013).
- increased alcohol and tobacco consumption (Hemphill et al., 2013).
- engaging in anti-social behaviour and violent behaviour (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2010).
- increased likelihood of school dropout (Skiba et al., 2016).
- greater risk of entering into the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2016).

Research also shows the impact of school exclusion can extend to students' families, who are more likely to feel alienated, confused and social isolated (McDonald & Thomas, 2003), and experience disrupted work and family arrangements (Smith, 2009).

Excluded Lives: The Political Economies of School Exclusion and their Consequences is a significant ESRC funded project which is currently exploring the causes and consequences of school exclusion and the experiences of young people involved. The project is aiming to provide a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary view of the different policies, practices and costs of formal, informal and illegal school exclusions across the UK.

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Associate Professor Ian Thompson, University of Oxford, is an international expert in school exclusion/inclusion, social justice in education, cultural historical activity theory and initial teacher education. Ian is currently Vice-President of the International Society for Cultural-Historical Activity Research. He is a Principal Investigator of the ESRC funded project 'Excluded Lives: The Political Economies of School Exclusion' in the UK. He has been a Chief Investigator on several significant studies, including 'Disparities in rates of permanent exclusion from

school across the UK' and 'Collaboration for Teaching and Learning; The Effectiveness of Arts Based Approaches in Engaging with Disaffected Young People'. He was a core member of the recent British Education Research Association Commission for Poverty and Policy Advocacy. More details available [here](#).

What can the research tell us?

Little is known, particularly from the perspective of children and young people and their families, about the processes leading up to students being excluded from the school or classroom, or the strategies used thereafter to ensure students continue to have access to an education. The decisions taken by schools regarding children and young peoples' access to education outside of mainstream schooling, as well as the support provided in transitioning them back into formal education, are critical in supporting their ongoing engagement and attainment.

The Excluded Lives project will engage with education professionals, school leaders and teachers and students and their families in order to examine the experiences and consequences of school exclusion. In this seminar, Associate Professor Ian Thompson will discuss the innovative methods that are being used within the project, providing an important insight into how research design can be used to incorporate the rights and perspectives of children and young people.

References and further reading

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The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion

The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion (CESI) is based at the University of South Australia. Educational inclusion is a global issue. The impact of social circumstances on access to education and quality of education is profound. The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion undertakes research to advance an understanding of the barriers and enablers to successful educational inclusion. For further information please see the CESI [website](#).