



A new Student Behaviour Strategy

Lifting educational outcomes through early intervention and targeted support

A new system of learning and wellbeing support

The NSW Government is committed to supporting the learning and wellbeing of every student in NSW public schools.

The evidence shows us that student wellbeing and resilience are essential for engagement in education, academic attainment and social development.

Students need safe and respectful learning environments, the support of a skilled workforce and access to evidence-based interventions targeted to their diverse needs.

Behaviour support and management is critical to creating engaging and effective classrooms.

To drive the NSW Government's agenda to improve school performance and lift student outcomes, we need ongoing improvement and system reform to further support and manage student behaviour.

We have listened to students, staff, parents and carers, and stakeholder groups to develop this draft strategy.

Submit your feedback to behaviour.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au by 25 September 2020.



The case for change



Recent inquiries into student wellbeing identified systemic issues in the existing student behaviour framework and revealed opportunities to deliver better outcomes.

Broad themes included:

- a need to identify students at risk and students who require targeted interventions, at the school and system level, to design and deliver enhanced responses – particularly those students in vulnerable cohorts
- the importance of building the capacity of teachers, specialist staff and school staff to better support and manage student behaviour through enhanced professional learning, as well as the establishment of a dedicated expert workforce
- reviewing the suspension policy framework and associated guidance for staff.

The strategy incorporates findings and recommendations from these recent independent reviews, including:

- NSW Ombudsman Inquiry into behaviour management in schools (2017)
- NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Student with a disability or special needs in NSW schools (2017)
- NSW Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report, Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools (2016)
- Telethon Kids Institute report on Strengthening School and System Capacity to Implement Effective Interventions to Support Student Behaviour and Wellbeing (2019).

Our teachers and school staff currently work to promote positive behaviour to address the diverse needs of their students.

We have identified opportunities to strengthen the system to ensure better learning and wellbeing outcomes for students and staff.

Under the current approach to managing behaviour, vulnerable student cohorts are disproportionately likely to experience adverse outcomes.

Students with disability, Aboriginal students, students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, students in out-of-home care, and students in remote and regional areas are disproportionately likely to be suspended.

The high rates of suspension for these groups of students demonstrate that their learning and support needs are not being met, compromising their educational outcomes.

The new strategy will support the NSW Government's commitment to mental health and wellbeing supports for students in NSW public schools, and the NSW Premier's Priorities to lift educational standards and increasing the number of Aboriginal young people reaching their learning potential.



Key reform directions

The strategy will be informed by the recommendations of independent inquiries, data analysis and extensive stakeholder consultation.

The department also commissioned the Telethon Kids Institute to conduct an evidence review of what works to address student behaviour needs, and how best to provide system-level implementation support to schools. Based on this work, we identified key principles to guide the draft strategy including:

- student behaviour is integrated within a strategic, system-level approach to learning and wellbeing
- all students are supported through a multi-tiered continuum of care that includes the promotion of positive behaviour, prevention, early intervention and targeted support
- school leaders, teachers and specialist staff are engaged and supported through professional learning to build their skills and confidence
- policy and practice are student-centred and strengths-based
- evidence-informed programs, practices and processes are used to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate school change and improvement
- proactive prevention-focused, relationship-based and restorative practices are balanced with appropriate behaviour management practices
- inclusion and equity are embedded in all aspects of student behaviour support and management to meet the diverse needs of students

- shared community responsibility and action are fostered through meaningful engagement between schools, families and support services
- social and emotional skills and behaviour expectations are taught to students with opportunities for developmental skill-building
- implementation of effective interventions is facilitated through a staged approach with meaningful planning, capacity building, and sufficient time and resources to establish and sustain a whole-school approach.

Best practice in supporting student behaviour involves a preventive, student-centred and positive approach.

Key reform directions to support this shift in approach include:

- 1 integrating student behaviour within our broader approaches to learning and wellbeing
- 2 providing targeted support to vulnerable student cohorts through evidence-based interventions and a dedicated expert workforce
- 3 building capacity across the workforce through available and continuing professional learning
- 4 commissioning services for improved outcomes.

Key reform directions

The new strategy will seek to minimise the use of suspension to avoid the cycle of exclusion and school disengagement.

Suspension can be a critical safeguard if student behaviour poses a risk to the safety of others. However, the NSW Ombudsman found that there is no evidence that suspension is an effective mechanism for reducing disruptive classroom behaviour. Suspension has been linked to increased recurrence of problem behaviour, lower scores in academic achievement, lower school retention rates, increased likelihood of involvement with the youth justice system, and poor long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.

Under the new policy framework, timeframes, categories and grounds for suspension and expulsion will be revised. Staff will also have access to alternative supports, resources and mechanisms, including the option of in-school suspension.

For the period of a suspension, teachers will arrange a program of learning to be completed at home or at school to ensure students remain connected to school and their learning.

Recognising the shift towards a preventive, student-centred and strengths-based approach, the Student Discipline Policy will be renamed the Student Behaviour Policy. Key intended changes will include:

- clearly defining objectives and accountabilities
- identifying a range of evidence-based interventions and support options, including alternative measures to suspension
- targeted support for students with disability, Aboriginal students and students in out-of-home care
- links to support services and external agencies
- revised timeframes, categories and grounds for suspension and expulsion
- alternatives to suspension, including restorative practice and performing a service for their school community
- improved guidance to support students returning from suspensions to ensure engagement.



Key reform directions

1 An integrated system of learning and wellbeing

A new Student Behaviour Strategy will integrate student behaviour within the broader strategic systems approach to learning and wellbeing support.

A multi-tiered continuum of care will be adopted to support the needs of all students, not only those with complex and challenging behaviours.

This will include initiatives across the spectrum of student need, including the promotion of positive behaviour, prevention and early intervention, and targeted support for vulnerable student cohorts.

The Student Discipline in Government Schools Policy and Procedures (Student Discipline Policy) were last updated in 2006. They focus on school discipline planning and governance requirements, but do not define a strategy or approach to managing and supporting student behaviour within the school setting.

The new policy will set out a framework of best practice and evidence-based student behaviour support and management.

In relation to suspension, key intended changes to the Student Behaviour Policy include:

- **Fewer grounds for suspension for Years K to 2.**
Suspension may only be used in serious circumstances for students in years K to 2, such as serious physical violence or the use or possession of a weapon, firearm or knife.
- **Reduced maximum period of suspension for Years K to 2.**
The maximum period a student in years K to 2 may be suspended will be one to 5 days. The current maximum period is 20 days.
- **Reduced maximum period of suspension for Years 3 to 12.**
The maximum period a student in years 3 to 12 may be suspended will be one to 10 days. The current maximum period is 20 days.

Principals will also have greater discretion to determine whether a suspension is the right course of action for a student. Whereas the current policy stipulates circumstances in which suspension must occur 'immediately', the new framework will require that principals and school leaders consider a range of factors and alternative approaches before deciding to suspend a student.

For students with disability, principals must ensure reasonable adjustments have been made to help the student manage the behaviours of concern if the behaviour is related to the student's disability.

In the case of expulsion, a principal will be required to identify alternative appropriate placements for the student, such as another school, education pathway, transition to work program or work experience program that will contribute to the student's education.

Key reform directions

2 Targeted support for vulnerable student cohorts

The new strategy will support the learning and wellbeing needs of all students.

Currently, vulnerable students are disproportionately likely to be suspended and experience disengagement from education as a result.

The new Student Behaviour Policy will introduce additional considerations of student circumstances, and increased flexibility in principal and school leader decision-making on suspension.

In addition, a new model of complex behaviour support will be designed to build school capacity to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students with a range of behaviours, including complex, challenging and unsafe behaviours. This will include the establishment of a dedicated workforce comprising specialist staff, improved access to behaviour specialists in regional and remote locations, and new assessment tools.

Under the new policy framework, teachers and school staff will be required to consider the impact of a student's disability and uphold the student's right to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. When suspending a student with disability, a school will need to consider a student's Education Plan in determining the appropriate learning programs to be provided for the student while on suspension. Other re-engagement programs may also need to be considered.

3 Building capacity across the workforce through embedded and continuing professional learning

Student behaviour is influenced by a wide range of interrelated internal and external factors.

Acknowledging this complexity, new evidence-based professional learning, advice and guidance will be developed to further build workforce capacity.

The department will partner with universities and experts in this field to design enhanced professional learning.

Enhanced professional learning will be available at all career stages for teachers, specialist staff and other school-based staff.

Key reform directions

4 Commissioning behaviour services to deliver improved outcomes

To support evidence-informed interventions and enable local decision-making to address specific community needs, an expert panel of behaviour service providers will be convened.

Schools will be able to select from a range of pre-qualified providers to deliver services in their school community broadly, or targeted to certain cohorts of students.

Adopting a commissioning approach to behaviour support and management will leverage the best strengths of government, non-government and, where appropriate, private providers to ensure students and staff can obtain the best solutions and support in their school.

The department will also explore co-commissioning opportunities with other parts of government, in particular the Department of Communities and Justice, to deliver improved outcomes for targeted cohorts of young people.



Engagement and consultation

Submit your feedback to behaviour.strategy@det.nsw.edu.au by 25 September 2020.

The new strategy will be finalised in October 2020, with implementation scheduled to commence on Day 1 Term 1 2021.

Throughout the next phases of consultation and implementation, we will continue to work with students, staff, parents and carers, stakeholder groups, and the community to improve and strengthen the Student Behaviour Strategy.



