



**Government of South Australia**

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Office of the Guardian  
for Children and Young People

***Children and Young People in State Care  
in South Australian Government Schools  
2008-2015***

**May 2016**

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# Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Profile .....	2
3	Suspensions and exclusions.....	6
4	Absence .....	9
5	Literacy and numeracy .....	10
6	Summary.....	17

# 1 Introduction

This is the third annual report from the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People (GCYP) about participation and academic results (NAPLAN) for children and young people under the guardianship of the Minister in South Australia.

Comment focuses on areas of significant difference between, or change in, results for students who are in state care<sup>1</sup> and results for all children in SA Government schools. No equivalent information is available from the Independent and Catholic school systems.

This report is based on data supplied by the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) and we have adopted their usages such as students 'located in and actively attending'<sup>2</sup> school and definitions such as 'school aged'<sup>3</sup>.

According to the children consulted by the GCYP at various times, the benefits of going to school go well beyond their grades. They say they like school because they can mix with friends and learn new things and that there is stability in the same places and faces. They are usually able to do the same things as everyone else their age. School can contribute positively to their social and emotional wellbeing. Young Aboriginal people in care also often stress the importance of culture and identity and its connection to education.

## Youth Justice Detention

The Guardian has the statutory role of monitoring the circumstances of young people in youth justice detention. In the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, there were 827 admissions to youth justice facilities in South Australia involving 426 individual young people. Forty-five per cent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 23 per cent were female.

16 per cent of these young people also were subject to guardianship orders.

DECD's *Youth Education Centre* provides formal education for young people detained in the Adelaide Youth Training Centre.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report the terms 'in state care' or 'in care' refer to those children and young people under guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister for Education and Child Development.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase 'located in and actively attending' is used by DECD in their report to the Office of the Guardian.

<sup>3</sup> School-aged is 5 to 17 years.

## 2 Profile

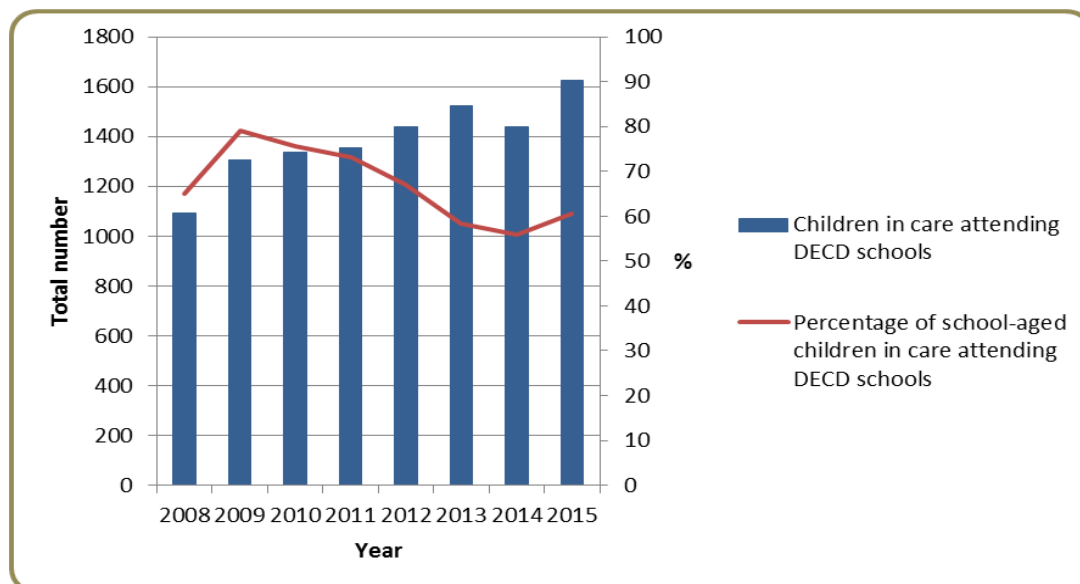
1,624 children and young people in care were enrolled in SA Government schools in Term 3 2015, increasing from 1,441 in 2014. This is from the total number of 2,685 students in care identified by Families SA<sup>4</sup>. Of the 1,624 children in care enrolled in SA Government schools:

- 775 were female and 849 male
- 1,125 were enrolled in primary schools and 499 in secondary
- 623 were enrolled in country schools and 1,001 in metropolitan schools.

Of the total number of students in care, 60.5 per cent were enrolled in SA Government schools and 39.5 per cent in the non-government sector. In 2014 the equivalent figures were 55.8 per cent and 44.2 per cent.

Although there was an increase from 2014 in the number of children in care 'located in and actively attending' a government school, the 2015 proportion of 60.5 per cent remains lower than the highest rate of observed in 2009 (79 per cent).

**Chart 1: Children in care attending SA Government schools – total number and proportion of all school-aged children in care, 2008-2015**

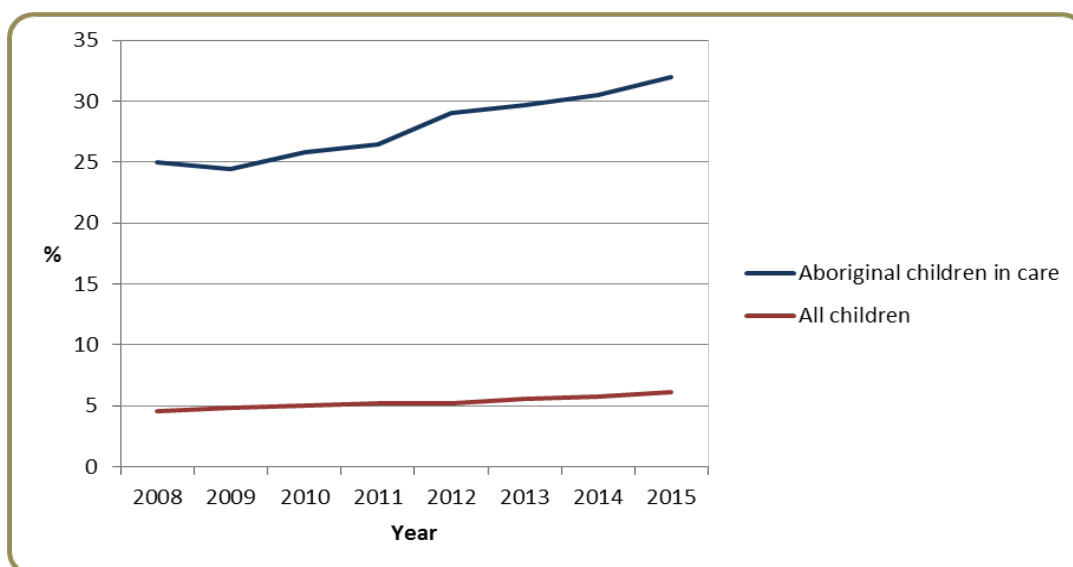


<sup>4</sup> The proportion of children in care *not* identified in the government school attendance census includes those enrolled in non-government schools and students over the age of compulsion who have left school. Data quality may be affected by the inability to match records due to the use of alias names.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

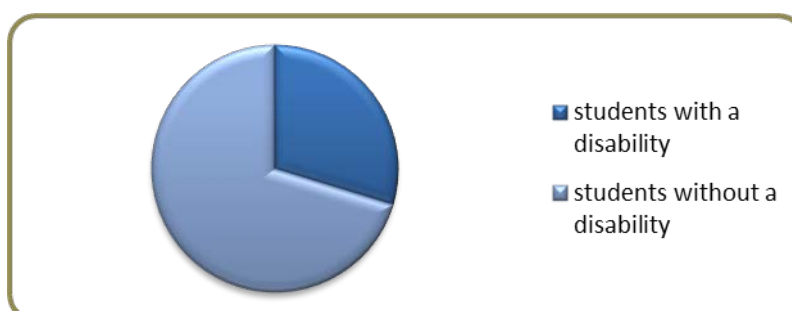
The proportion of children and young people in care in government schools who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is significantly higher than the proportion of all children in government schools (see *Chart 2* below). In Term 3 2015, 519 students (32 per cent) of children in care in government schools identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared with the state average of 6.1 per cent. This is consistent with the 2014-15 data which shows that approximately 30 per cent of children in state care are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

**Chart 2: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in care compared with SA Government school population as a percentage, 2008-2015**



## Students with disabilities

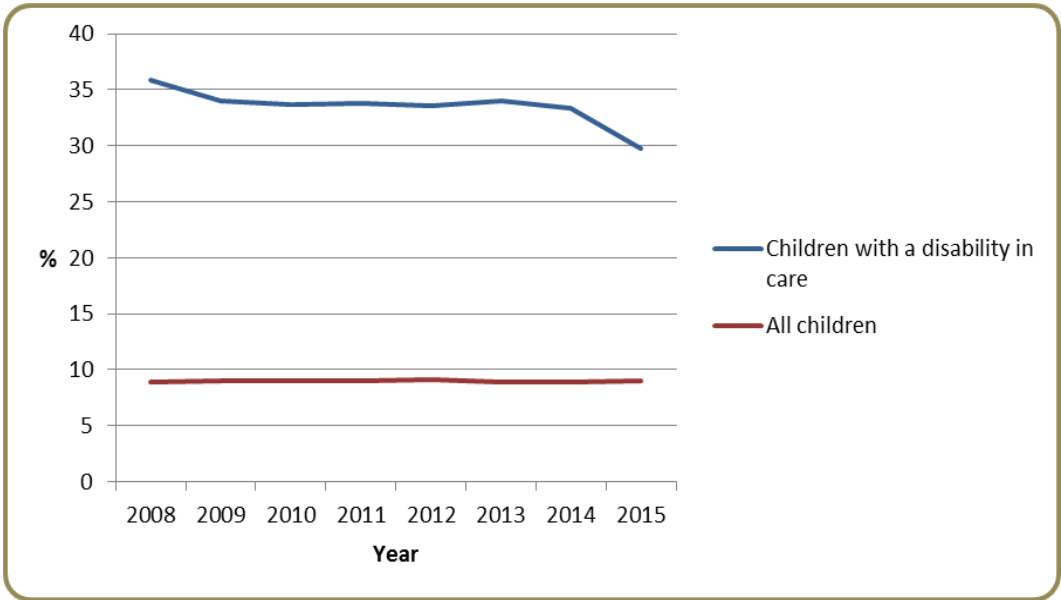
**Chart 3: Children in care with a disability enrolled in SA Government schools Term 3, 2015 (482 students with a disability)**



The proportion of children and young people in care in government schools who have an identified disability is significantly higher than the proportion in the state school population as a whole (see *Chart 4*). In Term 3 2015, 482 students in care (29.7 per cent) who were enrolled in government schools had a disability compared to the state average of nine per cent.

The decline in the proportion of children in state care with a disability in 2014-15 was a consequence of growth in the total number of children in care, while the number of students with a disability enrolled in the corresponding period was the same (482).

**Chart 4: Children with a disability, children in care compared with the SA Government school population as a percentage, 2008-2015**



*Table 1* following shows the categories of primary disability. The numbers are too small in most categories to compare children in care with state totals. However, in the categories of *Language and Communication*<sup>5</sup>, *Intellectual Disability*, and *Speech and/or Language*, children in care feature much more markedly. For example, the proportion of children in care attending government schools in 2015 with an intellectual disability is nearly seven times those enrolled in government schools, while the proportion for those reported under speech and language is over three times the proportion of those enrolled in government schools.

<sup>5</sup> In 2007 the disability categories were revised and ‘Language and Communication’ was replaced with ‘Autistic/Asperger’s Disorder’, ‘Global Development Delay’, and ‘Speech and/or Language’. As assessments of children are done, the new categories replace the old.

**Table 1: Category of primary disability, children in care compared with SA Government school population, Term 3 2015**

Primary Disability	Children in Care		State %
	Number	% of Children in Care	
	2015	2015	2015
Language and Communication	49	3.0	1.3
Intellectual Disability	157	9.7	1.5
Speech and/or Language	148	9.1	2.8
Global Developmental Delay	50	3.1	0.5
Autistic / Asperger's Disorder	56	3.4	2.2
Physical Disability	10	0.6	0.3
Sensory Disability (Hearing)	9	0.6	0.4
Sensory Disability (Vision)	3	0.2	0.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>9.1</b>

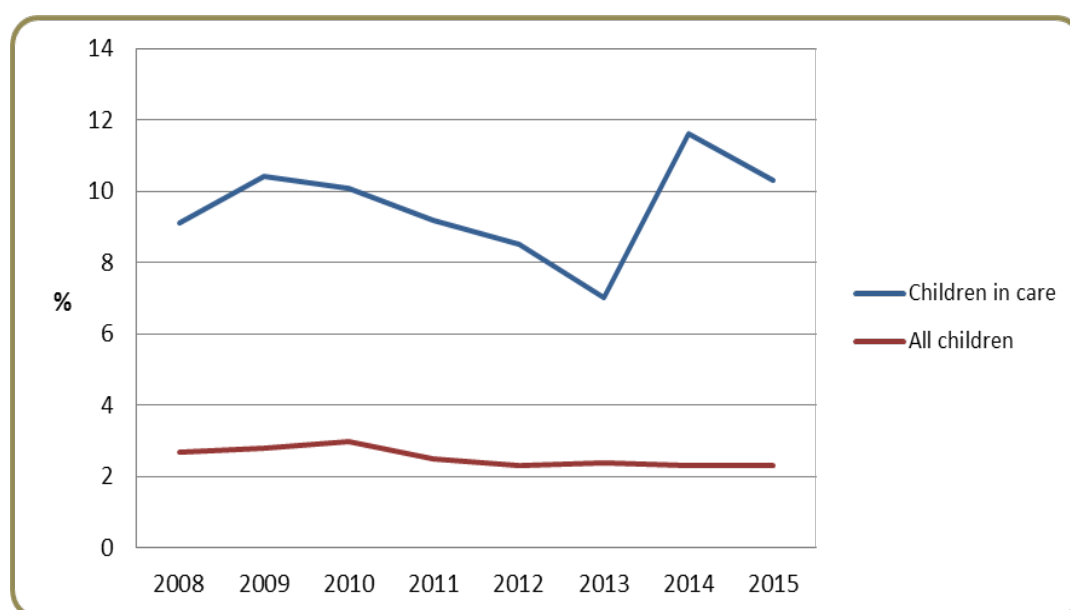


### 3 Suspensions and exclusions

#### Suspensions <sup>6</sup>

Suspensions of students in care dropped steadily from Term 2, 2008 to Term 2, 2013 then rose sharply in 2014, exceeding the high recorded in 2009. Suspensions for the state school population as a whole have remained relatively constant over the same period (see *Chart 5*).<sup>7</sup> 167 students in care were suspended in Term 2 2015, compared to 3,855 SA Government students. In both cases some individuals were suspended more than once.

**Chart 5: Rate of suspensions, individual students in care compared with SA Government school population, 2008 to 2015 (Term 2)**



Suspensions by age groups shows that suspensions for children in care occur more in primary than secondary school (see *Chart 6*).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Suspension from school means that the student does not attend school for a period of time ranging from one to five school days. For more information see <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/parent-information-suspension-exclusion.pdf?v=1459299567>

<sup>7</sup> The figures in *Chart 5* represent individual students suspended in Term 2, 2015, not the number of episodes of suspension.

<sup>8</sup> The student's age is calculated at the time of the incident, and students with multiple incidents may be reported in two groups if their date of birth falls in Term 2.

Chart 6: Rate of suspensions by age group, children in care compared to total SA Government school population, Term 2 2015

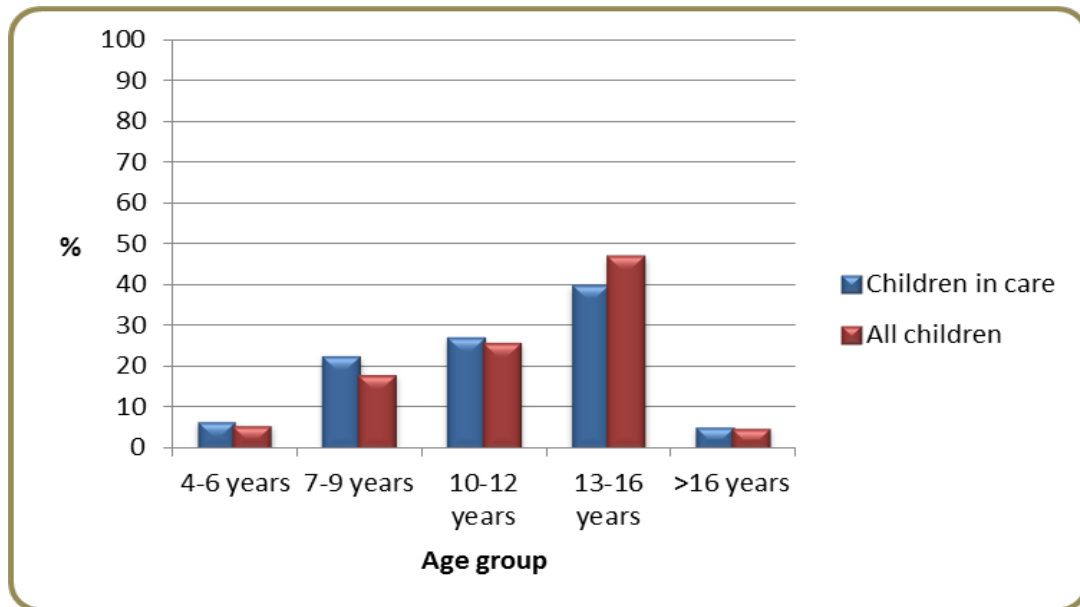


Table 2: Main reasons for suspension, students in care and SA Government school population, Term 2 2015

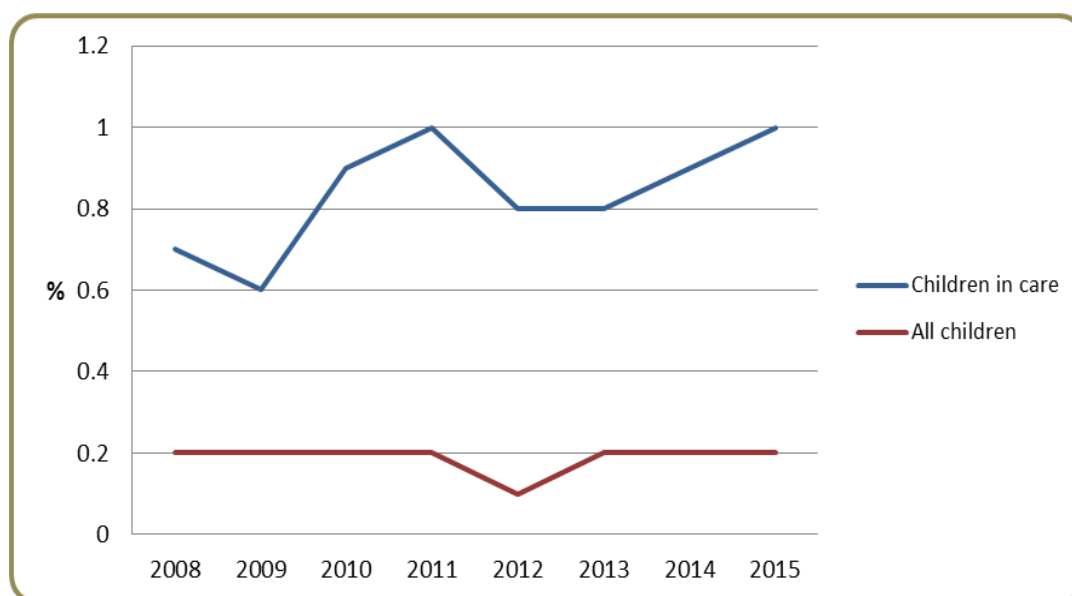
	Children in care %	State %
Violence – threatened or actual	40.1	40.3
Threatened good order	23.9	25.4
Threatened safety or wellbeing	19.4	17.3
Acted illegally	2.7	4.1
Interfered with rights of others	5.0	5.2
Persistent and wilful inattention	9.0	7.7

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## Exclusion<sup>9</sup>

Children in care enrolled in government schools appear more likely to be excluded, although the relatively small numbers involved make it difficult to draw strong conclusions. In Term 2 2015, for example, there were 17 exclusions of students in care (see *Chart 7*) compared to 257 SA Government school students overall (giving a comparative rate of 1.0 to 0.2 per cent).

**Chart 7: Rate of exclusions, individual children in care compared with SA Government school population, Term 2 2008 to 2015**



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<sup>9</sup> Exclusion from a school means that the student does not attend that school for either a set period of time ranging from four to ten weeks or for the remainder of a term or, for students over 16, the remainder of the semester. For more detail see <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/parent-information-suspension-exclusion.pdf?v=1459299567>

## 4 Absence

There is little difference in 2015 in the apparent absence rates for children in care in government schools compared with the school population.<sup>10</sup> However, there are some tendencies (see *Table 3*):

- students with a disability who are in care have a lower absence rate than that reported of children with a disability within the overall school population, that is, they are more likely to be attending than those who have a disability but are not in care.
- this more markedly is the case for Aboriginal children and young people
- students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds, however, have about twice the absence rate than that reported for those students from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not in care.

These relativities have been consistent since GCYP commenced monitoring.

**Table 3: Absence rates for children in care and SA Government school population, Semester 1 2015**

cohort	Semester 1, 2015		
	children in care		state rate %
	number	absence rate %	
total	1624	11.0	9.3
males	849	11.8	9.3
females	775	10.0	9.2
from non-English speaking backgrounds	275	14.7	7.3
disability	482	11.5	12.8
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	519	14.2	19.2
country schools	623	12.2	10.3
metro schools	1001	10.2	8.8
primary schools	1125	9.3	8.1
secondary schools	499	14.9	11.3

<sup>10</sup> Small but significant numbers of students in care attend school for periods of as little as one hour per week by negotiated arrangement. These do not record as absences but the reduced hours of attendance for these students likely has some negative impact on their NAPLAN scores.

## 5 Literacy and numeracy

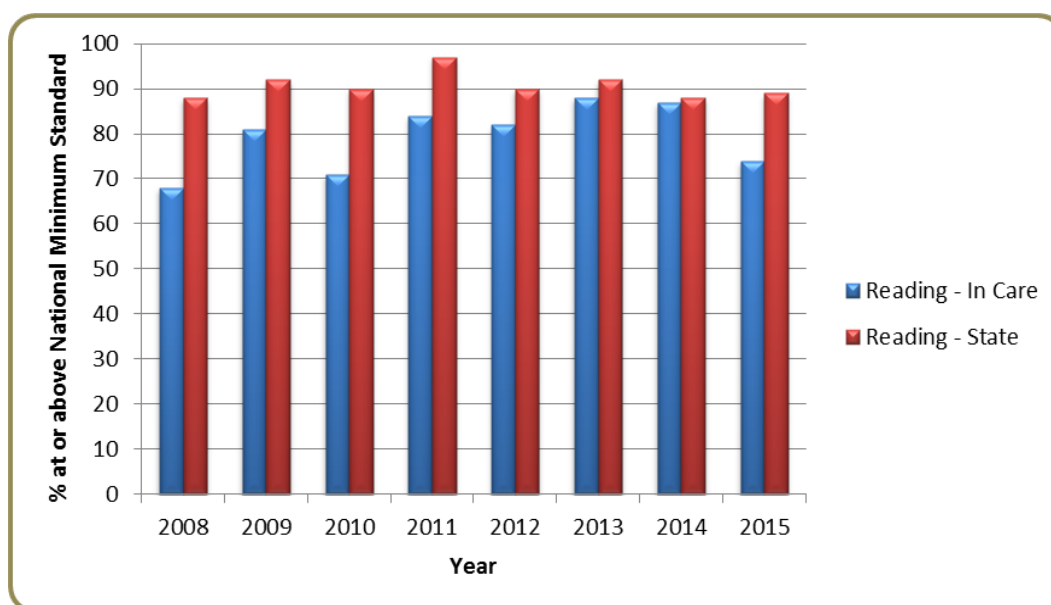
National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing is carried out each year for children in years three, five, seven and nine. In each of these year levels percentages *at or above the National Minimum Standard* demonstrate that the percentages for children in care continue to be significantly lower than totals for the state (see *Charts 8-19*).<sup>11</sup>

According to the NAPLAN website the *National Minimum Standard* represents the 'agreed minimum acceptable standard of knowledge and skills without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school'<sup>12</sup>. Students who do not reach this minimum standard are 'likely to need focused intervention and additional support to help them achieve'.<sup>13</sup>

In 2015, nearly two-thirds of year nine students in care would have difficulty making sufficient progress in writing without focused intervention (see *Chart 18*). However, children in care continue to make gains in their numeracy skills in high school.

The percentages of students in care exempted from NAPLAN testing are significantly higher than the government school figures and 2015 shows a sharp increase in the disparity (see *Chart 20*). This may serve to mask differences in results between students in care and the government school population.

**Chart 8: NAPLAN results for Year 3, Reading - Percentage of children *at or above the National Minimum Standard* comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015**



<sup>11</sup> Year on year comparisons cannot reliably be made as it is a different group of children sitting the tests each year and, for children in care, the actual numbers are relatively small.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2015, *NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2015*, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney, viewed 27 April 2016, [http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/resources/2015\\_NAPLAN\\_national\\_report.pdf](http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/resources/2015_NAPLAN_national_report.pdf), p. v.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Chart 9: NAPLAN results for Year 3, Writing - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

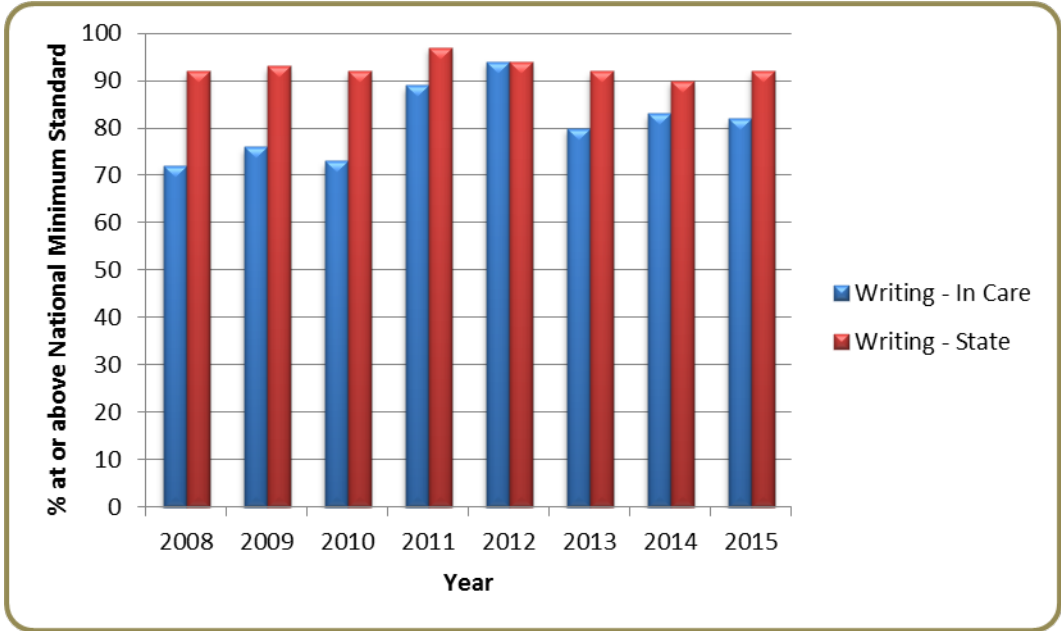


Chart 10: NAPLAN results for Year 3, Numeracy - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

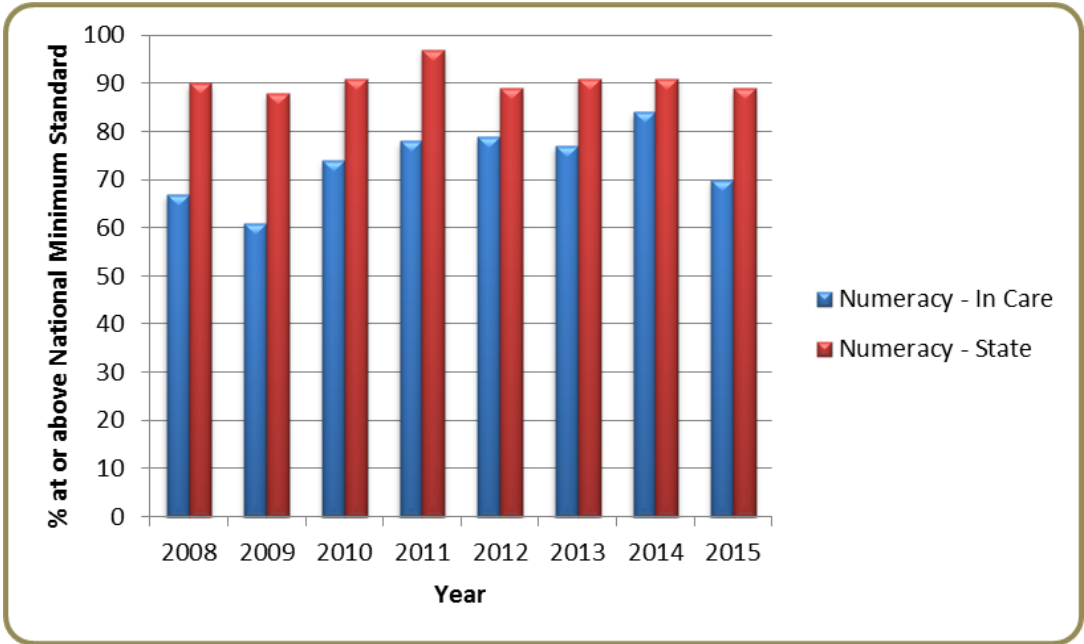


Chart 11: NAPLAN results for Year 5, Reading - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

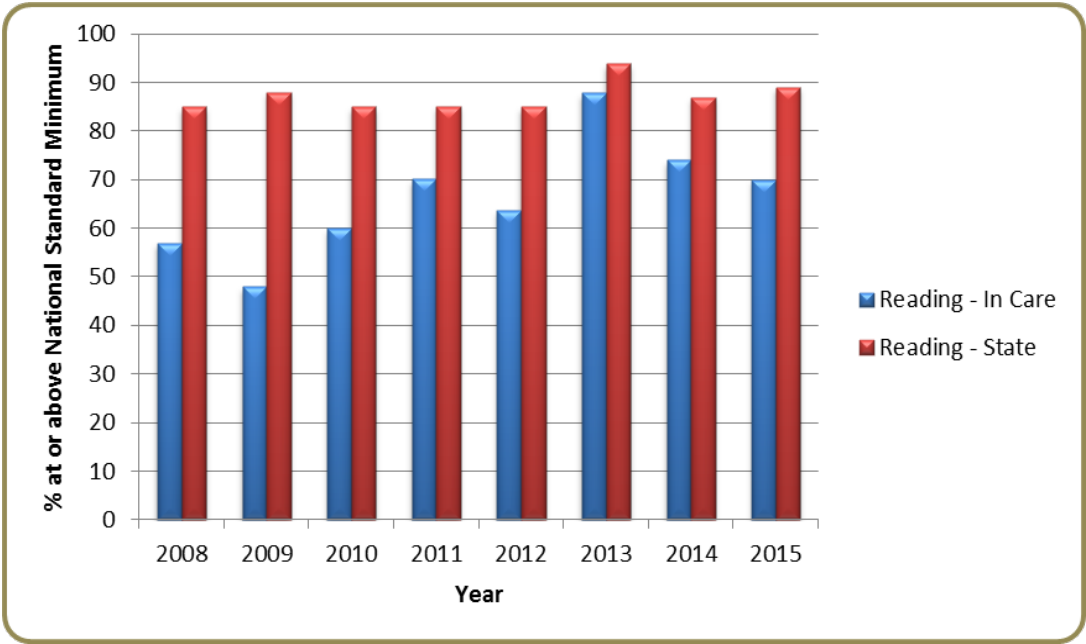


Chart 12: NAPLAN results for Year 5, Writing - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

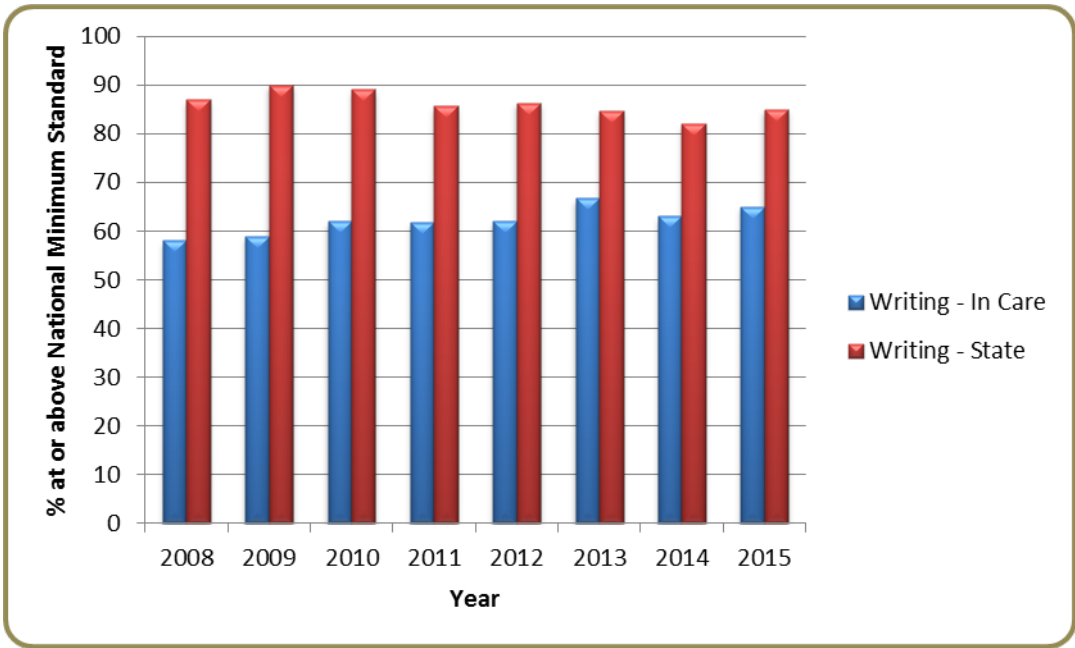


Chart 13: NAPLAN results for Year 5, Numeracy - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

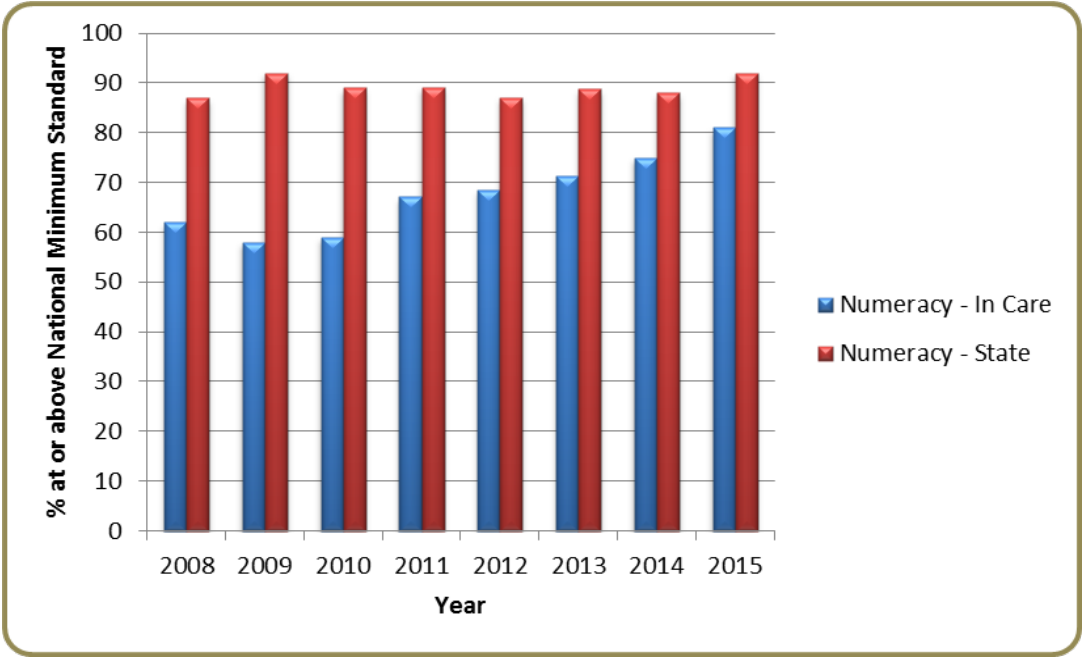
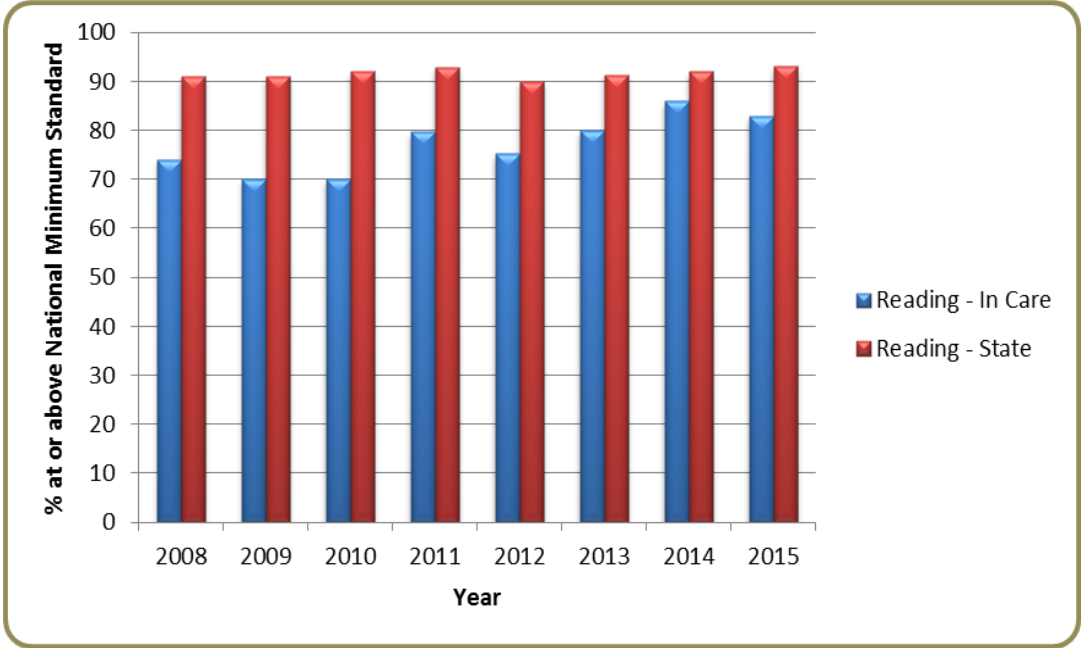
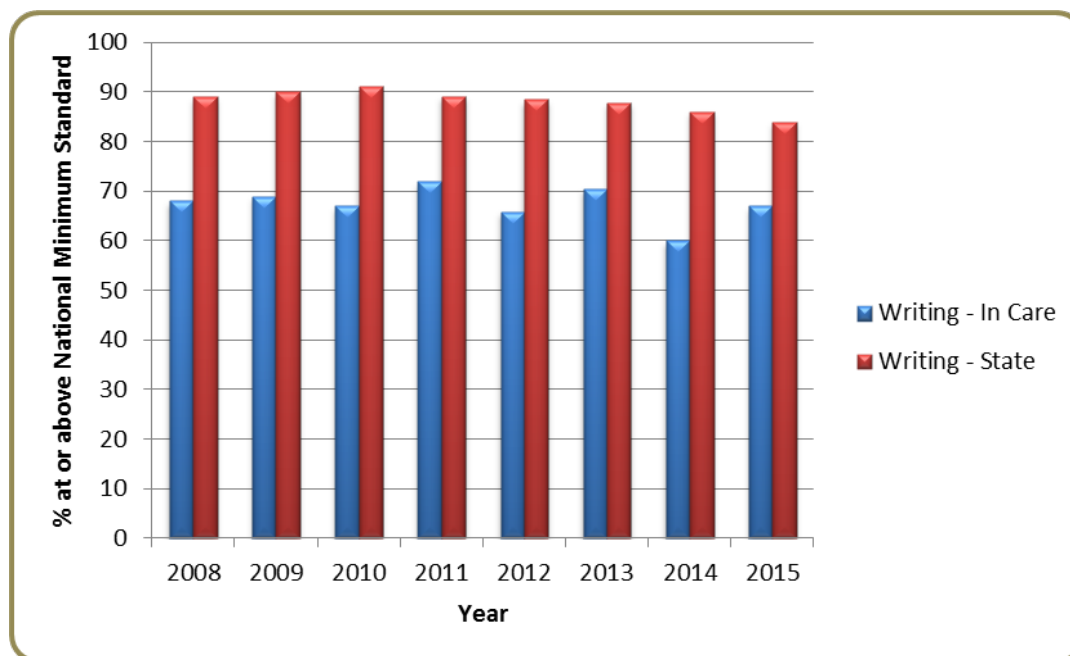


Chart 14: NAPLAN results for Year 7, Reading - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015





**Chart 15: NAPLAN results for Year 7, Writing - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015**



**Chart 16: NAPLAN results for Year 7, Numeracy - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015**

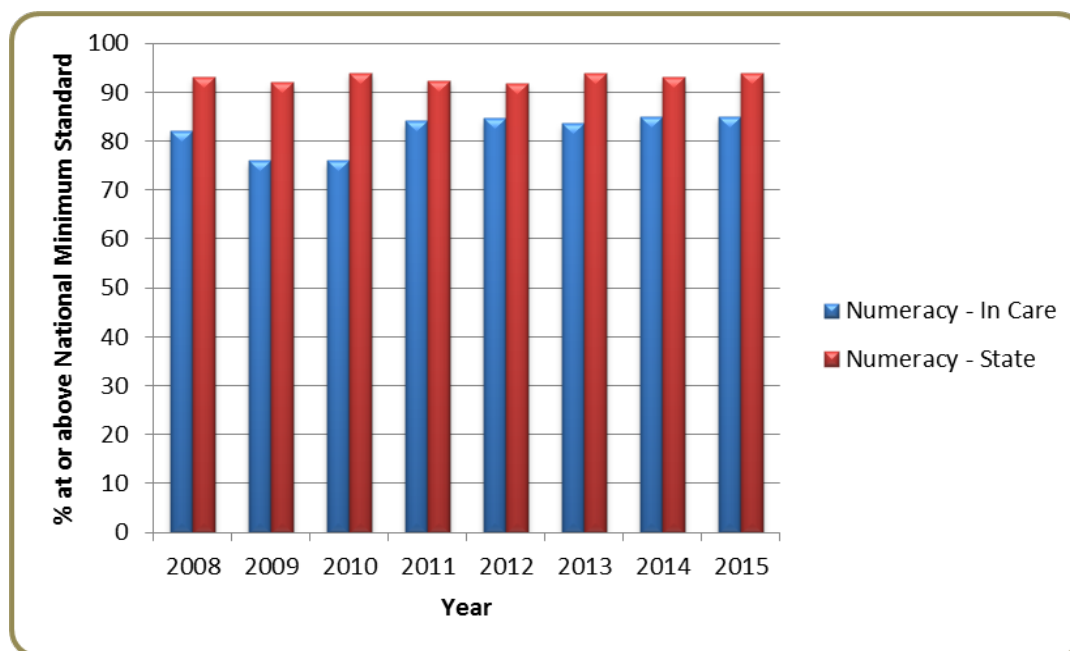


Chart 17: NAPLAN results for Year 9, Reading - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

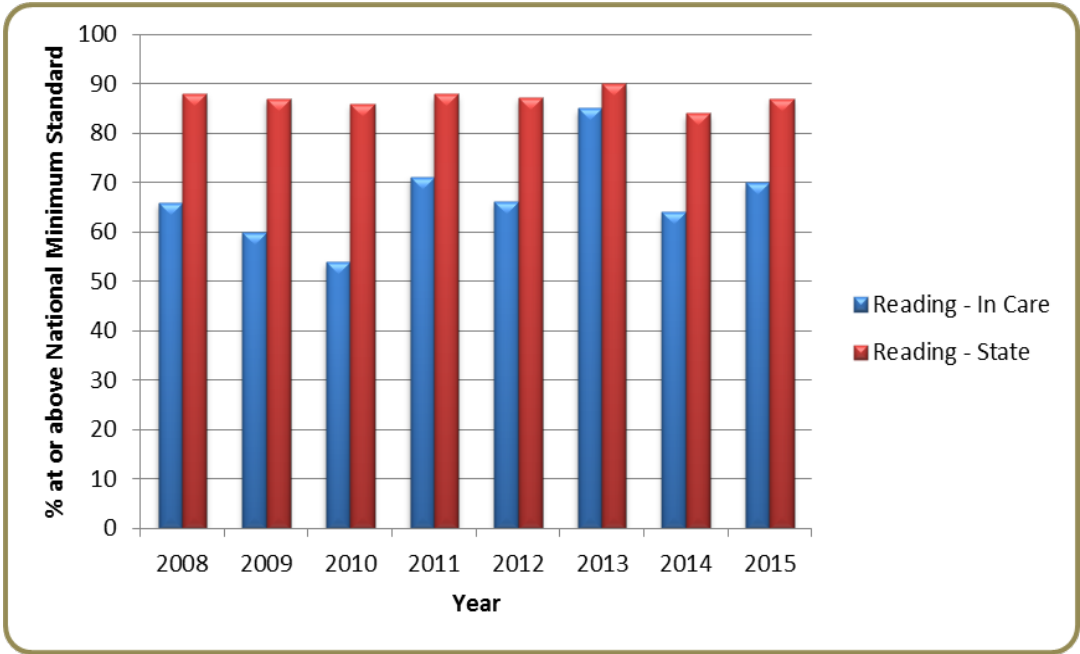


Chart 18: NAPLAN results for Year 9, Writing - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

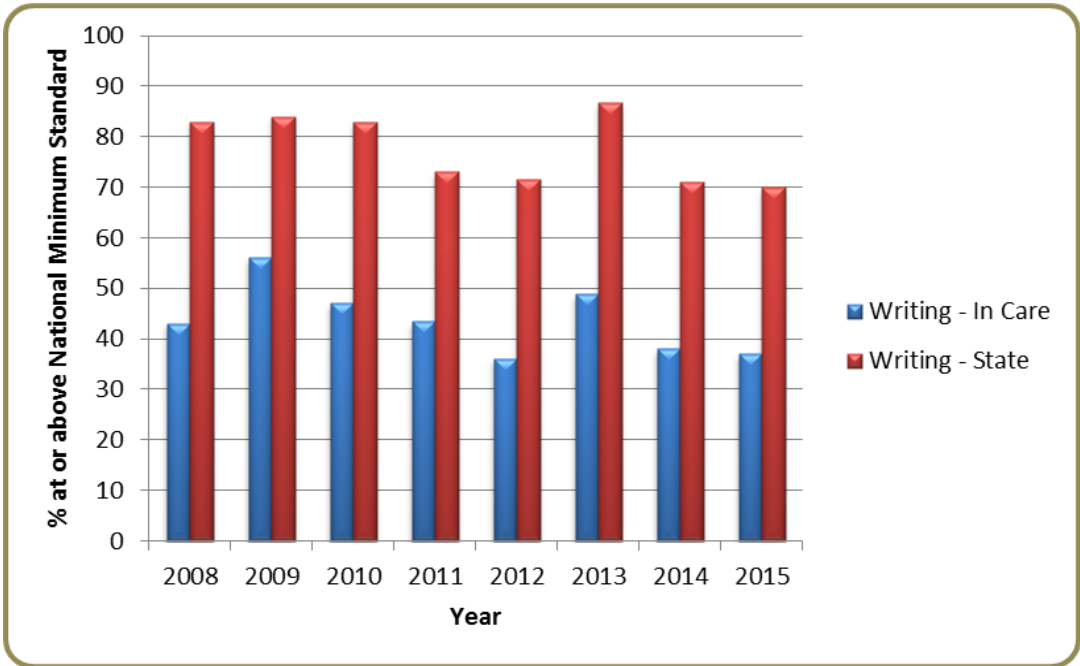


Chart 19: NAPLAN results for Year 9, Numeracy - Percentage of children at or above the National Minimum Standard comparing state with students in care, 2008 to 2015

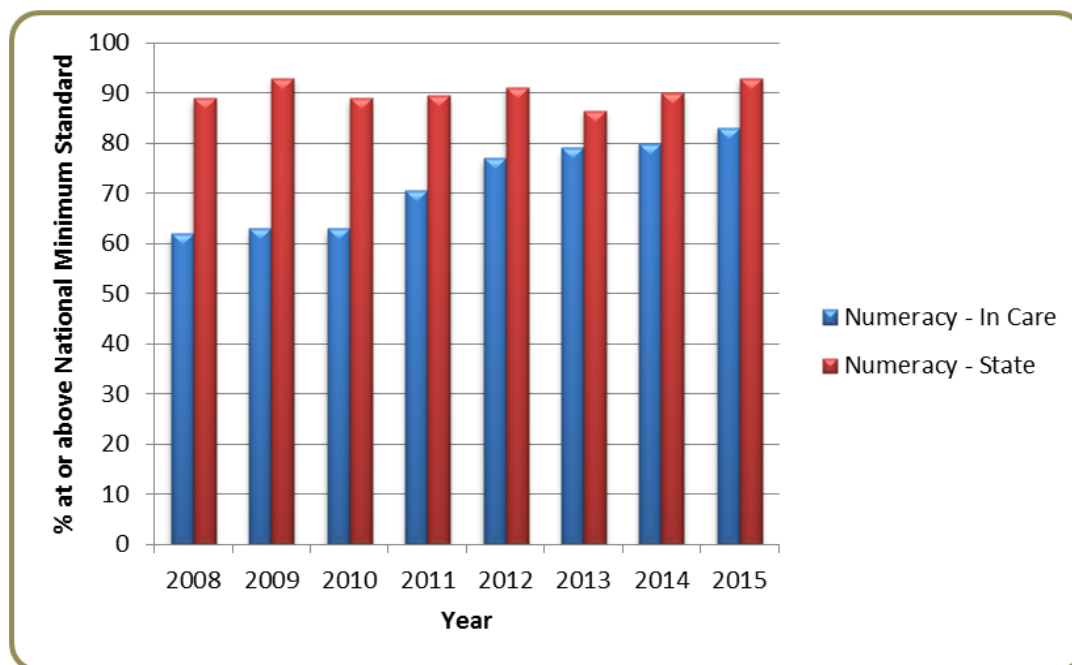
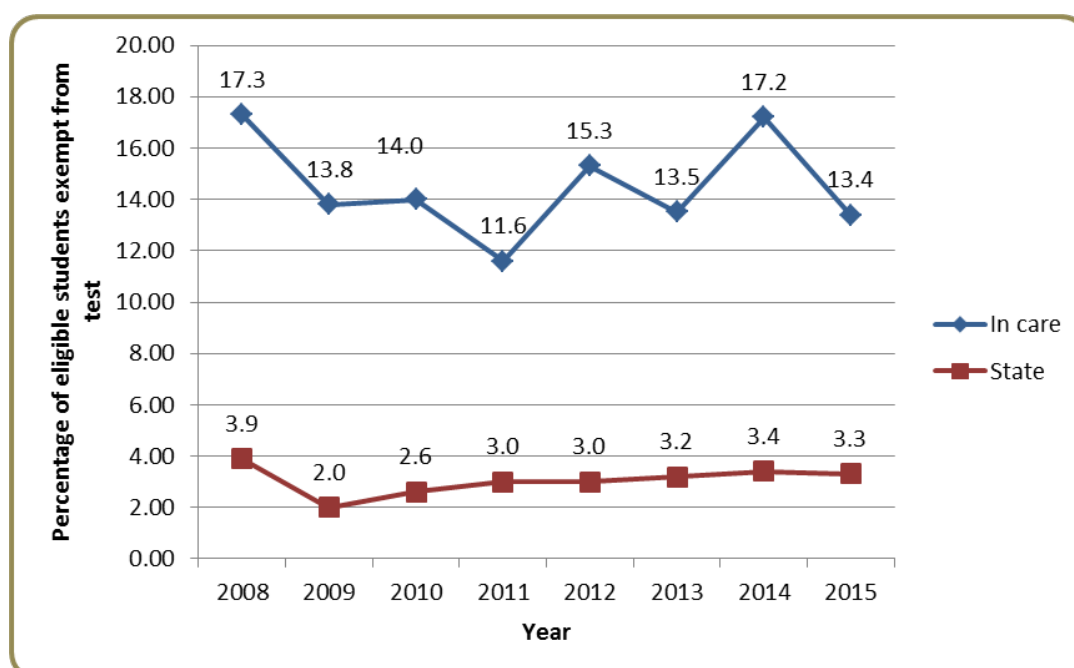


Chart 20: Students exempt from NAPLAN testing, average for all year levels across all domains, 2008 to 2015



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## **6 Summary**

Information in this report shows that for school age children under guardianship in South Australia in the 2015 school year:

- 60.5 per cent attended a government school, falling from 79 per cent in 2009 but an increase since 2014
- a greater proportion have learning disabilities compared to the overall student population, notably in speech and language skills<sup>14</sup>
- students in care have higher rates of suspension in their primary school years
- this group's absence rate is only slightly higher than that for the total SA Government school population<sup>15</sup>
- one in seven students under guardianship is exempted from sitting the NAPLAN tests
- there is a persistent significant gap between this group and their peers in achieving sufficient progress in literacy although the gap appears to be reducing in numeracy.

The 2015 results once again suggest that attention be paid to the circumstances of SA Government school students in care in respect of:

- speech and language delays of children before, and on entering, school
- alternative disciplinary measures to suspension from school – particularly for younger children
- monitoring hours of attendance at school so that part-day absences and reduced-hours arrangements are reported and minimised
- investigation of the reasons for the high rates of exemption from NAPLAN testing
- narrowing the gap between students in care and their age peers, particularly in literacy as they progress in their education.

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<sup>14</sup> The GCYP submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Access to the Education System for Students with Disabilities in September 2015 can be accessed at <http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/2015/10/access-to-the-education-system-for-students-with-disabilities/>

<sup>15</sup> This does not account for students who are absent for part of the day.