



## STRONGER SCHOOLS

An inclusive education plan for Victoria

# KEEP STUDENTS AND FAMILIES CONNECTED TO EDUCATION

Young people are supported to remain in education through strong school and family partnerships.

### Keeping young people at school should be a key goal for the Victorian Government.

Each year several hundred children are expelled from government schools, some as young as five or six years old.<sup>39</sup> Most expulsions do not comply with Victorian Government regulations, including having a plan for the student to find a new school. Many more children are expelled informally – encouraged or forced to leave without a formal process – despite informal expulsions being prohibited by DET.<sup>40</sup>

A disproportionate number of expelled children have a disability, identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or are in out-of-home care.<sup>41</sup> There are often complex issues involved, such as trauma, mental health, family conflict, or inadequate support for additional health and development needs.

The impact of expulsion on the child, their family, and the wider community cannot be overstated. It impacts young people's self-esteem and disrupts their education. According to the Victorian Ombudsman:

“Some 60 per cent of those in the youth justice system had previously been suspended or expelled from school, and over 90 per cent of adults in our prisons did not complete secondary school.”<sup>42</sup>

Whilst improvements to suspension and expulsion procedures have been made,<sup>43</sup> more can be done to prevent informal expulsions and part-time attendance where there is no legitimate reason or agreement between the school and the family.



### Help schools better understand and support children facing difficulties in their lives

- Build the knowledge and skills of all school staff about mental health, trauma and disability to help prevent and respond to concerning or trauma-related behaviours.
- Adequately resource schools to engage or access relevant experts.
- Train all school staff in evidence-based approaches such as trauma-informed practice and positive behaviour models, such as the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPB) Framework<sup>44</sup> and the Koorie Inclusive SWPB Framework.

# 2

## Help schools include and keep students engaged

- Ensure all schools comply with expulsion processes, including understanding and responding to the underlying causes of a student's behaviour before any decisions are made.
- Investigate, monitor and prevent instances of informal expulsions and part-time attendance initiated by schools.
- Where part-time attendance has been initiated by students or their families, ensure schools work with the student and family to develop a pathway back to full-time attendance.
- Help schools develop effective Individual Education Plans and Student Support Groups that improve attendance, student engagement, learning outcomes and monitoring of progress.
- Ensure schools know about and engage with programs that support students at risk of disengaging.

# 3

## Ensure school expulsion is a last resort and no student is excluded from the government school system

- Fully implement the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman's Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions.<sup>45</sup>
- Ensure every student of compulsory age who leaves a school, regardless of the reason, is assisted to successfully transition to another school or flexible learning option of their choice. Where a student is expelled, regional engagement coordinators should coordinate supports for students for at least six months, including working with community sector organisations.

39. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.2, accessed at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx>

40. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.6, accessed at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx>

41. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.2, accessed at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx>

42. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.2, accessed at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx>

43. Government Gazette, 18 January 2018, Ministerial Order No. 969 – Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion of Students in Government Schools, p.70, accessed at <http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2018/GG2018G003.pdf>

44. Victorian Government, School Performance and Improve – School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/swpbs.aspx>

45. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, accessed at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx>