

Children and Young People in State Care in South Australian Government Schools 2010-2020

August 2021



Guardian
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Hon. Rachel Sanderson MP
Minister for Child Protection
GPO Box 1838
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Dear Minister

I am pleased to present to you the Guardian for Children and Young People's report, Children and Young People in State Care in South Australian Government Schools 2010-2020.

This report provides a summary of the trends relating to children and young people in care who are attending government schools in South Australia, from data kindly provided by the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Penny Wright".

Penny Wright

Guardian for Children and Young People and Training Centre Visitor

23 August 2021

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Preliminary notes

General note on data

This report provides summary statistics relating to students in South Australian Government schools during Term 3 2020 who were children and young people in care. Data includes analysis of available information relating to attendance (Semester 1 2020) and behaviour management incidents (Term 2 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 on data

No NAPLAN data was supplied for 2020 due to COVID-19 causing the testing to be cancelled.

Data may not add up due to rounding

Decimal points have not been rounded up, which means that some percentages will not total 100.

The following terms are used in particular ways in this report -

Aboriginal

Reflecting community preference, the term Aboriginal in this report is inclusive of children and young people of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Government schools

This report uses the term 'government schools' for Department for Education schools.

'In care' or 'in state care'

Refers to children and young people under guardianship, or in the custody, of the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection under the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*.

NESB

We follow Department for Education usage of the term NESB for students from a non-English speaking background.

School aged

Refers to children and young people aged between 5 and 17 years.

1. Introduction

This is the eighth annual report from the Guardian for Children and Young People (GCYP) about the participation in education of children and young people attending government schools who are under the guardianship, or in the custody, of the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection. It uses data kindly provided by the Department for Education and covers the decade up to the end of the 2020 school year.

Comment focuses on areas of significant difference between, or changes in results for, children and young people in state care and the equivalent results for all students attending government schools. Data provided is taken from different points identified in the school year. Due to the emerging and ongoing impact of COVID-19 on schools, some data has been affected. For example, 2020 data shows higher rates of absence, and there is no data available for NAPLAN as testing was cancelled.

No comparable information is available from the Independent or Catholic school systems, making the situation of children in care enrolled in those systems relatively opaque. Catholic Education South Australia is currently establishing protocols with the Department for Child Protection to share data for those in care attending Catholic schools. Catholic Education South Australia has indicated to the GCYP that this will then enable them to provide education data for future reports.

The enrolment rate of children in care in government schools has steadily declined since 2010. Data from the Independent or Catholic school systems would enable the South Australian community to have a fuller picture of the experience of students in care, and its collection should be strongly encouraged.

Some children and young people with whom the GCYP has spoken acknowledge that the benefits of attending school can go far beyond their education and academic results. At school they can be with friends, learn about new things, have important relationships with teachers and find stability in the same places and faces. They are usually able to do the same things as everyone else at their age and school contributes positively to their social and emotional wellbeing. Aboriginal children and young people in care also highlight the importance of culture and identity and its connection to their education.

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2. Summary

In South Australia in Term 3, 2020, 56.4 per cent of all students in care were enrolled in government schools. The other 46.3 per cent may attend in the non-government school system, or are below school-age, and a small number will be non-identifiable for other reasons.

This report demonstrates that-

- The proportion of all children and young people in care who attended government schools in 2020 was 56.4 per cent, which is a decrease from 58.6 per cent in 2019.
- In 2020, 35.9 per cent of children and young people in care in government schools identified as Aboriginal, compared to Aboriginal students comprising 6.7 per cent of all government school students.
- There are lower rates of school absence for Aboriginal students in care compared to the overall population of Aboriginal students attending government schools.
- A greater proportion of all children and young people in care have learning disabilities compared to the overall government school student population, notably with respect to complex social/emotional/behaviour needs.
- The proportion of children and young people in care with an intellectual disability, and those with complex social/emotional/behavioural needs, are both six times higher than the overall government school student population.
- Children and young people in care enrolled in government schools are four times more likely to be suspended and seven times more likely to be excluded than the broader government school student cohort.

The information summarised in this report is based on data provided by the Department for Education. While the data reflect the numbers of children who were subject to Suspension, Exclusion and 'Take Home' orders within the reporting period, there is no data about the number of children who attend school for reduced (and sometimes significantly reduced) hours.

More work is required to better understand the circumstances of students in care attending government schools and how these children and young people experience and are supported to attend and thrive in government schools.

Particular attention is drawn to further consideration of-

- existing and proposed supports available for those in care who have a disability and/or complex social/emotional/behaviour needs;

- accurate monitoring of hours of attendance at school, so that part-day absences and reduced-hours arrangements are reported and reduced; and
- the unique needs of Aboriginal and culturally diverse children and young people in care including those who do not speak English as a first language.

Education and youth justice detention

In addition to holding the position of Guardian for Children and Young People, Penny Wright is the Training Centre Visitor (TCV) for Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre (KTYJC) under the *Youth Justice Administration Act 2016*.

The TCV and her staff engage with the Department for Education's KTYJC Youth Education Centre (YEC) in the course of implementing the TCV's independent visiting, advocacy and inspection functions. Details about the YEC can be found [here](#).

In 2019-20, 328 individual children and young people were admitted to KTYJC (sometimes more than once, giving a total number of 664 separate admissions in that period). Of those 328 individuals, 22.8 per cent were female, 48.4 per cent identified as Aboriginal, and 28.3 per cent were under the guardianship, or in the custody of the CE of DCP at the time of admission. Most were aged between 14 and 17 years of age (some 89.3 per cent of the total), noting that 10 is the minimum age for admission to youth detention in South Australia.

Department for Human Services, Youth Justice Directorate's Disability Screening Assessment Project Report found that from a sample of residents at KTYJC, approximately 9 out of 10 were found to have disability-related needs.¹

Children and young people detained at KTYJC have reported they can access good support for their learning at the YEC, with many stating that they had not engaged with school consistently whilst in the community. One young person told a member of the TCV's staff, "I'm hopefully going to pass my year 11 in here." Another young person said that -

I haven't been going to school. I've been rejected by school and my social worker won't let me go. Yeah, that's half the reason I'm bloody in here. I got to go [to school at the Youth Education Centre] today. Do you know how long it's been since I've gone to school? It's nearly been a year. I need to learn. I was doing maths today. I'm doing year 8 maths 'cause I haven't gone to school in a bloody year. I didn't go barely last year.

¹ See the full report [here](#).

3. Profile

In Term 3 2020, there were 2,418 children and young people in care enrolled in government schools, an increase of 195 students from 2019 data.

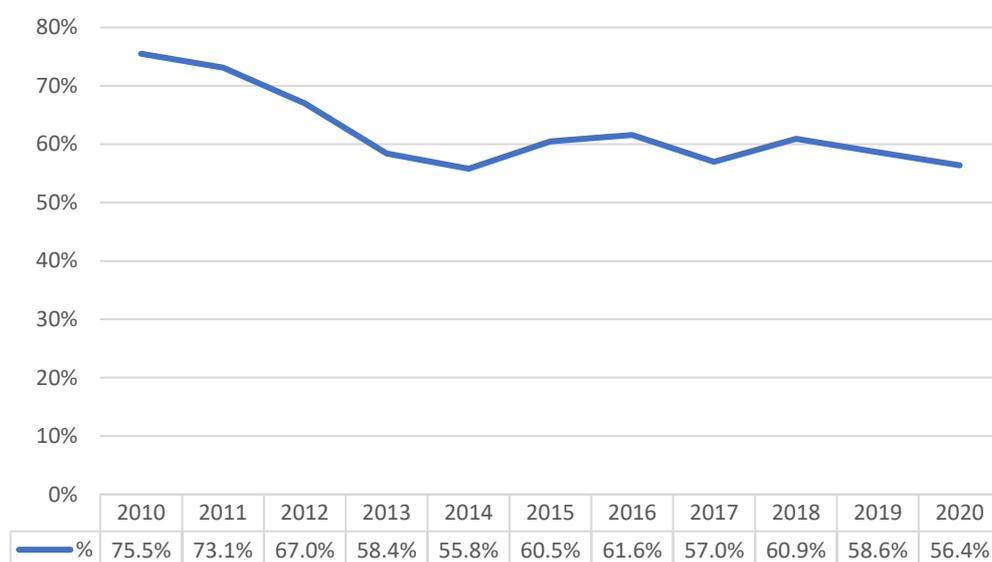
Of these 2,418 students –

- 1,180 were female (48.8 per cent) and 1,238 male (51.2 per cent);
- 1,563 were enrolled in primary school (64.6 per cent) and 855 were enrolled in secondary school (35.4 per cent); and
- 902 were enrolled in country schools (37.3 per cent) and 1,516 were enrolled in metropolitan schools (62.7 per cent).

Children and young people in care attending government schools represented 1.4 per cent of the government school student population in Term 3 2020.

The proportion of all children in care who attended government schools in 2020 was 56.4 per cent, which is a decrease from 58.6 per cent in 2019. Chart 1 demonstrates the annual proportion of children in care attending government schools since 2010.

CHART 1 - Proportion of children and young people in care attending Department for Education schools, 2010 to 2020, Term 3, 2020



The number of children and young people in care attending government schools in 2020 showed an annual decrease, which has been the trend since 2010. It is important to note this may reflect a changing age profile of children and young people in care rather than enrolment numbers, but it also highlights the importance of being able to report on data from the Catholic and Independent school sectors. Without this, the South Australian community does not have a full picture of the participation of children and young people in care, in education.

Chart 2 compares students in care attending government schools with all government school students in selected demographic categories in Term 3 2020. No data was provided about children and young people who do not identify within the standard male/female gender binary or who identify contrary to their biologically assigned sex.

CHART 2 - Proportion of children and young people in care enrolled in Department for Education schools compared to the state average - selected demographic categories, Term 3 2020

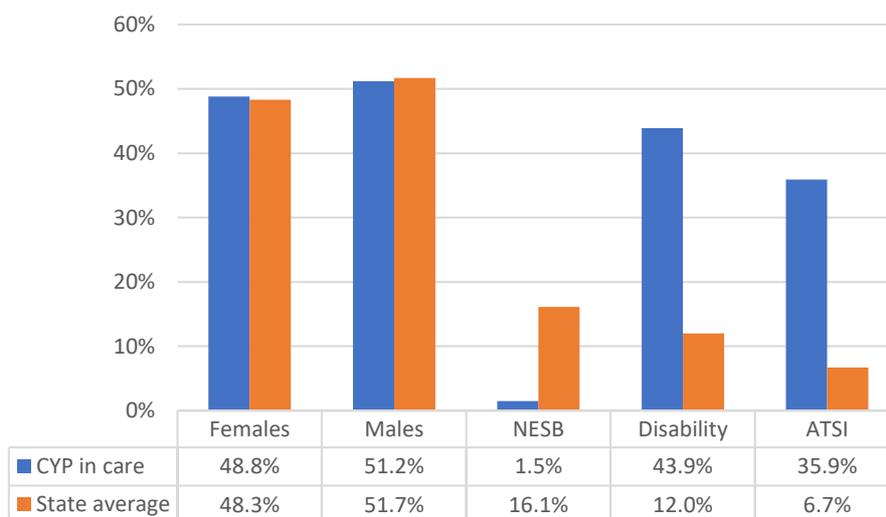
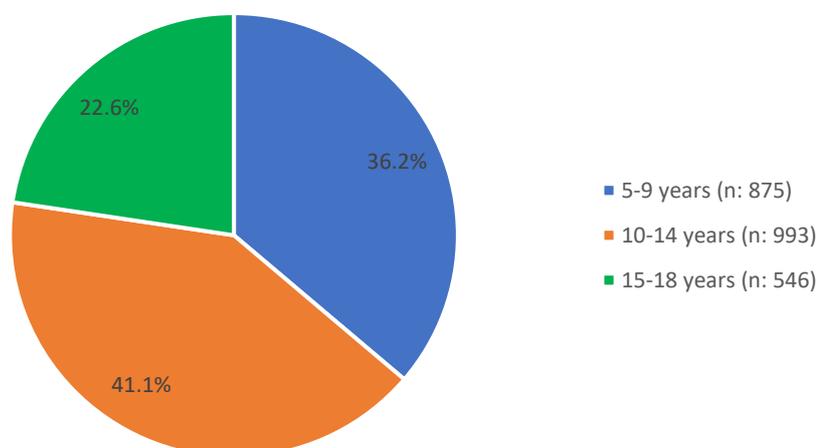


Chart 3 demonstrates age groupings of children and young people in care in Term 3 2020. The corresponding proportions for all government school students at the same time were 39.0 per cent aged 5-9 years, 38.2 per cent for 10-14 years, and 21.8 per cent for 15-18 years.

CHART 3 - Age groupings of children and young people in care in Department for Education schools, Term 3 2020



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The proportion of children and young people in care in government schools who identify as Aboriginal is substantially higher than Aboriginal children and young people as a proportion of all students attending government schools.

In Term 3 2020, 35.9 per cent of children in care in government schools identified as Aboriginal, compared to the state rate of 6.7 per cent of all students. The below chart demonstrates the trend and growing disparity that can be tracked from 2010.

CHART 4 - Proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care compared with all Aboriginal students enrolled in Department for Education schools 2010 to 2020

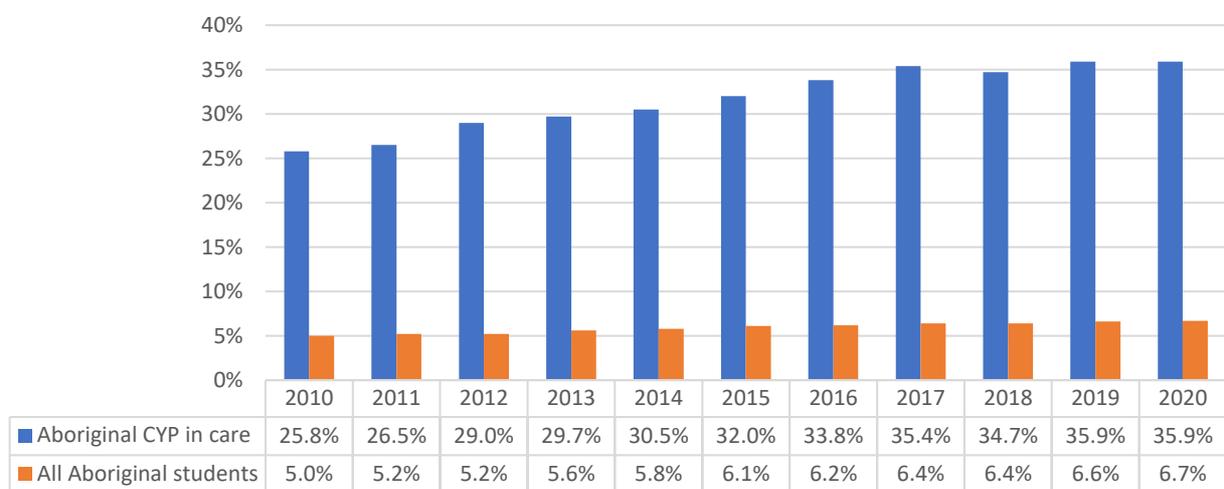
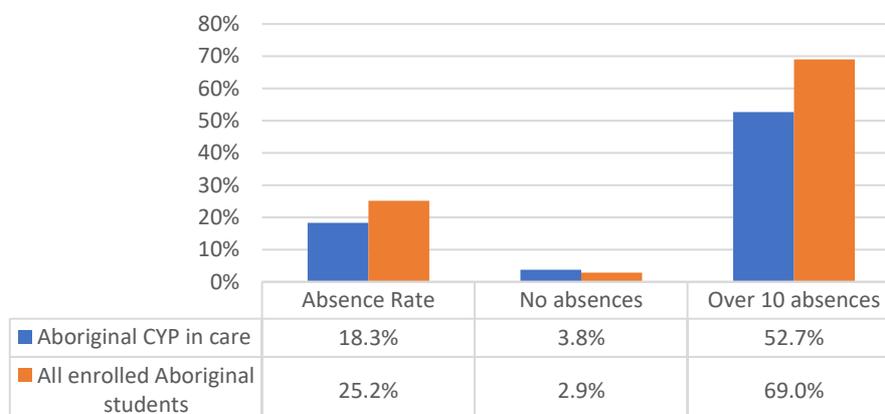


Chart 5 demonstrates lower rates of school absence for Aboriginal students in care compared to the overall population of Aboriginal students in government schools.

CHART 5 - Absence rate comparison, Aboriginal children and young people in care compared to Aboriginal children and young people enrolled at Department for Education schools, Semester 1 2020



Students with disabilities

The proportion of children and young people in care enrolled in government schools who have an identified disability continues to be significantly higher than the proportion in the broader government school student cohort.

In 2019, the Department for Education improved its coverage of disability and now reports data under the new heading of 'complex social/emotional/behaviour needs'.

The Inclusive Education Support Program's (IESP) funding model, which supports students with disabilities, was introduced in 2019. The Department for Education states that IESP eligibility criteria have been developed to align with national disability legislation and guidelines, focusing on a child's needs rather than disability diagnosis or label. This approach recognises all disabilities and learning difficulties including mental health, trauma, complex behaviours and complex health care needs. As a result, children (and, in this case, students) with 'complex social/emotional/behaviour needs' are eligible.

The IESP replaced the previous disability support program. There are additional supports available for students, depending on individual needs, as well as supports for schools and preschools to build their capacity to engage and assist students with complex social/emotional/behaviour needs.

In Term 3 2020, 1,062 students in care attending government schools had an identified disability. This represents 43.9 per cent of children and young people in care attending government schools, compared to the state average of 12.1 per cent of all students. The introduction of the new category of 'complex social/emotional/behaviour needs' in 2019 has resulted in a significant increase in the number of those reported to have a disability. The chart below demonstrates the disparity in disability reporting that would occur without this important category. This demonstrates the importance of properly recognising and reporting on disability.

CHART 6 - Proportion of children and young people in care recognised to have a disability compared with all students with a disability enrolled in Department for Education schools, 2010-2020, Term 3 2020

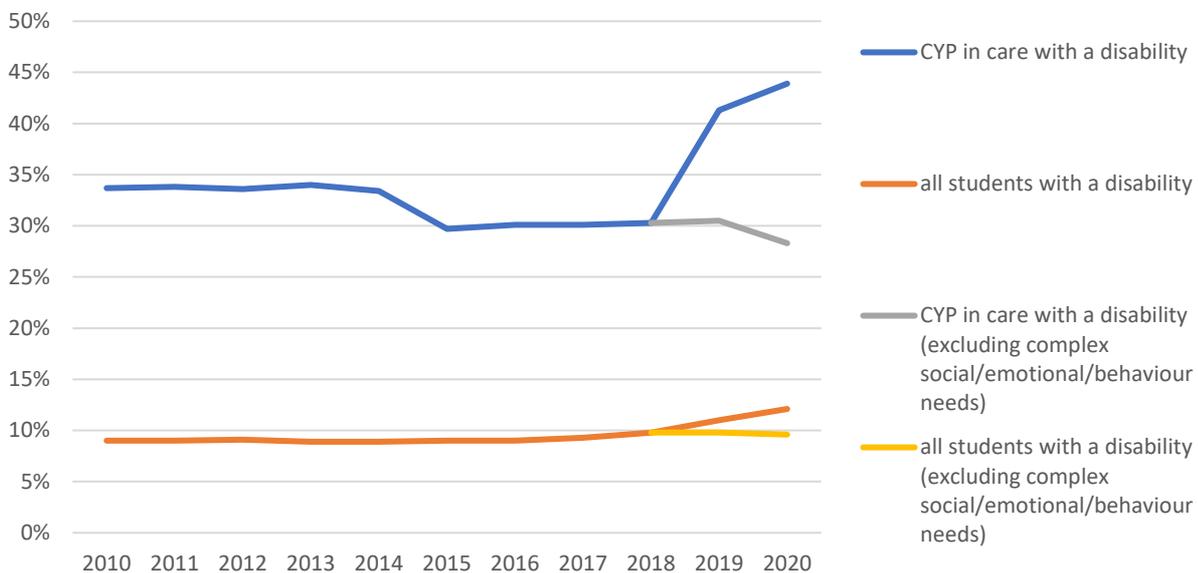


Chart 7 demonstrates the categories of primary disabilities of children and young people in care enrolled in government schools in Term 3 2020.² The numbers are too small in some categories to usefully compare those in care with state totals. The categories of complex social/emotional/behaviour needs, language, and intellectual disability feature prominently for children and young people in care. This is the most comprehensive disability data publicly available for children and young people in care.

With this new data reporting, we can now say that –

- the proportion of children and young people in care attending government schools in 2020 with a disability was almost three and a half times higher than the overall government school student population
- a greater proportion of all children and young people in care have learning disabilities compared to the overall government school student population, notably in relation to complex social/emotional/behaviour needs
- the proportion of children and young people in care with an intellectual disability, and the proportion of those with complex social/emotional/behavioural needs are both six times higher than the overall government school student population.

² The disability data provided is listed by primary disability. It is recognised that children and young people may experience more than one disability and additional disabilities can be, and are, recorded. However, it is the primary disability that is included in this dataset.

CHART 7 - Primary recognised disability of children and young people in care enrolled in Department for Education schools in Term 3 2020

Primary Disability	Number of children in care in government schools	As a % of children in care in government schools	% of all students enrolled in government schools with a disability
Complex social/emotional/behaviour needs	376	15.6%	2.5%
Intellectual	204	8.4%	1.4%
Language	202	8.4%	2.7%
Autistic Spectrum	142	5.9%	3.5%
Cognitive Delay (Early Intervention)	64	2.7%	0.6%
Communication (Early Intervention)	32	1.3%	0.7%
Physical	12	0.5%	0.3%
Hearing	10	0.4%	0.2%
Speech / Language (obsolete 2019 see note)	8	0.3%	0.1%
Vision	5	0.2%	0.1%
Global development delay (obsolete see note)	4	0.2%	0.0%
Complex/acute health care	3	0.1%	0.0%
Total	1062	43.9%	12.1%

Note: Global development delay and Speech/Language are obsolete from 2019 for newly verified students with disabilities

4. Suspensions and exclusions

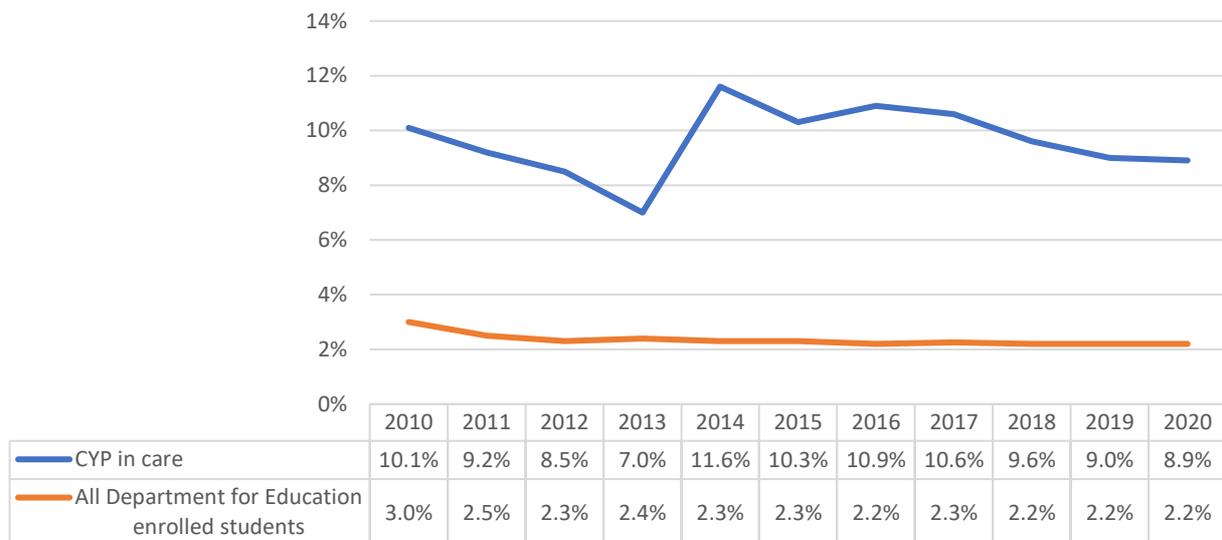
The education department defines suspensions and exclusions as follows -

- **Suspension** – The student does not attend school for one to five school days.
- **Exclusion** - The student does not attend that school for either four to ten weeks, for the remainder of a term or, for students over 16, the remainder of the semester.³

Suspensions

Suspensions of students in care continued to decrease from a high point of 11.6 per cent in 2014, to 8.9 per cent in 2020. The lower rate for the government school population as a whole has remained steady, sitting just above 2 per cent. This disparity in suspension rates means that children in care in government schools are suspended at a rate four times higher than government school students who are not in care.

CHART 8 - Rate of suspensions, children and young people in care compared with Department for Education school population, 2010-2020, Term 2, 2020



During Term 2 2020, there were 303 suspensions of 214 individual children in care, compared to 5,003 suspensions for 3,870 individual government school students. Some students in both groups were suspended more than once. Chart 9 demonstrates the top three reasons suspensions occurred.

³ See: [Suspension and exclusion - Information for parents and caregivers](#)

CHART 9 - Comparison of main reasons for suspension, students in care and all students, Department for Education schools, Term 2 2020

Reason for suspension	Children in care %	All students %
Violence – threatened or actual	44.6%	41.7%
Threatened safety or wellbeing	26.7%	26.2%
Threatened good order	17.8%	19.1%

Exclusions

Children and young people in care enrolled in government schools are more likely to be excluded than the broader government school student cohort, but the small number of exclusion incidents makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions. During Term 2 2020, there were 16 exclusion incidents of children in care, compared to 238 for other government school students, giving a comparative rate of 0.7 to 0.1 per cent.

The following chart demonstrates the number of exclusion incidents during Term 2 from 2016 to 2020, across both children and young people in care, and the broader government school population.

CHART 10 - Number of exclusion incidents, Department for Education students compared with children and young people in care, 2016 – 2020, Term 2 2020

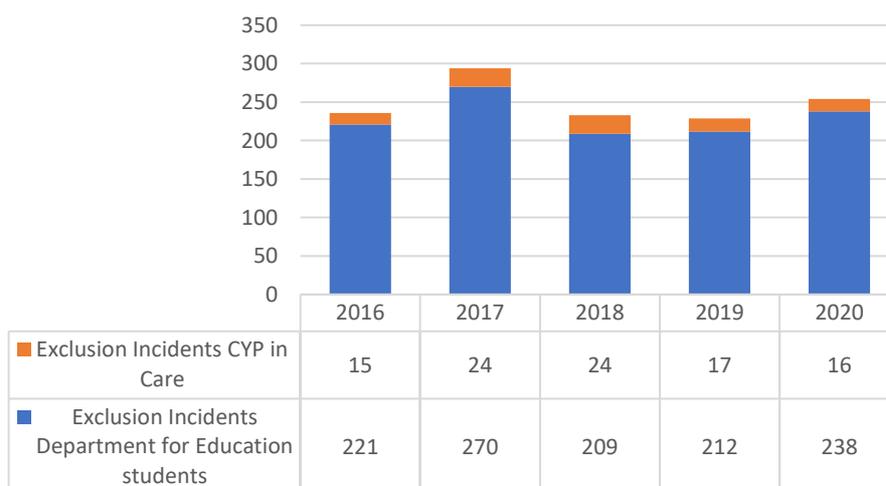
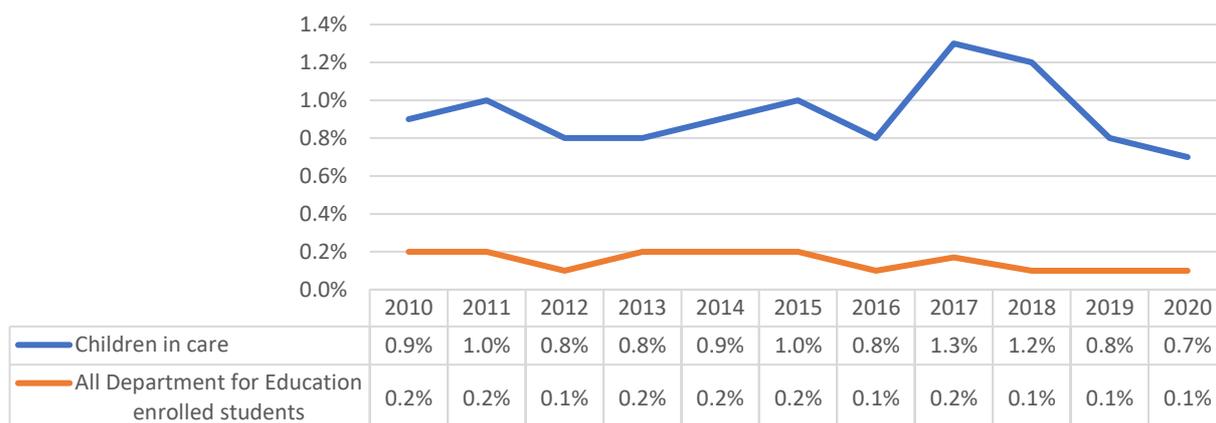


Chart 11 shows the rate of exclusions of children and young people in care compared with the government school student cohort. In 2020, the comparative exclusion rate of 0.7 to 0.1 per cent means that children in care were seven times more likely to be excluded. (This rate is declining over time. For instance, in 2019 the comparison rate was 0.8 to 0.1 per cent which meant that they were eight times more likely to be excluded.)

CHART 11 - Rate of exclusions, children and young people in care compared with Department for Education school population, 2010-2020, Term 2 2020



The *Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools*⁴ found that children and young people in care are also overrepresented in ‘take home’ statistics. A ‘take home’ is used only in a “behavioural emergency”,⁵ and enables a student to be removed for the remainder of the day. It is not extended beyond the remainder of a single school day. The Inquiry refers to those in care being disproportionately represented in ‘take home’ statistics, accounting for 1.3 per cent of enrolments in 2019 but 6.8 per cent of take homes.⁶

The Inquiry recommended that additional safeguards be implemented for priority groups (including students in care), such as requiring principals to ensure effective reasonable adjustments and supports are in place for students with disability, that trauma-informed practices have been implemented, and that culturally appropriate pedagogies are in place and being employed with fidelity prior to issuing a take home or suspension. The government’s responses to the Inquiry’s recommendation are to be found [here](#).

⁴ Established in September 2019 and reported in 2020. The report is available [here](#).

⁵ See page 257 of the *Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools* for a detailed description of a ‘take home’ according to the pre-July 2020 version of the Suspension, Exclusion, Expulsion Procedures.

⁶ p 305 *Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools*.

5. Absence and attendance

Children and young people in care enrolled in government schools in Semester 1 2020 demonstrated a higher rate of absence than the overall government school population (15.5 and 13.0 per cent, respectively). A small but significant number of students in care attend school for reduced hours, or as part of a Flexible Learning Option program. These are not recorded as absences.

Results worth noting are -

- The absence rate for children in care with a disability is almost the same as those with a disability in the broader government school population (17.0 and 17.4 per cent respectively).
- The absence rate for Aboriginal children in care is 18.3 per cent, compared to 25.2 per cent for Aboriginal students not in care. This demonstrates that Aboriginal children in care are more likely to be attending school than Aboriginal students not in care.
- Conversely, students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds have an absence rate of 15.2 per cent, compared to that of students from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not in care, who have an absence rate of 11.2 per cent. This demonstrates that students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to be attending school than students from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not in care.
- The absence rate for children and young people in care is higher for secondary students (20.7 per cent) than for those in primary school (12.7 per cent).

These rates have been relatively steady since GCYP commenced monitoring in 2008, however they probably increased in Semester 1 2020 due to the emerging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHART 12 - Absence rates for children and young people in care and all Department for Education students, Semester 1, 2020

Cohort	Number children in care	Absence rate % children in care	State absence rate
Males	1,180	16.0%	13.1%
Females	1,238	14.9%	12.9%
From non-English speaking backgrounds	36	15.2%	11.2%
Disability	1062	17.0%	17.4%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	869	18.3%	25.2%
Country schools*	902	15.7%	14.0%
Metro schools*	1,516	15.3%	12.6%
Primary schools	1,563	12.7%	11.8%
Secondary schools	855	20.7%	15.3%
Total	2,418	15.5%	13.0%

* Note: Figures are based on the location of the school at which the student is enrolled

Students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds

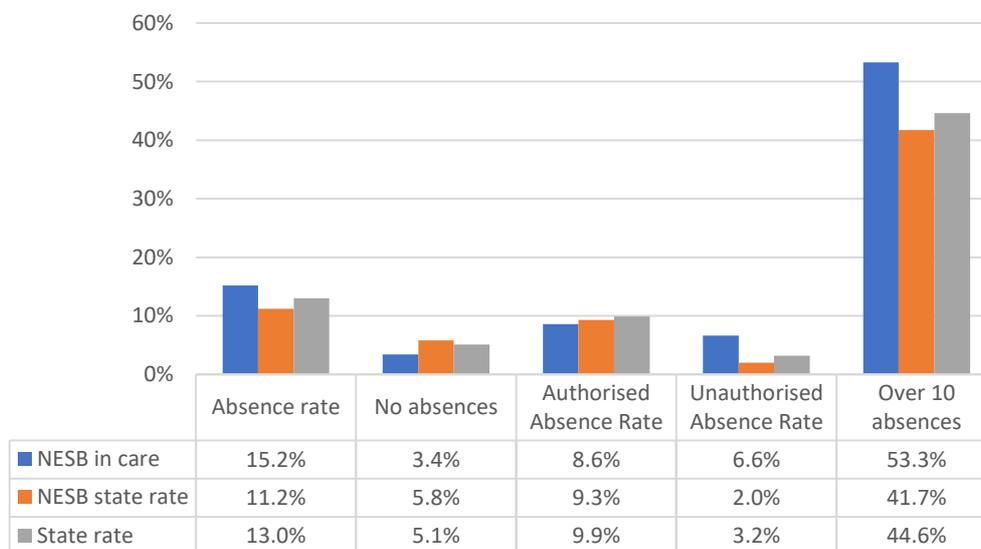
The chart below compares absence rates in government schools for three populations: children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds, all children and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and the whole student population.

It shows that those in care have a lower rate of 'no absences' when compared to other students in government schools from non-English speaking backgrounds (3.4 and 5.8 per cent respectively), and fewer 'no absences' than the broader school cohort.

Those in care from non-English speaking backgrounds have higher rates of 'unauthorised' absences when compared to the state rate and to those other students in government schools from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The largest disparity occurs when recording those students with over 10 absences. Just over half of students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds had over 10 absences.

CHART 13 - Absence rates for students in care attending Department for Education schools from a non-English speaking background, all students from a non-English speaking background attending Department for Education schools, and the state rate, Semester 1, 2020





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