Home From School Early:

Why are School Suspensions on the Rise?

Thesis submitted by

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Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Abstract

Suspension rates in Queensland state primary schools have risen by an average of 89% over the past eight years. In particular, the youngest cohort, Preparatory students aged between 4.5 and 6 years of age, have experienced a rise of over 163% in suspension rates. Notably, this is the highest primary school grade increase in the time period between 2012–2019.

This mixed methods study adopts an integrated approach to explore the complexities of school discipline and reveal the personal stories behind the statistics. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is applied to explore sociocultural events that have potentially impacted young children's behaviours that lead to school suspension. Further, it identifies evidence-based proactive interventions to reduce the occurrence of problematic behaviours and suggests alternatives to external suspensions. Offering recommendations for changes to student discipline and suspension policy is also an objective of the study.

The literature review located evidence suggesting that excessive screen time negatively impacts on children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. Further, it found associations between ADHD and Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU). Screen time of parents was also revealed as problematic. Studies suggest distracted parenting due to mobile device compulsions may be disrupting the parent-child bond and thus, affecting children's behaviours. Baumrind's' parenting typologies (2005) were considered alongside these contemporary generational changes in parenting styles.

Two significant sociocultural changes emerged. The first was exponential growth in screened technologies over the past decade, particularly in the youth-dominant mobile market. The second change concerned an amendment to Queensland school disciplinary legislation in November 2013. The literature also revealed scant research exploring the Australian context of school suspensions, which influenced the design of this study.

Adopting Plowright's Framework for an Integrated Methodology (FraIM; 2011) provides both structure and process, embedding authentic integration of qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection consists of an anonymous online survey and documents relevant to student discipline. The survey captures the experiences and opinions of the respondents and their children through open ended questions and the incorporation of the parent-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ scores measure the traits and behaviours of survey respondents' children. Further quantitative data is provided by demographic information and rating scale questions seeking respondents' personal understanding and opinions concerning suspensions. Analysis of the document collection establishes understanding of past and current student disciplinary legislation, policy, procedures, statistics, and reports. Longitudinal suspension rate and enrolment statistics are also noted, tracking increases and decreases across the study timeline of eight years (2012–2019).

The document analysis exposed a trend of escalating school violence. Physical misconduct accounted for 72–75% (2014–2019) of annual Preparatory suspensions, compared to 39–41% for older grade cohorts during the same timeframe. Analysis of suspension statistics and departmental reports identified that physical misconduct is the single most common reason for school suspensions, supporting the findings of increased school violence.

Descriptive statistics, obtained from SPSS analysis, enabled comparison of the demographics, opinions, and suspension event experiences of the 70 respondents and their 55 children. Analysis of the SDQ results, utilising t-tests and effect sizes, allowed examination of differences between traits of non-suspended ($n=42$) and suspended ($n=13$) students. This revealed that externalising behaviours are prevalent in this group of suspended children. Results identified that the suspended children's trait scale scores for hyperactivity and peer problems were almost three times higher than scores of non-suspended children. Dollard's frustration-aggression hypothesis (1939) was considered an explanation

of these complex findings of rising suspension rates, school violence, hyperactivity and peer problems.

To address the findings of reported increases of school violence and physical misconduct in Queensland's youngest students, several recommendations evolved, including:

- The implementation of a school-site screen time policy in recognition of the effect of screen time and PIMU on young children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development.

- A proposed change to current suspension policy involves restricting suspension criteria for children under 8 years of age to risky or harmful behaviours. Mandating functional behaviour assessments for students at risk of a second suspension was also suggested.

- The development of a short-form psychometric test, suitable for use in schools during the enrolment process, to assist identification of children most at risk of behaviours leading to suspension events.

- Integration of school-wide positive behaviour programs, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practice. These approaches facilitate differentiated, proactive support to address complex behaviours, potentially minimising suspension risk.

- Incorporation of alternatives to external suspensions such as internal suspension, restorative justice, and programs such as intensive coaching of self-regulation and development of social skills.

- The development of a precise, clinical definition for disorders associated with screened devices to provide researchers and clinicians with consistency in language and treatment.

This innovative research investigates whether young children's excessive use of screened devices may be associated with problematic behaviours leading to school suspensions. Key foci were PIMU, distracted parenting, departmental policy, and school capacity to respond.

To progress the findings of this study, further research on the effects of excessive screen time on young children is vital. Greater understanding of the association of neurodevelopmental disorders and PIMU, particularly in children under 8 years of age, would also be a valuable contribution. A larger scale replication of this study, with access to the DoE's internal reporting and record-keeping system, OneSchool, could provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of escalating school violence and contribute to evidence-based solutions for managing problematic behaviours.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for

another degree or diploma at any other university or other institution of tertiary education.

Information derived from published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text

and a list of references given.

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Statement of the Contribution of Others

The following contributions of others to the intellectual, physical and written work of this research higher degree thesis are gratefully acknowledged.

Nature of assistance	Contribution	Name, titles and affiliations of co-contributors
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Harman, Y., & Mole, J. (2019, September 22-24). *Reach to Teach – Putting out the Welcome Mat* [Conference session]. Australian Association of Special Education National Conference, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. https://aase.edu.au/national-conference/2019-conference-proceedings/

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A wholehearted thank you to all the educators and non-educators who participated in the Home from School Early's online survey. Although you remain anonymous, your shared experiences and opinions have been a vital reminder that each suspension may be a statistic to some but is a Scarlet Letter for others, the stain of it having long-term consequences. May all the 'Patricks' out there finally be understood, thanks to your generous contributions.

I am especially grateful for the RTP scholarship, which not only allowed me to commit full-time to this study but also provided me with opportunities to travel the world and courageously present at international conferences. Through this, my eyes have been opened in so many ways.

I have left the most important acknowledgement last. To my darling family, may my words of gratitude ring long in your hearts. Thank you for knowing my passion for this topic would consume me and standing beside me anyway. Thank you for listening to my cries of frustration, my elation at new discoveries, my groans of exhaustion. Thank you for the timely gifts of chocolate, wine, and hugs, which we all know I would not have survived without. Thank you for your unwavering faith, even when it felt like the burden of this journey would never end.

It has, finally.

Just remember, there is a reason the first letter of my name is *why*.

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List of Acronyms and Key Terms

Acronyms

AC – Australian Curriculum

ACARA - Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

DoE - Department of Education

DET - Department of Education and Training

DESE - Department of Education, Skills and Employment

DETE - Department of Education, Training and Employment

DSM-5 – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

FBA - Functional Behaviour Assessment

HFSE - Home From School Early

IGD – Internet gaming disorder

NSW – New South Wales, Australia

P-2 - Preparatory year to Grade 2

P & C - Parents and Citizens Association

PACE – Advancing Partnerships – Parent and Community Engagement Framework

RCVANEPD – Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People

with Disability

SDA - School Disciplinary Absence

SDQ - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

Terms

OneSchool – The Department of Education's data base, reporting and administrative software

Prep - Preparatory year

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

Patrick huddles under a desk, the left side of his body pressed against the wall in a tight 'S': head lowered, shoulders hunched, legs drawn up and heels tucked tightly against his bottom. His left hand is curled into an angry fist. His right hand conceals most of his face: thumb in mouth, index finger sweeping the falling tears from his cheek. A drying streak of mucus is visible on the sleeve of his blue jumper where earlier, he had angrily wiped his runny nose. He keeps a wary eye on the school guidance officer, who is standing at the opposite side of the room, talking in hushed tones to the principal.

"His mother is really distraught, she said she is at the end of her tether – this is Patrick's third suspension this term, and it's only Week Seven! She agrees that his behaviour has escalated since Sarah was born, but she doesn't know how to handle his aggression."

"I empathise with their situation, I really do, but this time he has injured two people – I have no choice but to suspend him. Last time was bad enough, throwing the iPad and smashing it against the wall, but I can't have staff and students ending up in hospital just because he can't self-regulate. He pushed them down the stairs, for heavens' sake – and all because he decided he didn't want to go to Music!"

Both pairs of eyes slid to the boy trembling under the desk. Patrick stared back sullenly, feeling a fresh wave of rage flaring through his body. He suckled frantically on his thumb, hot tears burning his eyes.

Patrick is not real; he is a composite of several four to six-year-olds I have encountered in my teaching career. They are the students that teachers find most difficult to connect with: sometimes impulsive, sometimes aggressive, sometimes irritatingly stubborn. They are the ones that make up the ever-increasing suspension rates for our youngest students, which have soared more than 163% between the years 2012 and 2019 in Queensland state schools (Department of Education & Training

[DET], 2017; Department of Education [DoE], 2020j). The numbers speak for themselves: from 582

Preparatory suspensions in 2012 (DET, 2017) to 1,532 in 2019 (DoE, 2020j).

Of course, this does not mean there were 1,532 Preparatory students suspended in 2019; some

children were suspended more than once in that calendar year. Some, like Patrick, have been

suspended numerous times. For many, suspension, or School Disciplinary Absences as the Department

of Education labels them, fails to modify the very behaviours resulting in these suspensions. This does

not make the numbers more palatable; it just means the time-trodden suspension process is no longer

effective at modifying the suspended child's behaviours.

This introductory chapter provides brief background information regarding the school

suspension process as implemented in Queensland state schools. Grounds for suspension, including

the most common reasons, are also described. Next, the conceptualisation of the study is presented,

along with the current gap in existing literature. The researchers' personal and professional contexts

are then explored, providing transparency and acknowledgment of inherent prior knowledge. Research

questions and their development are described before they are aligned with data sources and

theoretical framework. Organisational contexts relevant to the study are then explained, followed by

the significance of the Home From School Early (HFSE) study. The chapter concludes with an outline

of the thesis to orient the reader.

1.2. Queensland State School Suspensions

School suspension is a weighty topic, particularly in primary school settings, where children

who have generally not yet reached their teen years are subjected to exclusionary discipline practices.

What is particularly alarming is the considerable increases in suspension rates of Preparatory students

in the past decade. The following section begins by describing current Queensland school suspensions,

before exploring the dynamics of school suspensions in other countries. The context of the HFSE

study as it is situated in Queensland school suspensions is then presented.

1.2.1. School Suspension: The Visible

In Queensland, a suspension is a disciplinary action addressing the inappropriate behaviour of

a student. Suspensions formalise consequences for significant behaviour breaches and range from one

to 20 days in duration (DoE, 2020j). More serious or repeated breaches can attract exclusion from a

school for a specified period – usually less than 12 months – or for students over 16, their enrolment

can be permanently cancelled.

The same grounds for suspension apply to all students who attend Queensland state schools,

from four to six-year-old Preparatory year students, to 18-year-old Grade 12 students. In Queensland,

there are differences between state schools and private, or non-state schools. For example, state

schools provide free education, while private schools generally apply tuition fees on top of the

government funding they receive. Additionally, private schools can apply their own disciplinary

policies and procedures (Caxton Legal Centre Inc., n.d.) which may differ from the list of grounds for

suspension (see Table 1.1), which apply to Queensland state school students. Note that Table 1.1

includes all 12 formal DoE categories. However, three categories (substance misconduct involving an

illicit substance; substance misconduct involving tobacco; and substance misconduct involving other

legal substances) have not been included in the HFSE study. Although these grounds still apply to all

grade levels, there are no historical Prep suspensions recorded for substance misconduct. In addition,

items 5 and 6 have been combined into a single category: other conduct prejudicial to the good order

and management of the school (including serious misconduct). Thus, only eight formal DoE categories

are mentioned henceforth in relation to the HFSE study.

Table 1.1

Grounds for Suspensions as per Department of Education

Reason for suspension
1. Absences
2. Refusal to participate in program of instruction
3. Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others
4. Physical misconduct – involving an object
5. Physical misconduct – not involving an object
6. Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school
7. Other serious conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school
8. Verbal or non-verbal misconduct
9. Property misconduct
10. Substance misconduct involving an illicit substance
11. Substance misconduct involving tobacco
12. Substance misconduct involving other legal substances

Note. Adapted from "School Disciplinary Absences by Student Demographics, 2015-2019" (DoE,

2020j). CC BY 4.0.

However, a mere three of these criteria account for approximately 75% of all student suspensions each year across both primary and secondary schools. These are physical misconduct not involving an object, verbal or non-verbal misconduct, and disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others (DETE, 2014b). This correlates with international studies (Yang et al., 2018) and includes behaviours such as hitting, kicking, yelling, swearing, and generally disrupting lessons.

While there is already a solid body of research on suspensions, the focus is mainly on adolescent students (Cholewa et al., 2018; Duxbury & Haynie, 2020). Other factors that have been studied robustly include demographics (Mendez et al., 2002; Yang et al., 2018); minority groups (Huang & Cornell, 2018; Reno et al., 2017); elements of school climate and teacher attributes (Elledge et al., 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2018); and categories of the negative behaviours associated with out-of-school suspensions (DETE, 2014b).

1.2.2. School Suspension: The Invisible

Much less is known about very young children and the effects of significant sociocultural changes, particularly the rapid advancements and uptake in mobile and digital technologies, have on their behaviour. There are also scant studies conducted in Australia. Research to date has largely been conducted in America, Europe, and Asia.

This thesis sets out to address this gap. Firstly, it explores significant sociocultural changes and policy directions over the past decade, noting their alignment with annual increases and decreases in Queensland state school suspension rates. It examines whether the effects of these changes correlate with behaviour escalations that lead to school suspensions of young children and in particular, Preparatory students. Additionally, the experiences and opinions of community members are sought to observe whether these reflect the real-life evidence regarding the increasing rate of Preparatory student suspensions and observed sociocultural changes in the timeframe between 2012–2020. It identifies opportunities to improve social-emotional and wellbeing outcomes for young children and enhance classroom environments, making them more conducive to learning and inclusion. Finally, it offers suggestions to inform policy decisions and potentially reduce the growing rate of school suspensions,

especially for our youngest learners, who are experiencing formalised school environments for the first time.

1.3. Situating the Study

The desire to understand the complexities around school suspension of very young children, coupled with the objective to devise potential solutions and inform policy decisions, became the essence of this study. The challenge was managing the sheer enormity of the task within the constraints of a doctoral thesis. With so many elements to consider and weave together, it was decided that a mixed methods approach would be necessary to explore social, educational, and cultural dimensions. Schools are complex environments; mixed methods allow for the exploration of the subjective and objective components of schools (Ponce & Maldonado, 2015), such as behaviour and discipline. Pluye and Hong, (2014) coined the apt metaphor, "[c]ombining the power of stories and the power of numbers …" (2014, p. 29) to describe mixed methods research. The HFSE study employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches in strategic combinations to 'tell the stories' of school stakeholders, and 'crunch' the numbers of existing statistical data. It then compares these in a variety of ways to draw out social and cultural perceptions to identify potential reasons for the trend of increasing suspension rates of Preparatory students.

David Plowright's Frameworks for an Integrated Methodology, or FraIM (2011), facilitates the opportunity to unfold the details of the study with a sense of storytelling of the data. The reader is initially stepped through the researchers' path by threading together the contexts the researcher is closely embedded in, such as the professional and organisational milieus where the HFSE project is situated. The story continues to unfold as the sure-footedness of policy and national constructs regarding student discipline is described. Finally, the theoretical paradigms that underpin the topic of school suspensions are described before the formation of the overarching research question is revealed.

Plowright (2011) considers the personal and professional contexts the researcher brings to the study, such as occupation and world-view, to be as equally important as organisational contexts. These contexts provide an element of transparency as through them, the researcher discloses potential biases,

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influences or inherent knowledge. Using Plowright's FraIM (2011), the relevance of the influences

Figure 1.1 illustrates how the the researcher's contexts informed the progression from research

concept to creation of the overarching research question.

Figure 1.1

Contexts Underpinning the Research Questions Using Plowright's Framework (2011, p.21)

For example, if the HFSE study was researched and authored by the parent of a child who had

been suspended from school, they would likely express a different perspective than a researcher/author

whose profession was, say, a school principal. The reader can then apply a critical lens when

considering the completed study. Similarly, providing the organisational context lays bare the

embedded cultural nuances, policy and procedural regulations, and historical influences by which the

research topic is bound. These are discussed below, outlining political impacts on Australian

education, including the roles of federal and state/territory education departments, funding issues, and

significant curriculum design and delivery changes.

1.3.1. Professional Context: The Questioning Teacher

This study developed from an instinctive sense that evolved over a period of five years of

primary school teaching. It was becoming increasingly clear that the behaviour of Preparatory students

was deteriorating with each year of new enrolments. The concept for the HFSE study emerged

organically through observation, casual staffroom conversations, and identification of common

patterns in young children's behaviour. Conversations between teachers and support staff expressed

concern that each year, there seemed to be growing numbers of young students exhibiting non-

attentive, hostile, or aggressive behaviours. The number of Preparatory students receiving detentions

or suspensions was also increasing. Coupled with these phenomena, there seemed to be a sociocultural shift beyond the school gates, with children as young as six months of age gripping mobile screened gadgets in their tiny hands. Everywhere you looked – fast food restaurants, shopping centres, parks, and playgrounds – and everyone you saw – infants, toddlers, young children, adolescents, and adults – were clicking, swiping, and conversing on these miniature computers. A suspicion began to develop. Was it possible these two occurrences – more aggressive, less self-regulated youngsters and increased use of mobile screened devices by very young children - were related? Or is the changing school environment, with stressors such as constantly changing policies and procedures related to this relationship?

1.3.2. Development of Research Questions and Framework

These initial, internal, and informal musings were teased out to develop a central research question: "Over the past decade, what sociocultural changes have occurred that may be contributing to the negative behaviours in young students that lead to school suspension?" Several noteworthy sociocultural changes that are likely to have impacted on young children in the past decade were identified. The focus was narrowed down to two main changes: the increasing use of digital mobile screened devices, and changes to education over this period. In addition to the central, overarching research question above, three further research questions were devised, with a total of four research questions to be investigated:

1. Over the past decade, what sociocultural changes have occurred that may be contributing to the negative behaviours leading to increased school suspensions of young students?

2. What are the documented reasons, policies, and processes of early years suspensions across Queensland schools?

3. Are the experiences and opinions of community members supportive of the observed increases in DoE Queensland's suspension rate data and sociocultural changes?

4. What are possible alternative solutions for avoiding suspension in the early years of schooling?

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These questions drove the core data collection methods of document analysis and online survey. The survey's intention was to explore the experiences and opinions of school community members who have a stakehold in the process, such as parents and school staff. This was achieved by incorporating both open-ended questions to gather qualitative data, as well as rating scales and closed questions to gather quantitative data. A document analysis was planned to inform whether changes to education legislation, policies and procedures correspond with periods of significant suspension rate increases.

Figure 1.2. illustrates the connections between the sociocultural changes identified, such as the impact of technology advancements and changes to education on young students over the past decade, the research questions, and data collection tools. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is also included in Figure 1.2. to clearly map out the vital connections between existing theory and the elements presented in Figure 1.2. The theoretical framework is elaborated on in detail in the following chapter, Theoretical Contexts.

Figure 1.2

Research Questions and Theoretical Framework Development
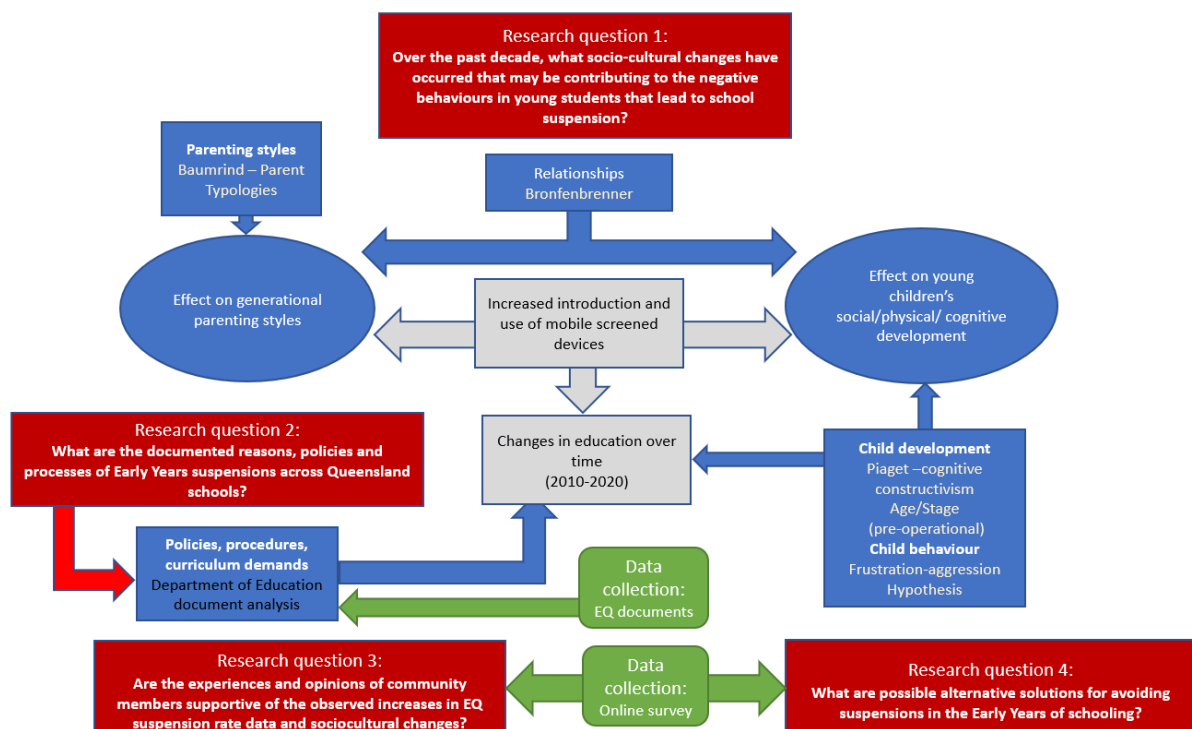
1.3.3. Organisational Context: Government and Policy

Australian education consists of Federal, State or Territory, regional and district contexts. Given the breadth of agencies and administrative bodies involved, definitions can vary between settings. One example is the first formal year of schooling: in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania, it is labelled *Preparatory*; in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory it is called *Kindergarten*. Western Australia identifies it as *Pre-primary*; in South Australia it is known as *Reception*; and in the Northern Territory, *Transition* (Essential Kids, 2015). To compensate for the variety of terms for the first year of education, national curriculum documents refer to it as *Foundation* (Australian Curriculum, n.d.-a). This study will refer to them as Preparatory, or Prep, which is the common abbreviation used throughout Queensland.

The Federal Government's role is to provide national leadership in key areas such as education policy, national curriculum development and supplementary funding for both government and non-government schools (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE], 2021a). However, the states and territories are solely responsible for registering and regulating schools within their jurisdiction. They are also responsible for the day-to-day management of schools within their physical boundaries, including employment of teaching and support staff (Australian Government, n.d).

The distribution of federal funding to state and territory schools is based on a complicated formula that involves minimum funding guidelines, bilateral reform agreements that outline actions to be undertaken by the states and territories to address national improvement goals, and allocations of the pool of Federal funding called the Schooling Resource Standard (DESE, 2021b). The intricacies of these funding calculations are beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to know there are checks and balances and a delicate dance between the Federal Government and its State and Territory governments when it comes to funding arrangements and financial support for Australian schools.

This system of bilateral organisation makes Australian education vulnerable to political ideologies and perspectives (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). This became particularly transparent during the international COVID-19 pandemic, with the standing Federal Education Minister, Dan Tehan,

warning non-government schools that funding would be withdrawn if they remained closed during the

virus outbreak in Australia (Financial Review, 2020). The amount of funding available to a school

affects staffing levels, as well as access to improvement programs, physical resources, and additional

support staff such as behaviour teachers, chaplaincy, school guidance officers, inclusion specialists,

and therapists. Whilst not all strategies for managing student behaviour involve a monetary

requirement, higher funding is certainly beneficial, particularly when it comes to human resources.

1.3.4. Significance of the Home From School Early (HFSE) Study

The HFSE study seeks to examine possible reasons for the increasing rates of school

suspensions, with a particular focus on the first year of formal schooling in Queensland state schools,

the Preparatory year. As stated, most existing research on school suspensions focuses on older students

in upper primary and secondary grades (Jabbari & Johnson, 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2015). While

data identifies older cohorts with the largest proportion of school suspensions, current DoE data

(2020j) indicates that suspensions in the Preparatory year are increasing at a higher rate than most

other grade levels, particularly for physical misconduct events.

Negative effects of suspensions compound over time, contributing to cumulative disadvantage

(Hemez et al, 2020; Novak, 2021). Behavioural issues occurring in early childhood are a high

indicator of later issues such as aggression, delinquency, and incarceration (Whitted, 2011; Novak,

2021). This intimates that the earlier the intervention, the higher the potential to break the cycle and

instil positive behaviour and values. Young children's malleability makes the early years of schooling

a critical time to shape behaviours, expectations and learning dispositions.

This study includes the opportunity to improve social-emotional outcomes for young children

and enhance classroom environments, making them more conducive to learning and inclusion. The

findings may be used to inform policy decisions regarding student discipline and suspension processes

for students navigating their first year of formal schooling. Ideally, this could reduce not only

suspensions, but also improve school climates. As student behaviour and discipline are frequently

cited as reasons for teachers exiting the profession (Buchanan, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2013; Mason &

Matas, 2015), it could also facilitate teacher retention.

1.4. Thesis outline

This chapter outlined the background to the HFSE study, describing the conceptual framework, research questions, aims and significance. Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical concepts underpinning this study. Chapter 3 reviews relevant existing literature to identify significant sociocultural changes during the decade prior to 2020. It also explores the impact these changes may have on young students' behaviour. The methodology is outlined in Chapter 4, including data collection, analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presents the document analysis and discussion, followed by the analysis of quantitative data, such as demographics of the respondents, in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 provides the results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire before moving on to qualitative findings in Chapters 8–11. Chapter 12 presents a summary of the HFSE study findings and aligns them with research questions before concluding the thesis with detailed recommendations, limitations, and future research opportunities.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The previous chapter expressed the gravity of school suspensions outlined in state data and brought a human face to that data, young Patrick. His story introduced the intent of the HFSE study to tell the stories behind the statistics of suspensions. A number of themes underpin this intention: relationships, change, conflict, and growth.

This chapter explores relationships with an ecological theory lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1996), situating the individual – in this case, the student – amongst the personalities, settings and events that shape them. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1996) is described, providing examples from the student's perspective. The role of parenting styles is also explored, mapping Baumrind's (2005) parenting typologies across generations and documenting their shift within the context of sociocultural changes. A construction of Dollard's Frustration-Aggression hypothesis (Miller et al., 1941) is presented as one explanation for the aggressive and often violent behaviours of young children experiencing screened device addiction. The chapter concludes with an exploration of growth through Piaget's (Bentham, 2002) theory of staged child development, with a focus on cognitive development.

2.1. Relationships: We are All in This Together

Relationships are the foundation of successful schools, beginning with the most influential relationship, that of child and parent. Engaged parents contribute to a range of academic and social-emotional benefits for students, including higher attendance rates, increased satisfaction with school, and higher mathematics and reading success (Yamauchi et al., 2016). However, the teacher-student relationship also reaps positive benefits (Allen et al., 2018; Elledge et al., 2016). The following section explores student relationships through two lenses: human ecological systems and generational parenting trends. Both are affected by sociocultural changes and the passage of time.

2.1.1. Relationships and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development

A meta-analysis of studies on teacher-student relationships determined that teacher attributes such as empathy, warmth, genuineness, and adapting to learner differences correlates with medium to high effects on student outcomes, including higher engagement, increased participation, fewer disruptive behaviours, and absenteeism (Cornelius-White, 2007). A further study found that not only

do positive teacher-student relationships have positive associations for engagement and achievement,

but adversarial relationships can lead to lowered student engagement and achievement (Roorda et al.,

2011).

This highlights that relationships can have both positive and negative effects on students.

Importantly, relationships affect individuals on many levels. Bronfenbrenner distils the complex layers

of relationships, environments and events that influence an individual by identifying each layer as a

system in his Ecological Theory of Human Development (1996). Each system is a little more remote

from the individual than the prior (see Figure 2.1) but still impacts on their development

(Bronfenbrenner, 1996, pp. 22-26).

Figure 2.1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development
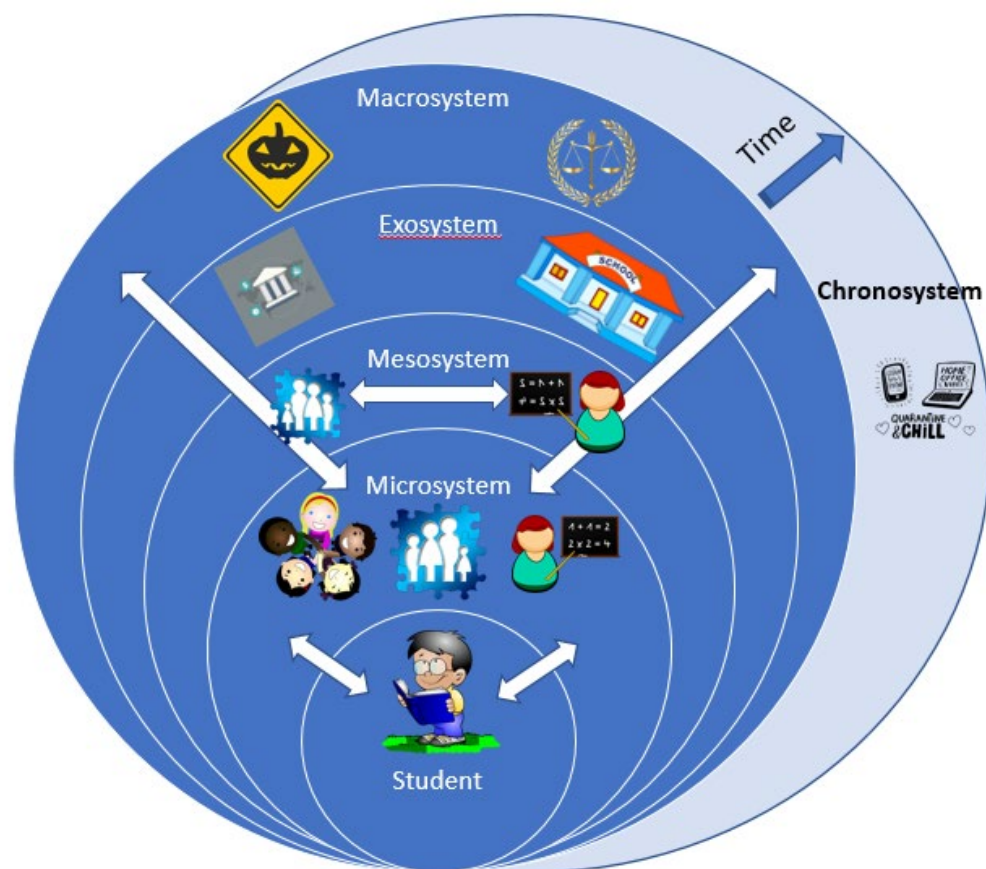
Note: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1996)

This theory provides a useful lens for observing school communities as it acknowledges that individuals are not shaped in a vacuum but rather, through interactions with others. Society is constructed of many environments, or systems, with individuals impacted in varying degrees by each system. These are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner,1996).

Using schools as an example, the individual is surrounded by other individuals with whom they form direct relationships, such as their family, peers, and teachers. Bronfenbrenner labels this the "microsystem". The next level, the "mesosystem", refers to the relationship links between individuals in the microsystem, for example, the connection parents have with the child's teacher. The "exosystem" includes relationships that do not directly involve the student, but still affect them. This could include the day-care centre of a sibling, where the student may be indirectly affected financially due to the cost of day-care fees to the family. The final and most distant layer is the "Macrosystem." This is comprised of the individual's cultural context, which includes elements such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, laws and customs. In the life of a student, these are elements such as educational policy, curriculum decisions, and the loosely termed but widely understood 'school rules.'

A further layer, the chronosystem, was added later and addresses the historical changes over time that affect the above four systems (Wardle, 2009). In the context of the HFSE study, these include significant sociocultural changes occurring in the life of contemporary students, such as the advent of digital technology and in particular, mobile screened devices. The chronosystem also reflects the changes digital technology has introduced to education, such as the creation of educational electronic games, 'apps', and digital learning platforms.

2.1.2. Relationships and Parents: Baumrind's Parenting Typologies

Parents are also navigating this new digital space. With conflicting advice, cybersecurity, cyberbullying, and the pervasive nature of digital platforms, even tech-savvy parents are bewildered by the capacity of today's youth to adapt and adopt to this fast-paced landscape. Family time is being eroded by competing social platforms and the temptation of instant streaming of entertainment services. Parents report this has led to children being distracted by devices, less respectful, and harder to discipline (Auxier et al., 2020; Graham & Sahlberg, 2021).

Parenting styles and disciplinary practices are often perceived as generational, such as the strict disciplinarian who wielded the cane in the twentieth century, or the lenient, 'hippie' parents of the 1970s. However, Baumrind's parenting typologies, "authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, … [and a later category,] disengaged …" (Baumrind, 2005, p. 62), are still observable in today's contemporary families, albeit with catchy, trendy labels invented by younger, marketing-savvy generations: the hovering Helicopter parent (Cui et al., 2019, p. 860); the obstacle-removing Lawnmower parent (Haller, 2018); and the ambitious authoritarian Tiger parent (Kohler et al., 2012).

Initially, Baumrind identified four parenting types in her early pilot study (Baumrind, 2005). The authoritarian parent subscribes to strict, regulatory control, sanctioning compliant behaviour and unquestioning respect of adults. The permissive parent presents at the opposite end of the behaviour management scale, indulging the child with leniency and very few enforced boundaries. Balanced between these two dichotomies is the authoritative parent, providing the child with consequential actions rather than punishment, and supportive structure rather than leniency (Baumrind, 1996). A later study identified a further classification: the detached, or uninvolved, parent (Baumrind, 2005).

These four types are often portrayed as being polarised between free-thinking and conservative styles (Baumrind, 1996). However, Baumrind found that two traits, "responsiveness and demandingness … further differentiated … the four patterns of parents" (2005, pp. 61-62). Responsiveness is defined as the degree of support and encouragement provided by parents, leading to the development of self-confidence and independence in their child (Baumrind, 2005). Demandingness, on the other hand, describes the degree of control and monitoring enforced in the parent-to-child relationship, with the child expected to succumb to societal norms and regulate their behaviour (Baumrind, 2005).

Cultural ideologies also impact on childrearing practices. For example, cultures with strong affiliations with traditional customs or religion (Baumrind, 1996), such as Italy (Lansford et al., 2005) or the Middle East (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018), have been associated with a prevalence of harsh or physical discipline. This may be due to community acceptance of harsh discipline as social norms and moral identity (Lansford et al., 2005; Silveira et al., 2021) or intergenerational modelling

(Capaldi et al., 2003; 2008). Children of parents who rely on harsh disciplinary practices frequently default to this model when they become parents. However, this cycle of poor modelling can be disrupted through intervention or partner influences (Capaldi et al., 2008).

The lived experience of intergenerational discipline modelling may partially account for parenting typology. While formal intervention may modify these patterns (Capaldi et al., 2003; 2008), digital technology has also disrupted parenting styles. Modern parents frequently turn to online sources for information and support on parenting issues (Auxier et al., 2020), particularly for sensitive topics, such as parenting challenges and attachment concerns (Zero to Three, 2018). Qualified and evidence-based information is far easier to access online (Zero to Three, 2018), where digital platforms can easily archive outdated information and upload relevant, up-to-date resources more quickly than traditional print publishing. Globalisation has also impacted, with the traditional extended family becoming separated due to easier travel and relocation.

This has seen a growth in positive parenting programs, 'apps' (Hodgson & Ramaekers, 2020), and strategies, such as Positive Discipline (https://www.positivediscipline.com/) and Triple P (https://www.triplep-parenting.net.au/). Modern parents note that harsh discipline, such as spanking or yelling, is ineffective (Zero to Three, 2016). A shift in the opposite direction, or a tendency towards permissive parenting, has been observed by some professionals, with negotiation of boundaries being led by children, rather than parents (Sax, 2016). Others perceive that modern parents' anxiety is enslaving them to their children. One grandparent, comparing her role as a mother in the 1970s to her daughter's contemporary role, summed it up as: "My job was not to entertain them, my job was to love them and discipline them" (Miller, 2018).

Children's digital technology use is likely to have had a role in shaping these modern parenting styles. Accessing devices at an increasingly younger age, parents are navigating new territory. Fear of cyberbullying and online predators (Auxier et al., 2020) has led to anxiety of the dual role of "nurturing and governing simultaneously …" (Gulli, 2016, p. 42). The overprotective parent has emerged. This parent, whilst both demonstrative and indulgent, attempts to protect their child by controlling their endeavours and environment (Caylan et al., 2021).

The desire to be a 'good' parent begins early, with easy access to the latest child development and parenting advice wielding a double-edged sword. Neuroscience discoveries report that critical brain development takes place in the early years of childhood (Geng et al., 2017). Parents feel compelled to capitalise on this vital growth stage by following the latest trend: milestone tracker 'apps' that provide customised, development-stage-aligned play programs (Kline, 2020; www.momatu.com); devices that monitor tummy time and infant movement (Hewitt et al., 2019); or kids and babies subscription boxes (www.subscriptionboxaustralia.com/) that curate and deliver products based around a theme, such as fine motor skills or sensory items. Amongst all this, retailers advertise the latest mobile touchscreen devices and educational products.

While parents agonise over their child's device attachment, many are recognising their own addictive device behaviours (Auxier et al., 2020; Graham & Sahlberg, 2021; Terras & Ramsay, 2016). Baumrind's discovery of the disengaged or detached parent over fifty years ago is almost prophetic; this 'new' phenomenon has a modern 21st Century moniker: the distracted parent (Christakis, 2018). This parent demonstrates similar traits as the detached or uninvolved parent: rejection and neglect (Baumrind, 2005). Device distraction mimics these two traits through lack of responsiveness of the child's desire for attention (Auxier et al., 2020; Radesky et al., 2014), and neglect through lack of supervision due to distraction (Palsson, 2017).

The phenomenon of technology distraction has also been labelled as "Technoference" (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018, p. 100). Parents who self-reported their own high device distraction also reported an increase in their children's screen time (McDaniel, 2019; McDaniel & Radesky, 2018), potentially as a strategy to occupy the child (Caylan et al., 2021; Graham & Sahlberg, 2021). Parents also confess using screen time as a bribe or reward for desired behaviour (Rhodes, 2017; Terras & Ramsay, 2016).

The body of evidence suggests technology has indeed instigated a shift in parenting styles in recent years. These include labels such as "enmeshed … and affectively controlling …" (Kaniušonytė & Laursen, 2021, p. 210); "distracted …" (Christakis, 2018, p. 11); and "overprotective …" (Caylan et al., 2021, p. 261). What has also emerged is the suggestion that the optimum parenting type is the

authoritative parent (Caylan et al., 2021; Garcia et al., 2019; Terras & Ramsay, 2016). Balancing

emotional warmth with the setting of boundaries and expectations, children of authoritative parents, in

general, have fewer behaviour problems and higher social-emotional skills (Kaniušonytė & Laursen,

2021), higher academic achievement (Terras & Ramsay, 2016), and lower screen time exposure

(Caylan et al., 2021).

2.2. Dollard's Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis and Screened Device Addiction

Aggression in young children has been attributed to a number of influences. These include

low vocabulary (Sakimura et al., 2008), poor emotion-regulation (Ersan, 2020) and emotion

understanding (Laurent et al., 2020), and underdeveloped social skills (Kemple et al., 2019). The

likely antecedent to aggression in these circumstances is frustration involving difficulties with either

expressive or receptive language (Conway et al., 2017).

Frustration is frequently expressed through aggressive outbursts when an individual is blocked

from attaining a goal (Dollard, 1939), such as a child struggling to communicate their needs. Known

as the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis, Dollard expressed frustration as an event, rather than the

more common definition of frustration as an emotion (Breuer & Elson, 2017), with the event being an

interference or blocking of a desired goal. While Dollard's explanation implied that frustration always

produces aggression, Pastore (1950) stipulated that the individual's understanding of the situation

mediates the intensity of the individual's aggression. Originally it was believed the "strongest

aggressive reactions were those directed toward the perceived sources of the frustration" (Breuer &

Elson, 2017, p. 3). However, aggression can also be displaced and directed at individuals who were

not responsible for blocking the goal sought by the aggressor (Dollard et al., 1939 as cited in

Berkowitz, 1989). This is colloquially known as scapegoating, or "[a] person who is blamed for

something that someone else has done" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

An example of this is the student who was reprimanded on the playground, who then returns

to class and verbally or physically lashes out at a classmate at the slightest provocation. Reasons for

this transference of aggression in the school context may be due to the status of the individual

blocking the aggressor from a goal, such as a teacher or principal, or via the "[a]nticipation … of

punishment …" (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 61). An example contextual to the HFSE study is where a student threatens to 'dob' or report a misbehaving student to a teacher and suddenly find themselves the target of the misbehaving student's ire.

Frustration and aggression are also associated with behavioural addictions such as internet or gaming addictions (Kim, 2013; Ko et al., 2009; Kuss et al., 2012). A recent Australian survey discovered that "13% of parents felt their children are 'addicted' to technology …" (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021, p.38). A further 54 % of parents and grandparents surveyed believed that digital media had negatively affected their child's behaviour, noting increased anger and mood dysregulation.

While internet and screen addictions have been associated with psychological disorders for some time (Caplan, 2010; Domoff et al., 2019; Young & Nabuco, 2010), it is yet to be considered a disorder by the fifth and most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Since its inception in 1952 (Kawa & Giordano, 2012), this tome has been viewed as the authority on psychiatric disorders and diagnoses. However, the body of literature on Internet gaming disorder (IGD) has been convincing enough to warrant it as a proposed disorder in the manual, complete with criteria and diagnostic features to provide researchers with "a common language …" (APA, 2013, p. 783) for future studies regarding the proposed disorder.

To date, internet and screen addiction is not professionally recognised as a health concern, despite the breadth of literature. Unfortunately, the research cycle requires several years to gather and analyse data, and thus, research is lagging the exponential growth in technology. Given the HFSE study's focus on young children's behaviour, particularly behaviours considered aggressive or violent, clinical acceptance of the effects of screened digital media on developing minds may arrive too late for those already well-entrenched in addictive technologies.

2.3. Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Piaget's child development theory (Piaget, 1999) may also provide an understanding for Preparatory student suspension data. Piaget's constructivist approach of cognitive development hypothesises that cognition occurs in stages of "biological maturation …" (Baber, 2016, p. 282),

where logic and understanding is developed by the individual through interaction with their physical

environment (Singer & Revenson, 1997). Meaning is constructed from independent explorations and

observations (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Thus, cognition is not passive or static but adaptable through

assimilation, which describes the use of prior knowledge to integrate new ideas, and accommodation,

or using new information to adjust prior knowledge and transform it (Blake & Pope, 2008).

Four stages of development, from birth to adulthood, are identified by Piaget: "sensori-motor

stage (birth to age two); pre-operational stage (ages two to seven); concrete operational stage (ages

seven to 11); and formal operational stage (ages 11-12+)" (Bentham, 2002, p. 2). Whilst the age

ranges are approximate and vary from child to child depending on maturity, the HFSE study is

concerned primarily with Preparatory students, or those likely to be in the pre-operational stage.

Symbolic representation develops during this stage, where interaction with and imitation of

others prompts rapid language development (Bae, 1999). Symbolic play utilises role play, sometimes

using one object to represent another. While much of this occurs in social environments such as

families and playgroups, the child has not yet developed an understanding of abstract concepts, such

as alternative points of view. This is what is sometimes colloquially termed 'the terrible twos' and

explains why playdates in this age bracket can often end in tears and tantrums: their thinking is

egocentric during this stage (Piaget, 1999), which can be mistaken as selfishness or defiance.

The babbling explorations of sound-making in the infant stage begins to develop into

communicative language during the pre-operational stage. Words and symbols of physical objects

emerge, although still initially driven by egocentrism. The child is aware only of their own worldview,

requiring interaction with others, including peers, to discern the thoughts and feelings of others. Piaget

perceived 'private speech', or language invented between children, as representational of egocentrism

during this stage (Heo et al., 2011).

Established meaning and interaction with others are required for language to be functional.

Through imitation, the child reproduces words, repeating them without meaning. Environmental

interaction through words and gestures directs the child to comprehension, utilising assimilation and

accommodation (Moerk, 1975) to transform "egocentric speech [to] socialized speech" (Singer &

Revenson, 1997, p. 57). Socialisation is a skill best learnt in social environments, where social norms and self-regulation (O'Sullivan & Ring, 2018) are constructed through relationships (Zaporozhets, 2020). These settings provide the necessity of reciprocation for speech to become conversation. Play becomes a natural classroom; negotiation, cooperation, and sharing are developed through collaborative play (Singer & Revenson, 1997).

The 21st Century conundrum is that traditional, face-to-face play is frequently replaced by digital media 'play' on screened devices (Bergen, 2017; Loebach et al., 2021). Parents of children as young as 18 months of age provide screen time opportunities for their toddlers, citing parental 'busyness', the use of screen time to manage behaviour, and to prevent disruption during family routines (Lee et al., 2018). A number of factors have been reported as influencing the deprivation of play, namely safety and injury concerns, unappealing outdoor environments, and the focus on school readiness and seated academic priorities (Bergen, 2017; Copeland et al., 2012).

Although well-intentioned, the trend for seated work and academics being prioritised over play (Bodrova, 2008; Lewis, 2017) and developmentally-appropriate learning contexts (Singer et al., 2006) may well be negatively affecting children's wellbeing and learning. Singer et al. (2006) cite studies comparing direct instruction with developmentally-appropriate learning. It was noted that young children who learned via direct instruction exhibited less learner motivation, higher stress, and elevated emotional and inattention problems. Conversely, a play-based approach is reported to foster social skills, promote problem-solving and critical thinking, and enhance conceptual thinking (Pyle et al., 2017).

2.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1996) as a lens from which to view the impacts of sociocultural change on individuals. The rapid development and adoption of screened digital media were examined, with a focus on resultant changes and adaptions to parenting. Baumrind's parenting typologies were dovetailed with Bronfenbrenner's theory, where generational parenting style shifts were defined as socially constructed changes within family relationships.

Dollard's frustration-aggression hypothesis (1939) was expressed as potentially attributable to the withdrawal effect of addictive behaviours in the context of digital media addiction, where denial of the item addicted to activates the frustration-aggression association. This chapter has also drawn on Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development (1999), considering it in relation to the social and cognitive demands on children entering their first year of formal schooling. The following chapter presents existing literature regarding school suspensions of young children, followed by a review of evidence-based alternatives to external suspensions. Young children's excessive use of screened digital media is also investigated, reporting several potentially harmful social, psychological, and physical effects.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1. Preface

Chapter 2 situated the HFSE study's themes of relationships, change, conflict, and growth within theoretical paradigms. Chapter 3 examines the impact of excessive screened device use, particularly on young children. Associations between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and problematic interactive media use (PIMU) are also explored. The chapter opens with a review of existing school suspension literature, with a particular focus on young learners. American and Australian contexts are compared, followed by interventions and alternatives that are reported to reduce either suspensions, or the problematic behaviours leading to them.

3.2. The Forgotten Children – School Suspension Research Gap

Student suspensions involving our youngest cohort, the Preparatory year, are undeniably on the rise in Queensland state schools (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). However, exclusionary student discipline is not an issue germane only to Australia; student suspensions have been studied widely across the globe. Despite this, most studies focus on students older than eight years of age, and the statistics and consequences of suspensions, rather than the antecedents leading up to them.

Racial and gender bias (Bryant & Wilson, 2020; Reno et al., 2017), over-representation of special needs students (Cole et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2014), and connections between suspensions and criminal pathways (Hemez et al., 2020; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017) are common themes investigated by researchers. Broad causes, such as socioeconomic status (Ramey, 2015; Rosenbaum, 2020), and family factors (Cho et al., 2019; Commissioner for Children, 2013) have also been extensively explored. However, research on a micro-level analysis of external impacts such as sociocultural events or policy implementation is scant, especially from an Australian perspective. Similarly, there is little research regarding suspensions in the early years of formal schooling.

The HFSE study, while recognising that suspensions in general are problematic, focuses on the trend affecting our youngest students. Children in their first year of public primary school in Queensland, the Preparatory year – four-and-a-half to six-year-olds – have experienced an increase of over 163% in student suspensions between 2012-2019 (DET 2017; DoE, 2020j).

3.2.1. School Suspensions in the Early Years of Child Development – Contrasting Contexts.

This section presents existing literature regarding suspension of children under eight years of age. Publications presenting the American context are followed by a review of Australian research. The section concludes with recommendations and alternatives drawn from literature published in recent years.

3.2.1.1. United States of America. American researchers have observed children as young as infants being suspended or expelled from their early childhood programs (Stegelin, 2018). It was reported as early as 2005 that the expulsion rate of pre-kindergarten children was more than 3 times higher than the rate for K-12 students (Gilliam, 2010). A later study identified preschool children of colour as being 3.6 times more likely to receive a suspension than their white counterparts (Gilliam et al., 2016). Male preschool students are particularly at risk, with "boys … three times as likely as girls to be suspended …" (2016, p. 2).

While these studies focus on children under four years of age in pre-school settings, racially disproportionate numbers of school disciplinary actions are reported across all school grades, as is the prominence of males in suspension numbers (Bryant & Wilson, 2020; Reno et al., 2017). A study of Kindergarten and Grade 1 students noted similar race and gender disparities but identified different predictors of early suspension (Yang et al., 2018). Using teacher ratings, the study noted that "aggression and defiance are predictive of school suspension among boys only, whereas for girls, lack of parental involvement contributes to an increased likelihood of school suspension" (Yang et al., 2018, p. 336).

The relationship between suspensions and parental involvement are approached from an alternative perspective by Jacobsen (2019), who addresses the theme of intergenerational punishment. This study reported that "children who had a residential father incarcerated by age 5 are 75 percent …" (Jacobsen, 2019, p. 651) more likely to experience a school disciplinary process. However, this is not the only association drawn between preschool and prison.

The school-to-prison-pipeline (STPP) refers to the process of tracking at-risk, or 'trouble-maker', students and using zero tolerance policies to push them out of the school system and into

juvenile detention centres (Mittleman, 2018; Skiba et al., 2014). While the relationship between suspensions and incarceration has been extensively researched, historically, it has associated this risk with older students (Hemez et al., 2020; Okilwa & Robert, 2017; Owens, 2017). Evidence suggests this path can be traced back to preschool (Adamu et al., 2015; Albritton et al., 2020; Stegelin, 2018), inciting calls for early childhood social-emotional programs (Albritton et al., 2020), mental health interventions (Carlson et al., 2012), and trauma-informed practice (Basford et al., 2020).

While suspensions are posited as consequences for the student's behaviour, the overrepresentation of race, gender, and disability (Welsh & Little, 2018) contests the concept of "within-child deficit …" (Armstrong, 2021, p. 984) and suggests that school climate and teacher judgement contribute to disproportionate racial, gendered, and disabled student suspension rates (Cruz et al., 2021; Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). While policy is in place to protect students against explicit bias, such as Indianapolis' Racial Equity Policy (IPS Newsroom, 2020) and disability policies (Americans with Disabilities Act, n.d.), implicit bias is less visible. Implicit bias refers to the entrenched, unconscious prejudices that influence our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Neitzel, 2018). This has led to calls for culturally responsive early education programs to develop deeper understanding and acceptance of student diversity (Basford et al., 2020; Stegelin, 2018), as well as a focus on teacher reflective practice and perspective-taking (Davis et al., 2020).

Mittleman (2018) also explored the theme of bias and the STPP. However, his study suggests zero-tolerance policies have led to standardised consequences, such as school suspension, systematically being applied. These policies are not discretionary, thus individual circumstances cannot be considered to moderate the disciplinary outcome (Hirschfield, 2008). Rather than implicit bias, students already disadvantaged become entangled in the cycle of "selection bias, simultaneous sanctions, and downward spirals" (Mittleman, 2018, p. 185). His study observed an additional risk: children who tested positive for lead poisoning were also at higher risk of school disciplinary processes.

There have been several studies linking lead exposure in young children with increased risk of problematic behaviours (Sampson & Winter, 2018) and school suspension (Aizer & Currie, 2019;

Amato et al., 2013). One study noted that "[f]or boys, a 1unit increase in lead increased the probability of suspension from school by 6% and detention by 57%" (Aizer & Currie, 2019, p. 575). Another concluded that exposure to environmental lead posed an increased risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Braun et al., 2006), a neurodevelopmental disorder that is discussed at length in this chapter.

In summary, suspension research published in America regarding young children is largely focused on preschool students, or those younger than four years of age. There is historically consistent evidence of bias, particularly regarding race, ethnicity, gender, and disability, leading to overrepresentation of these cohorts in suspension data. This has led to advocacy for policy change to disrupt the preschool-to-prison pathway, citing social-emotional learning, mental health support, and teacher education in cultural and trauma-informed pedagogies as pathways to interrupt this trend. Additionally, there are a number of studies concerned with the effects of lead poisoning on children, with associations between increased suspension risk and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) reported.

3.2.1.2. Australia. Research regarding Australian school suspensions is sparce, with research involving suspensions of children under eight almost non-existent. One author, Sheryl Hemphill, dominates Australian school suspension research with several published articles and books. However, the youngest cohort she has studied thus far is Grade 5 students who are approximately 10–11 years of age (Hemphill et al., 2014). A number of other Australian studies were located, although these also focused on adolescents rather than young children.

More recently, a Western Australian study reported children who experienced childhood trauma were almost twice as likely to be suspended by Grade 3 (Bell et al., 2021). The study identified children most at risk as those who had been maltreated or who had a parent who had been convicted. The study found that having a parent hospitalised with mental illness also increased a child's risk of exclusionary discipline.

In efforts to improve behaviour, approximately 3,000 Australian schools in a number of states including New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland (Poed & Whitefield, 2020) have

implemented school-wide positive behaviour interventions and support (SWPBS) programs. These

programs rely on data-driven decisions at school level, with teacher training essential for successful

implementation. Ideologies of functional behaviour and the explicit teaching of behaviour expectations

are key features of SWPBS (Horner et al., 2010). Reported outcomes of implementation include

reductions in undesirable student behaviours, enhanced social skills and learning outcomes, and

improved wellbeing (Poed & Whitefield, 2020).

      Recent changes to state-level student behaviour policies and procedures indicate government-

level awareness of increasing problematic behaviour rates and the inefficacy of exclusionary

suspensions. The NSW Department of Eductation (DoE) recently published the consultation paper, "A

new Student Behaviour Strategy" (NSW DoE, n.d.). The paper included components of SWPBS, such

as tiered support, a positive rather than deficit approach to student behaviour, and a "student-centred

and strengths-based …" (NSW DoE, n.d.-a, p. 4) approach to policy development. It also proposed a

significant change to suspension policy involving students in the first three years of their education,

Years K-2. Intended reforms described reducing both grounds for and period of suspensions for this

cohort (NSW DoE, n.d.-a, p. 6). Responses to the paper included stakeholder hesitancy in altering

suspension policy because of the complexities of managing student behaviour, the demands this places

on the workforce, calls for greater supports and teacher training regarding students with special needs,

and early intervention (NSW DoE, n.d.-b, p. 7).

      The proposed reform directions emerging from consultation will be discussed in the following

section, which addresses published recommendations and alternatives to external suspension. This

section highlighted that there is a lack of literature examining student disciplinary processes in the

Australian context, especially for exclusionary suspensions. Australian studies regarding the impact of

suspensions in the first year of a student's schooling are particularly neglected. While there is some

admirable work regarding interventions and alternatives to suspensions being undertaken, students'

voices need to be included. This is particularly relevant regarding experiences of childhood trauma.

      The mentioned changes proposed by NSW DoE regarding student disciplinary policy

emphasised the need to investigate the drivers of undesirable student behaviour to better cater for

student diversity, vulnerable cohorts, and the wellbeing of students and staff. Reforms arising from the consultation paper responses (NSW DoE, n.d-b.) are discussed below, alongside recent published recommendations for managing student behaviours. Alternatives to suspensions will also be explored.

3.2.2. *Managing Student Behaviour and Alternatives to External Suspensions – What the Literature Says and Current Policy Positions*

It is clear that external suspensions are ineffective at modifying undesirable student behaviours. While suspensions are an essential measure when risky or dangerous behaviour threatens safety within the school, there is a large body of evidence indicating that exclusionary discipline frequently increases the student's risk of negative outcomes. These include lowered academic achievement (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020), delinquency (Christle et al., 2005), youth violence (Hemphill et al., 2017), and incarceration (Novak, 2021; Skiba et al., 2014). Additionally, the NSW Ombudsman noted it does not reduce disruptive behaviours (NSW DoE, n.d.-b), often cited as a reason for suspension (DETE, 2014b).

Together, this evidence supports the argument to reduce suspensions and provide alternative consequences. The NSW DoE attempted this recently, only to discover the issue requires a multi-faceted approach, with stakeholder push-back against proposed reforms (NSW DoE, n.d.-b). The increase in problematic, complex student behaviours was stated as a considerable concern. This led to NSW DoE committing to provide greater support through evidence-based resources and interventions, along with the employment of behaviour specialists (NSW DoE, n.d.-b). Acknowledging the need to understand the drivers of problematic behaviours in order to provide a tailored approach is a symbolic step in supporting vulnerable students. However, despite this statement of a student-centric, positive behaviour management approach, it is concerning that NSW DoE consider "suspension as a mechanism to impose a punishment …" (NSW DoE, n.d.-b, p. 10), rather than as a consequence aligned to a behaviour. Queensland DoE have also recently updated student disciplinary policy and procedures, which is discussed at length in the document analysis provided in Chapter 5. Notably, the Queensland "Student Discipline" procedure (DoE, 2020-k) avoids the use of the term *punishment*, replacing it with *consequence*.

The "What Works" document, aimed towards improving outcomes for Indigenous Australian students, provides suggestions and alternatives suitable for all students (Australian Government, 2004). Whilst almost two decades old, the advice is still relevant: consistency and clarity around procedures, positive relationships with students' families, access to external agencies, culturally relevant teacher training, behaviour monitoring systems, social skill development, and a safe space for overwhelmed students. These elements can all be drawn into a framework consisting of "a strong and flexible leadership team … strong and effective relationships … [and] high expectations of achievement in academic and social outcomes …" (2004, pp. 4-5).

A number of international studies have investigated interventions to reduce exclusionary suspensions. Psychological support, such as guidance officers, may lower a student's risk of suspension by as much as 22% (Mittleman, 2018). The Monarch Room, a trauma-informed intervention, also adopts psychological support to moderate the use of external suspensions (Baroni et al., 2016). Training at-risk students to self-regulate is key to its success, which provides a safe space where overwhelmed students can withdraw without penalty. Staffed by trauma-informed professionals, it provides ongoing support to at-risk students while maintaining their academic pathway (Baroni et al., 2016). Over the three years of implementation, suspension numbers reduced from 18 in the first year, to only two suspensions in the third year (2016, p. 163).

School-wide positive behaviour interventions and supports (SWPBIS) is frequently cited as an evidence-based program (Borgen et al., 2020; Poed & Whitefield, 2020; Sprague et al., 2001). A multi-tiered, data-driven intervention, it aims to prevent undesirable behaviours by explicitly teaching behaviour expectations and focusing on reinforcement of positive behaviours (Poed & Whitefield, 2020). The topic of several meta-analyses, it is reported to have positive outcomes for behaviour, with some indicating the additional, unplanned benefit of positive affect on academic results (Lee & Gage, 2020).

Unfortunately, there is no one simple solution to problematic student behaviour, nor is there a suitable 'off-the-shelf' alternative to suspensions. Each school has its own, unique identity, consisting of individuals with their own complexities. The necessity of trauma-informed practice in schools is

clear evidence that students of all ages are overwhelmed and under-supported. What is not clear is

what changes have occurred to drive the increase in children exhibiting problematic externalising and

internalising behaviours. The following section addresses this, examining sociocultural changes that

occurred over the past decade to identify potential stressors that may be impacting on children's

behaviour.

3.3. 21st Century Learning – Out With the Old, in With the New: Embracing Technology

Two noteworthy events occurred in the 2012–2020 timeline that may explain changes in

children's behaviours. The first refers to a change to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*: the

Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013. This document and a

range of other policies, procedures, and reports are presented and analysed at length in Chapter 5. The

second notable sociocultural event in the lives of these young students is the increased reliance on

digital technology and screened devices, particularly the mobile market.

Technology has impacted our daily lives over the past few decades, from the rise in popularity

and accessibility of home computers in the 1970s and 80s (Höltgen, 2019) to the current growth of

mobile device use (Rideout & Robb, 2020). In recent years, this has influenced the way we learn and

intensified the sense of urgency to prepare students for the 21st Century. Many Australian schools now

request that primary school-aged children bring an iPad or laptop to school to access learning

applications, otherwise known as Bring Your Own Device (Merga, 2016).

In the haste to master new technologies, valuable play-based learning has been increasingly

abandoned and replaced with seated work in the early years. While play-based learning has long-

established benefits such as development of social skills, self-regulation, and expressive language

(Bodrova, 2008; Taylor & Boyer, 2019), play - particularly gross motor play - is often sacrificed to

prioritise academic learning (Copeland et al., 2012). Academic, seated work is frequently in front of

screens: Smartboards, iPads, computers, and projectors. Rather than achieving "amplification of

development" (Zaporozhets, 1986, as cited in Bodrova, 2008, p.358) through enriched learning

environments, this pressured approach is an "acceleration of development" (Zaporozhets, 1986, as

cited in Bodrova 2008, p.358), pushing young children towards activities and expectations for which they are not developmentally ready.

Concerns about the effect of screen time on young children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development have been raised and debated academically and socially since the advent of television. The development of smartphones, iPads, and other mobile devices has increased the amount of time young children are accessing screens. Statistics from an American national survey, "The Common Sense Census" (Rideout & Robb, 2020), indicate that birth to 8-year-olds are spending more time on mobile devices than ever before. In 2011, this age group spent a mere 5 minutes a day on mobile devices, increasing to 48 minutes in 2017 and 55 minutes in 2020. Mobile device ownership has also risen significantly in the homes of birth to 8-year-olds, escalating from 52% of homes in 2011 to 98% in 2020. In addition, personal mobile device ownership for 2 to 4-year-olds has soared from 1% in 2011 (Rideout, 2017) to 46% in 2020 (Rideout & Robb, 2020).

3.3.1. Defining Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU)

Internet, screen, and interactive media addiction are just some of the terms used to describe addictive symptoms associated with screened digital devices. The variety of disciplines reporting on the issue, coupled with the lack of diagnostic standardisation (Pluhar et al., 2019), has led to an overwhelming list of definitions for the loosely termed *addiction*. The label 'addiction' itself is fraught with negative connotations and stigma.

To navigate this, Rich et al. (2017) devised the term, problematic interactive media use (PIMU), as a diagnostic definition. The authors emphasise that PIMU describes a syndrome rather than a diagnosis and note the majority of their PIMU patients are subsequently identified with a range of co-morbidities. These include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and anxiety. Behaviours observed include school refusal, problems with peers, and conflicts with family (Rich et al., 2017, pp. 9-10).

This thesis has adopted Rich et al.'s (2017) term, problematic interactive media use (PIMU). Their definition most accurately captures the complexity of the HFSE's focus on digital media creep and its effects on young brains and bodies, noting PIMU describes: "behaviors characterized by

compulsive use of, increasing tolerance to, and negative reactions to being removed from interactive screen media use, which impair the individual's physical, mental, cognitive, and/or social function" (Rich et al., 2017, p. 9).

3.3.2. Links Between Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Parents often half-heartedly lament their child's attachment to their mobile device. However, the threat could be more than mere distraction. A growing body of research suggests a possible link between screen time and both attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Lissak, 2018; Pluhar, 2019; Sahu et al., 2019), and PIMU (Cho & Lee, 2017; Gentile et al., 2012). This is particularly concerning due to reported alterations in brain development associated with PIMU (Takeuchi et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2015; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015) and increasing rates of ADHD diagnosis (Danielson et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2016; Zablotsky et al., 2019). Both PIMU and ADHD are discussed below.

PIMU: PIMU is considered a behavioural addiction. Behavioural addictions share similarities with substance addictions, such as a reward system activation, impaired impulse control, "craving … social impairment … [and] withdrawal …" (APA, 2013, pp. 483-484; pp. 795-796). Physiological conditions attributable to substance addiction include cardiac and respiratory complications, stroke, gum disease and skin infections (APA, 2013). While substance addiction clearly affects an individual's physiology, the association between behavioural addiction and physiology is not clear.

However, advancements in neuroscientific techniques may shed light on this. Some neuroimaging research indicates behavioural and substance addictions share neurological changes (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015). Although the studies reported in these meta-analyses involved some quasi-experimental processes and small sample sizes of between five and 48 participants, they revealed a considerable number of studies that recorded structural brain changes and faulty neurobiological activity in participants with PIMU.

For example, brain imaging studies have identified similar neural processes in both behavioural addictions, such as PIMU and gambling, and substance addictions (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015). In the case of PIMU, rewards such as visual and auditory stimuli

built into the game trigger increased dopamine release in the reward centre of the brain (Takeuchi et al., 2016). This is of particular concern for children. Many games and apps, both educational and recreational, are structured around reward mechanisms. These include visual and audio feedback, achieving levels, and in-game rewards or points that can be traded for objects within the game (Rapp, 2017). These are all elements transferred from traditional electronic game design to curriculum areas to increase student engagement, performance and motivation (Dicheva et al., 2015). They also mimic the interactive mechanisms adopted by video poker machine designers to entice players to become immersed in the artificial environment engineered by the game (Schull, 2012).

The current American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, the DSM-5 (2013), reviewed over 240 articles citing similarities between compulsive internet gaming, gambling, and substance use disorders. As a result, the APA has recently identified internet gaming disorder (IGD) as a condition for further study, with the view to include it as an official mental disorder in future editions of the DSM. This has likely driven the recent surge of research in this area. To illustrate the rapid rise in interest for this topic, in early 2017, there was little published research on toddler or young children's use of screened technology other than television. Most of the research located at that time focused on adolescents and adults (Bounova et al., 2016; Weinstein, 2010; Young & Nabuco, 2010). A mere six months later a number of studies investigating the screen and digital media habits of children under 10 emerged (Azmi et al., 2019; Paudel et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2017).

The above studies reported a number of observations regarding young children's use of screened devices, including risk factors for PIMU in primary school children. The authors associated PIMU with "social, psychological and behavioral disorders" (Azmi et al., 2019; p. 1561). Increased screen time was reported in children under 8 years of age when parents used screened devices to regulate the child's behaviour or had high screen use themselves (Paudel et al., 2017).

Another study reported that parents constantly attending to mobile phone calls or notifications, otherwise known as distracted parenting, negatively affected the language development of toddlers (Reed et al., 2017). It is quite disconcerting to realise that collectively the negative effects on

children's development and behaviour identified in the research align with the DoE's suspension categories of disruptive behaviour, physical misconduct with and without an object, and verbal misconduct (DETE, 2014b).

Distracted Parenting: PIMU also affects children indirectly, with many parents being heavy users of screened devices. American parents surveyed in 2016 indicated they spend an average of almost nine and a half hours with screened media devices daily, with more than 80% of that time dedicated to personal screen time (Lauricella et al., 2016). While a more recent study conducted by the same organisation did not report actual hours spent on devices, they reported that 52% of parents surveyed believe they spend too much time on devices, compared to 29% of parents in the 2016 survey (Robb, 2019).

This not only models poor screened device habits, but children may also perceive that their parents are devoting excessive time to their screened devices (Robb, 2019). This can lead to children resorting to negative behaviours when seeking the attention of their distracted parents (Elias et al., 2021; Kiefner-Burmeister et al., 2020; McDaniel & Radesky, 2018), and lowered discipline responsiveness (McDaniel et al., 2018). It can also raise children's own engagement with screens, exposing them to the risk of developing PIMU themselves (Wu et al., 2017).

Parental use of and distraction by devices has recently been associated with changes in children's behaviour. A literature review investigating the impacts of parental phone distraction on children reported that both externalising and internalising behaviours were observed in children when their parent was occupied with a device (McDaniel, 2019). The author noted reports that "some children and teens [were] actively trying to get the parent to put the phone away (Oduor et al., 2016; Sharaievska & Stodolska, 2017)" (McDaniel, 2019, p. 75). This raises questions about child development in the age of distracted parenting, such as "attachment security, children's social and emotional development, and infants' developmental stages …" (Beamish et al., 2019).

ADHD: A growing field of study is the association of children's symptoms between PIMU and ADHD symptoms. ADHD is the most commonly reported neurodevelopmental disorder in children and adolescents (Lawrence et al., 2015). Features of ADHD include inattentiveness,

challenges with memory retrieval, impulsivity, difficulty with planning and organisation, and lowered

executive functioning (APA, 2013). It is frequently treated with pharmaceutical drugs, particularly

stimulant medications, or cognitive behavioural therapy (Safren et al., 2017).

Some studies suggest that the highly motivating, reward-centre stimulating elements of

electronic media render children with ADHD at a higher risk of PIMU (Beyens et al., 2018; Engelhard

& Kollins, 2019; Park et al., 2017), while others posit PIMU may mirror ADHD-type symptoms

(Leménager et al., 2018; Ra et al., 2018). One study suggests the similarities between ADHD and

PIMU behaviours have possibly led to misdiagnoses of ADHD, given the fledgeling knowledge of and

lack of clinical recognition of PIMU (Lissak, 2018).

This illuminates the diagnostic complexities and surrounding neurological disorders such as

ADHD and PIMU. Diagnostic biological markers have not been found for ADHD (APA, 2013), with

diagnosis relying on observed behaviours. Likewise, PIMU is also reliant on symptomatic

observations for diagnosis (Pluhar et al., 2019). This has led to some symptoms being associated with

both ADHD and PIMU, such as attention problems, impulsivity (Nikkelen et al., 2014), mood

disorders, hostility, and social phobia (Yen et al., 2007). These symptomatic similarities may pose a

risk of the lesser-known PIMU being overlooked during diagnosis for the more commonly known

ADHD (Lissak, 2018; Ra et al., 2018). Due to the range of associated symptoms (APA, 2013) and lack

of an established unified diagnostic metric, misdiagnosis of ADHD is not uncommon (Davidovitch et

al., 2017; McKeown et al., 2015).

This may explain why the incidence of attention disorders in young children appears to be

rising rapidly (Xu et al., 2018). It has been reported in recent years that young school children are

overly represented in ADHD diagnoses (O'Connor & McNicholas, 2020; Whitely et al., 2017). An

American study reported on the prevalence of children aged between 2 and 5 years being diagnosed

with ADHD (Danielson et al., 2018). By comparing annual data from The National Survey of

Children's Health across two timeframes (2007-2008 and 2011-2012), the American researchers

calculated a staggering increase of 57% in ADHD diagnoses in children in the 2–5-year age bracket

over this period. Australian researchers have identified a comparable trend of increased ADHD

diagnoses by noting that stimulant medication prescriptions, commonly prescribed to treat ADHD symptoms, rose by 72% between 2000 and 2011 (Ghosh et al., 2016). It is estimated that approximately 4% of Australian children have ADHD (Deloitte Access Economics, 2019, p. 14).

While it is clear that ADHD diagnoses are increasing (Xu et al., 2017), the causation is hotly debated. It is certainly likely that advances in medical knowledge and greater community awareness have contributed to increased diagnoses in more recent years (Kazda et al., 2019). While some studies have identified a strong genetic link (Banaschewski, 2010; Zayats & Neale, 2019), others suggest environmental factors may contribute to the development of ADHD (BlueCross BlueShield, 2019). These range from diet, maternal health, environmental contaminants (Thapar & Cooper, 2015), and childhood trauma (González et al., 2019) to the use of screened digital media (Beyens, 2018; Lissak, 2018; Ra et al., 2018).

The latter has prompted its own debate. There is some uncertainty regarding the directional link between ADHD and screened devices. Some evidence suggests that digital media environments have high appeal for individuals with ADHD, predisposing them to being high users (Engelhard & Kollins, 2019; Yen et al., 2007). On the other hand, research also suggests a potential "bidirectional causality between video game playing and attention problems/impulsiveness" (Gentile et al., 2012, p.67). That is, while it is likely individuals with ADHD are naturally drawn to aspects of screened digital media thus making them more vulnerable to problematic interactive media use (Andreassen et al., 2016; Bickham, 2021; Enagandula et al., 2018; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016), there is some evidence that digital environments themselves contribute to attention and hyperactivity problems. For example, one study found that, as anticipated, participants who had pre-existing ADHD rated higher problematic internet use than controls. However, they also discovered that participants who had "only recently developed ADHD-like symptoms showed significantly higher lifetime and current Internet use severity compared with [healthy controls]" (Leménager et al., 2018, p. 39).

Research has observed similarities between ADHD symptoms, such as inattentiveness and frustration tolerance (APA, 2013), and increased screen time. Sigman (2012) reported a 9% rise in attention problems for every hour of television viewed by a child per day. A more recent study

identified a correlation between the rise in ADHD diagnoses and increased use of digital media (Ra et al., 2018). This study hypothesised that increased access via mobile screened devices combined with the distractive effect of such devices could potentially be a causal link to increased ADHD symptoms. Similarly, a study of 11–15-year-old adolescents reported positive associations between daily digital technology use and ADHD and conduct disorder symptoms, as well as lowered self-regulation (George et al., 2018).

Additionally, neuroimaging studies have identified similarities in the grey matter volume of adult participants with internet gaming disorder (IGD, labelled PIMU in the HFSE study) and those with ADHD. One study compared the grey matter volume (GMV) between two groups of adolescents with PIMU: one group had a history of ADHD symptoms in childhood, while the second group did not (Lee et al., 2019). These were compared with a control group without a history of either PIMU or ADHD. This study reported similarities in GMV between both PIMU groups, while the control group had normative GMV. The authors noted that compared to the control group, the two PIMU groups had less GMV in the brain region responsible for executive control, conflict monitoring, and response inhibition (Bush et al., 2000). The authors also caution this is not a clear directional association; indeed, neuroimaging research is fraught with limitations "such as low statistical power, flexibility in data analysis, software errors and lack of direct replication" (Poldrack et al., 2017, p. 115). However, these findings support the recommendation to minimise screen time for young children (DET, 2015; World Health Organisation, 2019).

It is well-documented that students with ADHD are at greater risk of school suspension (Bauermeister et al., 2007; Watts, 2018). This is largely due to the challenging and disruptive behaviours exhibited by students with ADHD. However, children with ADHD symptoms also frequently experience lack of school attachment, leading to anti-social behaviours and school suspension (Watts, 2018). Further, behaviours noted as symptomatic of both ADHD and PIMU, such as defiance, aggression, inattention, and compulsive or impulsive behaviours (APA, 2013) align with the three most common behaviours given for suspensions of Queensland Preparatory students:

misconduct not involving an object, verbal or non-verbal misconduct, and disruptive behaviour

adversely affecting others (see Table 1.1).

3.3.3. Social-emotional Effects of PIMU

Excessive screen time and PIMU have implications for the social and emotional wellbeing of

young students. As mentioned, several studies identify a correlation between PIMU and grey matter

atrophy (Lee et al., 2019; Montag et al., 2018; Yuan et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2009). Lower grey

matter density in the insula cortex, an area of the brain involved in empathy and social cognition

(Uddin et al., 2017), has also been detected in participants with gaming addiction symptoms (Zhou et

al., 2009).

Although these studies focused on excessive periods of time spent on screened devices and

gaming addiction, recent research has correlated even moderate measures of screen time with lowered

psychological wellbeing. A study involving children aged between 2 and 17 years of age reported that

while screen time of 1 hour per day or less appeared not to affect participants' wellbeing, accessing

screened devices for more than 1 hour a day was associated with "lower psychological wellbeing,

including less curiosity, lower self-control, more distractibility, more difficulty making friends, less

emotional stability, being more difficult to care for, and inability to finish tasks" (Twenge &

Campbell, 2018, p. 271). Further, some studies indicated that young children who had a high rate of

screen time were at increased risk of victimisation from school peers (Domingues-Montanari, 2017).

This may be due to lower levels of social interaction with other children because of higher engagement

with screened devices, and thus having less developed social skills (Hinkley et al., 2018; Pagani et al.,

2013).

The amount of time a child spends accessing screened devices is not the only concern; the

content they are watching may also be problematic. In particular, viewing programs and games with

violent content is linked to increased aggression (Coker et al., 2015; Coyne et al., 2018; Martins &

Weaver, 2019), and lowered measures of empathy (Prot et al., 2014) and prosocial behaviour (Coyne

et al., 2018). Violent content has also been associated with hindered self-regulation in children under 3

(Lissak, 2018). These behaviours can spill over to the school environment, exposing young children to

the risk of suspension due to verbal or physical aggression. Professional agencies (Council on Communications and Media, 2016) and government departments (DET, 2015) recommend parents consistently and vigilantly monitor the content their children access via screened devices to avoid the negative effects of inappropriate viewing. These agencies also advocate for parents to model healthy viewing habits by limiting their own screen time.

In summary, the negative effects of excessive reliance on, or addiction to, mobile screened devices on young children's social-emotional wellbeing include poor self-regulation, increased aggression, and under-developed social skills. These behaviours not only undermine psychological wellbeing but may also result in physical expressions of frustration as well as externalised behaviours such as verbal misconduct, non-compliance, and physical aggression. These are all actions that can lead to school suspension.

3.3.4. Physical Effects of PIMU

A reported physical side effect of excessive screen time is obesity (Fang et al., 2019). Screen time has been shown to change eating patterns, including increased consumption of high calorie/low nutritional value snack foods, such as soft drinks, biscuits, chocolate bars and chips (Börnhorst et al., 2015). Poor diet, particularly sugar-laden soft drinks, has also been associated with childhood ADHD (Yu et al., 2016). However, evidence suggests that while the correlation between screen time and obesity certainly exists, it is not a simple, single-item causal effect.

Poor sleep duration and excessive screen time have been associated with increased obesity in children (Garmy et al., 2018). This risk is increased when screened devices are installed in the child's bedroom (Appelhans et al., 2014) as the potential effect of screen-emitted artificial light disrupting biological sleep patterns (Lissak, 2018) is of concern. An Italian study identified almost 40% of children aged 1–3 years of age used screened devices prior to bedtime (Brambilla et al., 2017), resulting in sleep duration below health guidelines recommended by the Sleep Foundation (Suni & Singh, 2021).

Poor sleep quality has also been associated with behavioural problems such as "opposition, hyperactivity, inappropriate social behaviour, mood variability, and school problems" (Calhoun et. al.,

2017). A correlation between sleep disruptions and heightened anxiety and fearfulness has also been reported (Séguin & Klimek, 2016). In school environments, these behaviours may be misconstrued as disobedience, non-compliance, or disruptive behaviour, which are categories that are frequently described as cause for suspending a student from school.

Poor sleep can also be caused by chronic pain. Concerns have been raised over the physical impact computers and handheld devices have on the body, particularly musculoskeletal issues involving the neck and lower back (Harris et al., 2015; Toh, 2017). The effect of using workstation furniture unsuitable for children, coupled with poor posture whilst using hand-held electronic devices, is especially concerning for children as they are still developing physically (Straker et al., 2018). This can produce pain such as headache and backache (Domingues-Montanari, 2017). Children suffering recurrent or chronic pain report they experience mood disorders, particularly depression and anxiety (Eccleston et al., 2014). Chronic pain can also cause irritability, leading to externalising behaviours such as verbal misconduct or displays of aggression.

To summarise, the negative physical effects of PIMU may include sedentary behaviours leading to obesity, disrupted sleep patterns, poor sleep quality, and chronic pain due to poor posture or lack of ergonomic furniture. As a result, young children may experience depression, low self-esteem, hyperactivity, irritability, and mood disorders. These conditions can manifest as internalised behaviours, such as anxiety, social withdrawal, and passive non-compliance, or externalised behaviours, which include physical aggression, verbal misconduct and disruptive conduct – all behaviours which correspond with suspension guidelines.

3.3.5. The Tech and Tantrum Link – Could Children's Obsession with Screened Devices and Digital Technology be Increasing Suspension Rates?

Accessibility and affordability of screened devices have increased dramatically due to growth in the mobile gadget market in recent years. Whilst figures of infant and toddler screen time are largely reliant on parent questionnaires (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018) and diaries (Raman et al., 2017; Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009), the casual observer need only attend a restaurant or shopping centre to witness large numbers of children in prams or highchairs clutching mobile devices.

Technology has advanced so rapidly that research has not been able to keep pace. While the full impact of screened devices on very young children is still largely unknown, existing research demonstrates correlations between older children's and adolescents' screen time habits and negative effects on their psychological, social-emotional, and physical health. Continuing to endorse unmanaged exposure of young children to screened devices is, as Christakis and Zimmerman (2009) affirm, comparable to performing an "uncontrolled experiment …" (p.1179) on our youngest citizens.

While there is a growing body of research establishing the cognitive, psychological, and physical effects of screened device use (Lissak, 2018; Domingues-Montanari, 2017; Straker et al., 2018), less is known about the impact these effects have on children's behaviour. Those who suspect an association between screen time and undesirable behaviour, such as aggression leading to family violence, social disfunction, and school refusal, are often parents who have turned to the media (Dalley, 2018; Freed, 2017) in desperation to have their suspicions acknowledged.

It is well evidenced that excessive screen time can lead to unhealthy behaviours such as causing sedentary habits, weight gain, sleep disturbances (Council on Communications and Media, 2016) and chronic pain (Domingues-Montanari, 2017). It is suggested it may also lead to social-emotional disturbances, PIMU and trigger symptoms of ADHD (Lissak, 2018; Ra et al., 2018). These physical and psychological symptoms can lead to a range of undesirable behaviours, both external and internal.

Externalised behaviours include aggressiveness, hyperactivity, and noncompliance, while internalised behaviours include anxiety and depression (Fanti & Henrich, 2010). Externalised behaviours are usually more evident, as they can include demonstrations of aggression or delinquency (Gulati & Dutta, 2008, p.113). These aggressive or undesirable behaviours are commonly termed *acting out*, a phrase coined to describe the physical result of internal feelings such as frustration, rage, and fear (Mathews, 2012).

Young children are vulnerable to acting out, as often they are yet to acquire the verbal language skills and emotional vocabulary to express their thoughts and feelings (Sorin 2001). Additionally, they are still developing self-regulation (Egger & Angold 2006). Lack of self-regulation

during stress may present as physical or verbal aggression, frustration, and non-compliant behaviour (Fabes & Eisenberg 1997), the hallmarks of the top three causes for suspensions in the early years of schooling: physical misconduct not involving an object, verbal or non-verbal misconduct, and disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others (DET, 2014).

Whilst there are positive benefits of screened technology, such as enhancing creativity (Dezuanni et al., 2015), promoting mindfulness and mind-body techniques (Culbert, 2017), and boosting Maths mastery (Harris et al., 2016), these are beyond the scope of the HFSE study, where one of the study's purpose is to explore relationships between undesirable behaviours and screened digital device use of young children. The intent is not to demonise screened devices but rather, to inform of the potential negative effects on young children when their use is not well managed. The antidotes are clear throughout studies in this review: supervision of content, or what children are being exposed to (Martins & Weaver, 2019; Coyne et al., 2018); dose-size, or time spent accessing screened digital devices (Twenge & Campbell, 2018); and purpose, or whether the digital environment is the most appropriate for that purpose.

Considering the growing body of research associating excessive technology use with negative effects on psychological, physical, and social-emotional wellbeing, it is timely to investigate young children's escalating access and use of screened devices to explore whether there is an association with behavioural patterns identified through school suspension rates. From the literature reported here, it is clear that further investigation into how these variables may affect school suspension rates is a worthy goal for future research. In particular, insights gleaned from such research could be useful in developing management strategies to reduce the escalating suspension rates of Preparatory students.

3.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter explored existing literature regarding school suspensions. Studies were drawn from American and Australian contexts, highlighting the gap in both Australian studies and examinations of Preparatory student suspensions. The growth of technology was also investigated, citing literature associating the impact of problematic interactive media use, or PIMU, on the

psychological, physical and social-emotional wellbeing of young students. The following chapter

expresses the rationale, design, and execution of the HFSE study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"

Widely attributed to Albert Einstein

4.1 Preface

The previous chapter presented a review of literature on the HFSE study's topics of concern: schools suspension involving young students; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), problematic interactive media use (PIMU), and the association between ADHD and PIMU; and evidence-based alternatives to external suspensions. This chapter begins by expressing the motivation for the HFSE study and the resulting research questions. The research approach and methodology selected for the research design are presented. Warrantability, validity, and reliability are also addressed. Elaboration of the research methods follow, describing the instruments used to select and collect data. The chapter concludes with a detailed explanation of the analysis process.

4.2 Research Rationale, Approach and Design

The HFSE study is concerned with student wellbeing in the context of student discipline and behaviour management. Schools have several options for managing student behaviour through formalised disciplinary processes. In Australia, these are specified by the state and federal Departments of Education (DoE) through the development and implementation of education legislation, policies, procedures, and supporting documents. Disciplinary processes are established to provide fairness and consistency when applying these processes. An "Evidence Framework" (DoE, 2020d) underpins decision-making during creation of policies and procedures to assess their impact and validity. However, the impact of new or altered regulations is often observed retrospectively rather than immediately. To identify the impact of policy changes and other events that may have impacted on young children's behaviour, a retroactive timeline was created (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

Timeline of Sociocultural Changes and Events: 2012-2020

	S: 582 E: 45,689	S: 572 E: 46,882	S: 873 E: 47,191	S: 894 E: 48,070	S: 1,028 E: 47,555	S: 1,026 E: 47,031	S: 1,197 E: 48,095	S: 1,532 E: 47,640	S: Not available E: 46,939	KEY:
	2012	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	
	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: 115min/day	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: 139mins/day	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: Not known	Screentime: 144mins/day	S = Prep suspensions / E = Prep enrolments
	iPad 3 & 4 launched PLUS iPad mini launched	*iPad Air launched*	*iPad Air 2 & Mini 3 launched*	*iPad Pro & Mini 4 launched*	*iPad Pro 9.7 launched*	*iPad Pro 10.5 launched*	*iPad AirPro 11 & 12.9 launched*	*iPad Air (2019) launched*	*No data at time of writing*	0-8 y/o mobile screentime
	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 28%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 29%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 27%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 31%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 34%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 37%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 37%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: 42%	School principals experiencing physical violence in workplace: NOT YET AVAILABLE	iPad mobile device launches
		Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013	Performance Insights: SDA Report			Mandatory enrolment for 6-year-olds to Prep / EQ Safe, Supportive & Disciplined Procedure / EQ Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students Procedure	EQ Student Protection Procedure	Restrictive Practices Procedure / Cancellation of Enrolment Procedure / Student Discipline Procedure / Student Code of Conduct		Australian school principals experiencing violence in workplace
										Department of Education

Note: S & E Data: Data sourced from https://qed.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/statistics/schooling/students and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY 4.0)

Screentime data: Rideout 2017, pp. 3-6; Rideout & Robb, 2020, p. 18

Australian principal violence data: Riley et al., 2020, p159

4.2.1. *Alignment of Sociocultural Changes With Document Collection and Suspension Data*

The timeline records annual Queensland state school suspension and enrolment rates, increases in average screen time habits of children, launch dates of new mobile technologies, and pertinent DoE documents such as policy and procedure implementation. Reported annual physical violence rates, as experienced by school principals (Riley et al., 2020, p. 159), has also been tracked. This became an important element, with increasing school violence emerging as a theme during data analysis.

The timeline of sociocultural changes and events was one of the first tools created for the HFSE study and became pivotal for aligning the extensive collection of data and documents associated with school discipline. Initially created to detect sociocultural changes and events occurring before and around the significant increase in Preparatory suspensions in 2014, it was also a convenient recording and tracking tool to align evidence as it came to hand. Maintaining the timeline and continuing to track changes until submission of the thesis detected a last-minute, but crucial, change to school disciplinary documents in 2020.

4.2.2. *Storytelling Beyond Statistics*

An aim of the HFSE study was to go beyond statistical data and extract the personal stories of suspended students as reported by their parents. This was facilitated by adopting a narrative framework using the literary tool of *the Five W's*, or the elements of who, where, when, why and what, when composing the research questions and determining data collection methods. The statistical data provided the who, where, and when: Preparatory students enrolled in Queensland state schools between the years 2012–2019. To explore why the Preparatory year was experiencing these increases, an explanatory approach was deemed the most appropriate (Wang & Park, 2016). To facilitate this, an online survey was designed to capture the experiences and opinions of school community members. An evaluative approach was also applied (Wang & Park, 2016) to explore what behaviours lead to a school suspension, and what formal processes apply. This was achieved by conducting a document analysis of school disciplinary policies, procedures, and reports, both historical and current.

To accommodate these research dichotomies, a mixed methods approach was determined and utilised to draw on the "fundamental principle of mixed research" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 127). Mixed methods provide robustness through selection of appropriate complimentary approaches, acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). For example, accessing existing quantitative DoE statistical data collected over several years and geographical areas helped compensate for the HFSE study's single point in time survey data collection.

While mixed methods were an obvious methodology, a framework for presenting such diverse data was less obvious. Weaving written opinions, experiences, and suggestions together with authoritative government documentation and carefully constructed rating scale data requires not only skill, but also a clear outline to draw these components seamlessly together. Plowright's Framework for an Integrated Methodology, or FraIM (2011, p.18), provides both structure and process, ideal for unravelling and reconstructing raw data into a concise path for others to follow. Plowright (2011) convincingly replaces the traditional scholarly terms of quantitative and qualitative data with the more modest terms, numeric and narrative, an ideal foil for the contexts of the HFSE study. More importantly, the FraIM provides an uncomplicated model suitable to any research, regardless of its complexity.

In the FraIM model, *cases* describe the data collection sources, determined by the research questions. For example, the HFSE study's main intent is to investigate why Prep student suspensions have increased annually. It was determined that in addition to participant opinions and experiences, an understanding of the suspension process was required. These decisions led to the creation of an online study and a document analysis. Plowright's framework identifies rating scale data, open-ended questions, and content analysis of artifacts as surveyed sources (2011, p. 31), therefore all HFSE data sources, or cases, are categorised as surveys. Next, the sampling strategy and other methods of data collection are described before organising data as numerical or narrative. The FraIM structure then elaborates on the analysis processes for both numerical and narrative data. Evidence is extracted from these before claims are made, followed by a conclusion, recommendations, and limitations.

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Figure 4.2 illustrates the application of Plowright's FraIM (2011) to the HFSE study's research design beyond the contexts previously described as underpinning the overarching research question (see Figure 1.1). Figure 4.2 continues to develop this illustrative tool to explain the research design beyond Figure 1.1. For context, the overarching research question in Figure 1.1 adjoins the cases in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

HFSE Study Design Using Plowright's FraIM (2011, p. 21)

Home From School Early: School Suspensions
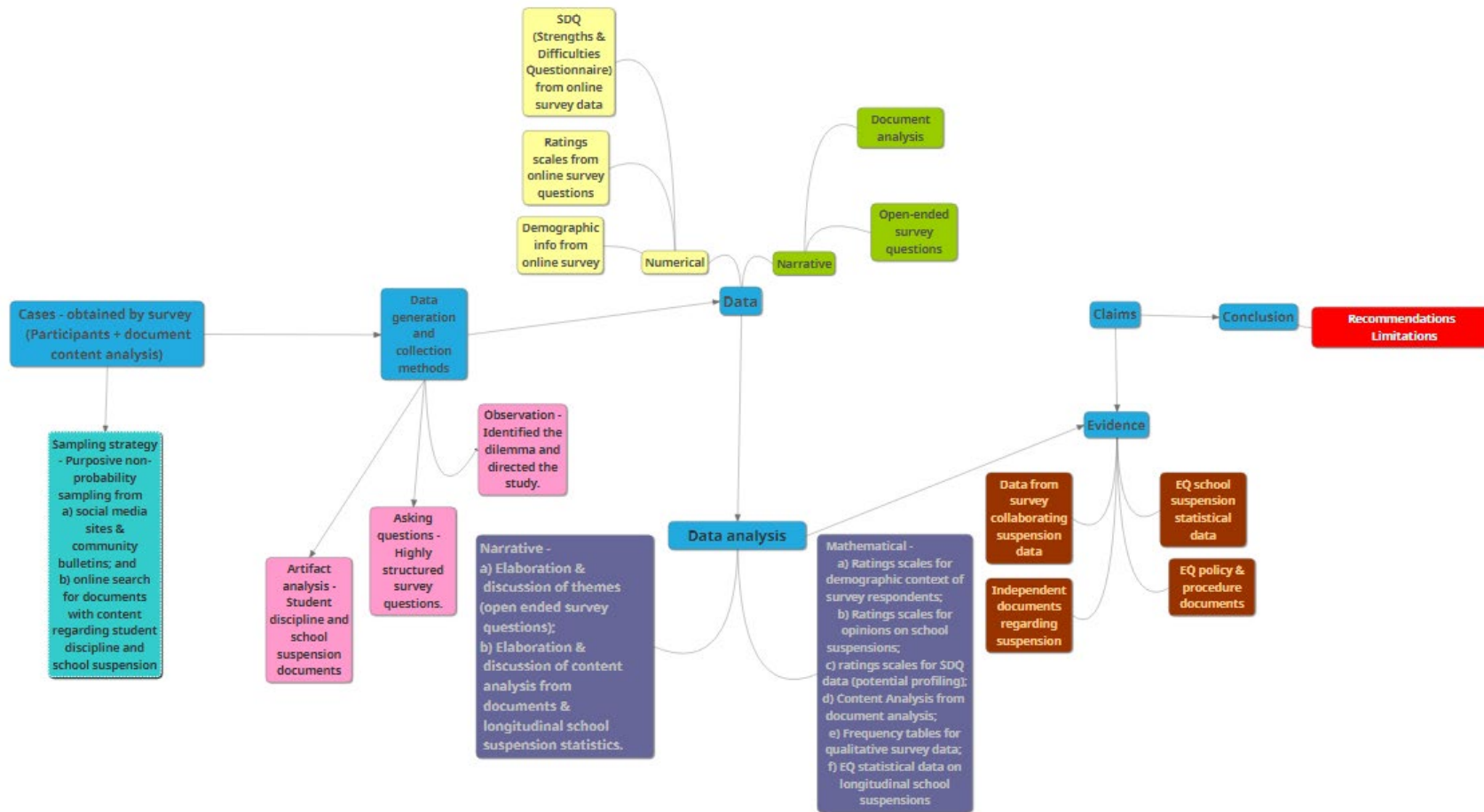
4.2.3. Warrantability and Triangulation

Plowright's FraIM also offers the benefit of "warrantable research …" (2011, p. 136). *Warrantability* addresses research robustness, or the ability for both evidence or data, and claims or inferences, to stand up to scrutiny (Forbes et al., 2001). According to King et al. (1994), "Inference is the process of using the facts we know to learn about the facts we do not know" (p. 46). In the context of the HFSE study, the facts we do know are that Preparatory student suspensions are increasing, and that policies and procedures stipulate the processes governing school suspensions. What we do not know forms the overarching question. This asks whether suspension rates for Prep students are escalating due to sociocultural impacts, such as changes to education policy and the increased use of screened digital media, and whether these impacts may be shaping young students' behaviours.

The structure of the FraIM ensures that the research question remains central to "each stage of the research process" (Plowright, 2011, p. 152). This includes the literature review, research contexts, methodology, data selection, data collection, and analysis. Each stage of research development is a process of considering options and discarding inferior ones in favour of more credible ones. The researcher continuously analyses each stage of the research process from the perspective of the research question. Each potential reason is weighed up against further data. Each subsequent set of data either confirms or invalidates the hypothesised conclusion until a body of evidence points towards the most likely outcome.

Plowright's integrated methodology is one technique employed by the HFSE study to boost warrantability; triangulation is another. Triangulation is described as a way of using "multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings" (Mathison, 1998, p. 13). To achieve this, the HFSE study compiled two collections of data: the researcher-designed online survey incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures, and the documents incorporated into the document analysis. The survey collected respondent's demographic information, worded responses, rating scale responses, and parent-rated reports of their child's traits. The document analysis collected 21 government and independently authored documents. Triangulation was achieved through transformation of the qualitative and quantitative data generated, using mixed methods to

compare and confirm findings (Creswell, 2018). Mixed methods play a fundamental role in the establishment of triangulation. As Creswell & Plano Clark note: "A study that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods without explicitly mixing the data derived from each is simply a collection of multiple methods" (2007, p. 83).

      Figure 4.3 elaborates on how the two collections of data were disseminated to contribute to data triangulation. These data sets are then aligned with the research questions. While colour-coding illustrates the main source of data for each question, data were frequently integrated, or mixed, from more than one source to respond to questions. This is elaborated on in the next section. Arrows illustrate the core use of data for triangulation (see Figure 4.3).

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Figure 4.3

Triangulation and Alignment of Research Questions With Data Collection and Analysis
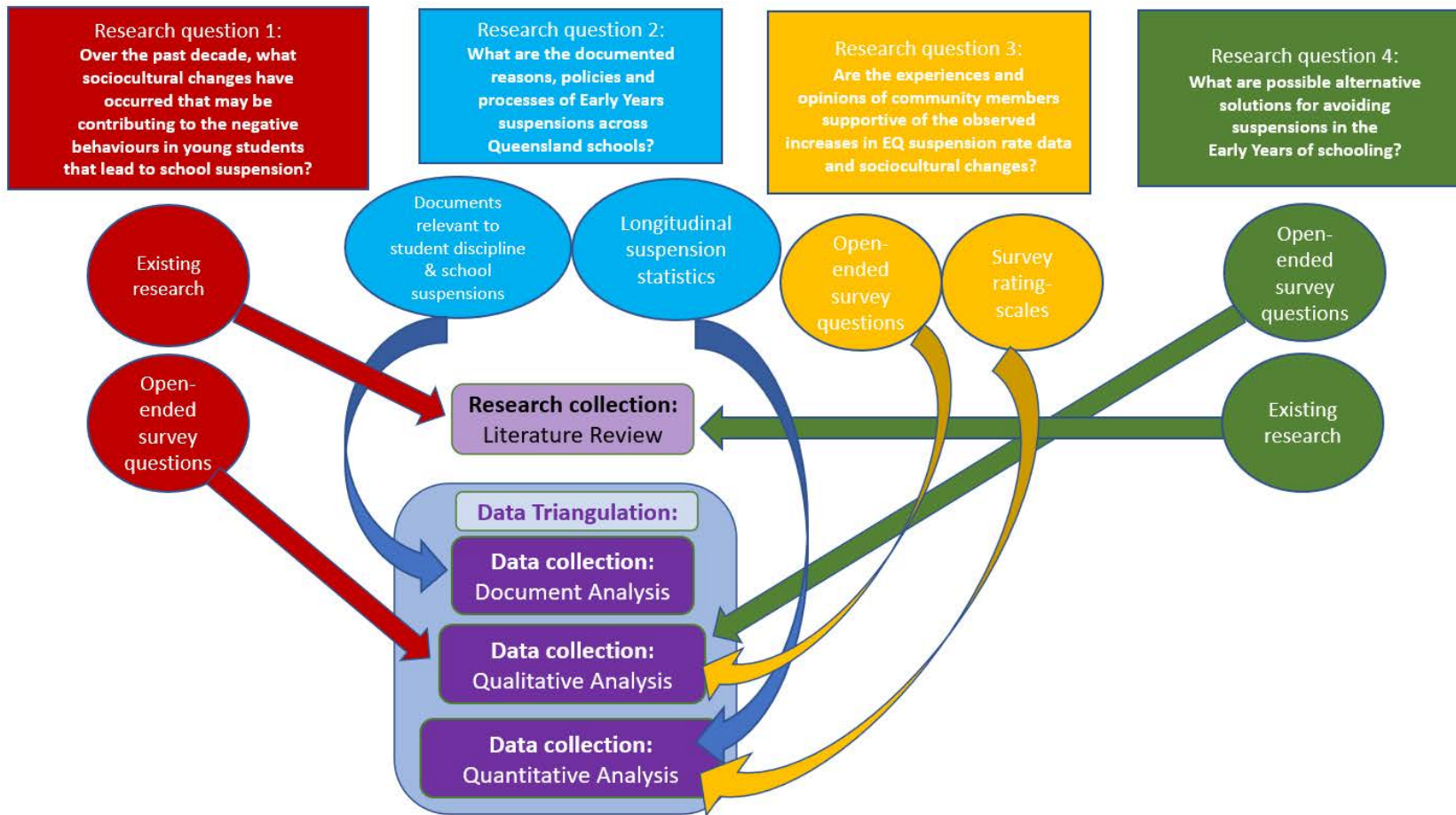
4.2.4. Validity and Reliability

The term *validity* refers to the strength, or soundness of the claims made by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Triangulation assists validity by providing multiple points of evidence to scrutinise claims against (Taylor, 2013). Triangulating HFSE data from multiple sources facilitated internal validation across data sets and compensated for potential bias or perspective emphasis (Bowen, 2009).

Internal validity requires competent selection, collection, and analysis of data to ensure the findings are well-grounded (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). An example from the HFSE study is the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), an existing, reliable psychometric tool (Dahlberg et al., 2017; Muris et al., 2003; Niclasen et al., 2013). This facilitated investigation of the relationship between psychological attributes of students and suspension risk. The survey generated data for three student groups: students who had never been suspended, students who had been suspended once, and students with multiple suspension events. Triangulation was achieved through comparison of the SDQ data with qualitative data parents provided about their children and DoE statistics, which expressed categorical reasons for each suspension event.

External validity on the other hand, measures whether the results of the study can be applied to the general population (Moon & Blackman, 2014). For instance, the DoE declined requests for authorisation to conduct the HFSE study on site. This resulted in reliance on participant recruitment via social media sites, affecting external validity. To elaborate, recruitment advertisements were distributed through the researcher's social media network and submitted to a number of Facebook group pages. These were primarily teacher or parenting groups. Whilst this *volunteer sampling*, or self-selection method meets criteria such as being ethical, was likely to generate rich data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and is relevant to the research question (Abrams, 2010), it did not provide *probability sampling*, or randomness of participants (Pluye & Hong, 2014). This restricted the generalisability to the study sample, rather than the general population. However, Abrams (2010) argues "probability sampling … does not fit the goals and assumptions of most qualitative research questions" (2010, p. 538). The HFSE study's aim of investigating school suspensions, an event that is

not experienced by the entirety of the general population, necessitated an element of participant selection rather than randomness.

Reliability expresses the stability of a data measurement when duplicated across homogenous testing samples (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). Including a uniform data collection method - parental reporting of their child's psychological attributes via the SDQ test - contributed to this study's reliability. To elaborate, the SDQ offered *internal consistency* (Goodman, 2001), or "the consistency of people's responses across the items on a multiple-item measure" (Jhangiani & Chiang, 2015, p. 98). In addition, parent reporting provided observer triangulation through multiple observers (Padgett, 2008), further establishing reliability.

4.2.5. *Mixed Methods Integration and Alignment of Data Collection with Research Questions*

Data integration occurred across several stages of the study, with the method of analysis determined by the research question being addressed. To illustrate, qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions were initially analysed thematically (Clarke & Braun, 2017). To achieve this, common words or phrases from survey responses were first colour coded. Responses were then grouped according to category and theme.

These analyses partially addressed the first, third and fourth research questions (see Figure 4.3). Qualitative survey responses were then transformed into quantitative data by organising themes into frequency distribution tables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This was useful for shaping a response for the fourth research question (see Figure 4.3), using frequency distributions to provide a focus for potential alternatives to suspension and student behaviour management.

In addition to clarity of theme frequency, the distribution tables provided for efficient comparison of categories and themes across all data sets in the data collections. For instance, themes relating to social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, and students with special needs emerged from both the document collection and the survey data collection. These findings informed the recommendations in Chapter 12.

The collection of independently authored reports, DoE suspension data, policies, and procedures underwent document analysis. Integration was achieved by multiple transformations of

data sets during analysis. For instance, documents associated with student discipline and suspensions

in Queensland state schools were evaluated and synthesised using *content analysis*. Described as a

process of "skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation"

(Bowen, 2009, p. 32), content analysis is valued for its flexibility and application to both qualitative

and quantitative methods (White & Marsh, 2006). It also offers reliability through replicability of

systematic procedures (Krippendorff, 2004; White & Marsh, 2006). Similar to the thematic process

used to analyse worded survey responses, content analysis involves detection of themes and categories

from the data (Labuschagne, 2015). However, unlike the data-driven thematic analysis (Clarke &

Braun, 2017) of HFSE survey responses, content analysis of the document collection - and the process

of selecting the documents themselves - observed *abductive* reasoning (Krippendorff, 2004).

In simple terms, abductive reasoning relies on logical inference, where observations fine-tune

possibilities, or hypotheses, until the most likely, or logical possibility remains (Douven, 2021). This

was achieved by first seeking documents that contained a preselected group of words or phrases

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) associated with school suspension and student discipline. These analyses

informed a response to the second research question (see Figure 4.3). Skimming these documents

revealed a previously unconsidered theme: increasing rates of school violence. Extending the

document collection to incorporate words and phrases associated with school violence revealed further

documents that confirmed the dilemma of violence in schools. The use of abductive reasoning also

improved reliability of the HFSE study by providing *warrants*, or justifications (Krippendorff, 2004;

Plowright, 2011), as described in Section 4.2.4. In addition, this finding from the document analysis

impacted the second research question: the evidence of school violence contained within them was the

likely impetus for the observed policy and procedure changes in 2020 regarding student behaviour

management.

Further transformation of these data (Krippendorff, 2004) contributed valuable evidence to the

timeline of sociocultural changes and events (see Figure 4.1). This process consisted of examining

documents to identify records of time-specific changes to education. Plotting these findings onto the

timeline, then comparing them with fluctuations in suspension rates, identified a considerable

sociocultural change. An amendment to education legislation regarding student discipline in November 2013 coincided with an alarming annual increase in Prep student suspensions in 2014. This finding further informed the first research question (see Figure 4.3).

Quantitative elements were also extracted from DoE documents. Longitudinal Queensland state school suspension statistics were collected and collated in tables to measure annual rates of increases or decreases from 2012 until 2019 (see Table 5.1). An accumulative record was maintained to project suspension and enrolment trends across almost a decade. Annual Preparatory student suspension and enrolment rates were also recorded on the sociocultural timeline (see Figure 4.1), illustrating annual trends. These data were compared with survey responses, both qualitative and quantitative, to address the third research question (see Figure 4.3).

A third data set involved the quantitative survey questions. While nominal data provided valuable demographic information regarding respondents and their children, ordinal data measured respondents' opinions regarding the most and least likely reasons for suspensions (Johnson & Morgan, 2016). These analyses were compared with qualitative survey responses and the document analysis to answer the second research question (see Figure 4.3).

The parent-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which was embedded in the online survey, was another source of quantitative data. The SDQ incorporates a 3-point Likert scale (Goodman, 2001) using the response categories *Not True*; *Somewhat True*; and *Certainly True*. Once scored (see Appendix J), responses revealed psychological attributes of respondents' children, a valuable measurement for comparing the suspended and non-suspended children included in the HFSE study. These observations assisted in establishing several recommendations in response to research question 4 (see Figure 4.3).

This section described how research questions and data contributed to research rigor (Gill & Gill, 2020) through warrantability, triangulation, validity, and reliability (Krippendorff, 2004; Plowright, 2011). Authentic use of mixed methods was also explained (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Research questions were then aligned to the data sources and analysis methods. The following

section explains the data collection procedure, describing instruments and participants. Section 4.4

explains the data analysis process.

4.3. Data Collection: Instruments and Participants

While only two distinct collections of data were collected for this study, a researcher-designed

online survey and the document collection, they were disseminated into six discrete data sets. The

survey contributed three sets: qualitative open-ended survey responses; quantitative survey data

recording demographics and opinions of survey respondents; and the parent-rated SDQ data regarding

respondent's children. The document collection provided the remaining three sets: longitudinal DoE

suspension and enrolment statistics; historical and current policies and procedures, also published by

the DoE; and independently authored reports regarding student discipline and school suspensions.

Incorporating hard data into the document analysis, such as annually reported statistics,

strengthened findings by providing concrete metrics to support soft data, such as interpretations of the

document collection (Dalglish et al., 2021; www.thetoolkit.me). Statistical data published by the DoE

also includes textural information regarding historical changes that may impact the interpretation of

analysis, such as modifications to reporting procedures, rendering it a necessary addition to the

document collection.

4.3.1. Ethics

Before collecting data via survey distribution, the survey (Appendix B), social media

advertisement (Appendix B) and community bulletin recruitment advertisements (Appendix D) were

approved by James Cook University's internal Ethics Department on 13th June 2018 (Appendix E).

The survey was published on the SurveyMonkey® site on 20th July 2018, with data collection ceasing

31st November 2019. The original Ethics Approval, H7401, provided for the inclusion of documents

published between 2012–2016. However, as the study progressed, further statistical data were

published by the DoE, so a request to extend the collection time was sought and approved 23rd

December 2019 (Appendix F). This provided an extension to 30th June 2021.

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4.3.2. Data Collection Instruments

Both new and existing data were collected for this study. An anonymous online survey, developed by the researcher in collaboration with her supervisors (see Appendix B), collected responses from participants and contributed new, study-specific data. Existing data consisted of longitudinal DoE suspension and enrolment statistics, collated from annual reports retrieved from the DoE's website (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). Policies, procedures, and reports regarding student discipline were also accessed via the DoE's website. Finally, reports authored by independent bodies on the topics of student discipline, school suspensions, and student behaviour were identified and gathered.

4.3.2.1. Online Survey. Invitations to participate in the anonymous survey were advertised on two social media platforms (Appendix C), Facebook and Instagram. These were posted on the researchers' own social media accounts as well as on selected Facebook groups, including teaching communities, online gaming support networks, and parent groups. In addition, an advertisement was posted on local community bulletin boards in four local shopping centres (Appendix D).

All invitations provided a link to the survey (Appendix B), which was hosted by Survey Monkey®, a global company specialising in online survey hosting and management. The social media invitations included a hyperlink to the survey, while the printed version posted on community boards included pull-off tabs with the survey website address printed on them. The survey included an information statement and checkbox confirming respondents' consent before respondents could progress to the online survey questions (see Appendix G).

Survey respondents who wished to contribute additional information about their experiences were invited to arrange an interview with the researcher. This was facilitated by a link to a purpose-built website. The purpose of the website was to avoid survey responses being linked to identifiable details required to facilitate interviews. This step maintained anonymity of survey respondents. It also embedded an interview information page (see Appendix H) and an informed consent form (Appendix I), requiring potential interviewees to check a box to communicate consent.

Survey questions 1–14 contained closed questions. Participant consent was the first numbered question of the survey. Questions 2–4 collected demographic details, such as gender, age, and occupation. Questions 5–13 provided rating scales and category selections to determine respondents' opinions regarding most and least common causes of school suspensions. Question 14 provided a checklist of school year level grades from Preparatory to Grade 12, asking respondents to indicate their opinion regarding which grade/s were appropriate to issue school suspensions.

Questions 15–19 were open-ended questions, designed to elicit worded responses. To promote completion of this section of the survey, these five questions were rendered mandatory for completion of the survey; respondents could not move onto the next question until the previous question had been answered. These questions were framed around opinions on why Preparatory suspensions were increasing, what student behaviours warranted immediate suspension, suggestions for alternatives to suspensions, suggestions for reducing behaviours that typically lead to suspension, and post-suspension return-to-school processes. Only one question explicitly identified the Prep year as the focus for responses. This was due to uncertainty whether the social media requests for participants would generate an adequate response rate if questions were restricted to Prep students, therefore all other questions were not cohort-specific.

Questions 20–44 were targeted at respondents who had children. The first question gathered demographic information about the respondent's child or children. This was followed by 25 parent-rated questions regarding traits and attributes of each child, presented as a 3-point Likert scale (Goodman, 2001). These were obtained, with authorisation, from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, or SDQ (see Appendix J), to establish whether suspended students' traits were similar or dissimilar to non-suspended students. The SDQ was repeated five times to allow families to provide details for multiple children. A further two questions followed each SDQ duplication. These asked whether respondents' child/ren attended a list of extra-curricular activities, and whether they accessed screened devices, including amount of time spent on them.

Question 40 asked whether the respondent's child had ever been suspended from school. Questions 41–44 applied to respondents replying yes to question 40. These asked for additional

information, such as what reason was given for the suspension, what grade the child was in when suspended, whether the child had special or additional needs verification, and whether the parent agreed with the school's decision to suspend their child. The final two questions, 45 and 46, asked whether the respondent wished to arrange an interview, providing a hyperlink to the website dedicated to collecting contact details to facilitate interviews (see Appendix H).

4.3.2.1. Dedicated Website to Facilitate Confidential Interviews. The dedicated website was designed by the researcher and published on a private domain. The website allowed survey respondents to request an interview with the researcher after reading and agreeing to the embedded consent form by checking a box beside the consent agreement (Appendix I). An automated email was delivered to the researcher to advise that a request for interview had been received.

Three interview requests were received. One was received from a male, who withdrew consent when asked whether his wife would be willing to participate in the interview. A second request was followed up by telephone and email. The phone number provided was not answered. After several attempts, a voicemail was left for the respondent, along with an email. Neither were returned. The third participant was interviewed via Zoom®, an online video-conferencing tool. The interview was recorded using the Zoom® recording feature and saved to the researcher's laptop. It was deemed inappropriate to include this interview in the study due to the interviewee being known to the researcher. This familiarity led to student-specific shared knowledge being discussed in the context of the study focus. The workplace association between interviewee and researcher presented a risk of these students' identities becoming known, even after a de-identification process, thus its inclusion in the HFSE study was abandoned.

4.3.2.2. Document Collection. Government documents were selected and downloaded from the DoE website. An overhaul of the department's website, along with several departmental name changes across the 8 year timeframe relevant to the HFSE study (2012–2019), hindered the collection of some departmental documents. This was largely overcome by frequenting the DoE website and downloading documents throughout the study period, rather than only completing a single sweep of the website at the beginning or end of the study. Some historic documents were able to be located by

utilising the *WayBack Machine*, an extensive "non-profit … digital library of Internet sites and other

cultural artifacts in digital form" (Internet Archive, n.d.). Whilst these methods were successful in

retrieving most of the documents identified as pertaining to student behaviour and discipline, several

remained irretrievable.

Suitable DoE documents were identified by locating specific webpages, such as student

behaviour or school discipline, on the DoE website. The policy and procedure register was also

accessed (DoE, n.d.-e). These websites and pages provided links to further documents, such as

templates for behaviour management documents, or resources such as functional behaviour assessment

tools and information regarding departmental initiatives and programs. Many of these documents also

contained hyperlinks to additional documents or webpages. Once relevant documents were located,

they were downloaded and saved. All relevant documents were tracked on the timeline of

sociocultural changes and events (see Figure 4.1.).

Statistical suspension and enrolment documents were located via the Education Departments'

open data portal (Queensland Government, n.d.). These are updated annually by the department, with

only the most current five years of data published each year. Data is generally updated mid-year. Thus,

the earliest datasets available when the HFSE study commenced in January 2017 were for 2012–2016.

Subsequent years were captured when they were published. These data were collated and transformed

by the researcher using Microsoft Excel to create a table recording suspension statistics for the period

of 2012–2019 (see Table 5.1). Annual suspension and enrolment statistics were also added to the

timeline of sociocultural changes and events (see Figure 4.1.).

In addition to the statistical information located on the DoE website, several reports were also

identified as relevant to student behaviour and discipline. A departmental report on *school disciplinary*

absences (SDAs), otherwise known as suspensions (DETE, 2014b), was located by entering the term

school disciplinary absences into a website search-engine. The Royal Commission's restrictive

practices issues paper (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People

with Disability (RCVANEPwD, 2020a) and report of public hearing 2 (RCVANEPwD, 2020b) were

both located whilst searching for the term *restrictive practices*, prompted by the discovery of a new

DoE procedure implemented in 2020 regarding the restraint of students (DoE, 2020i). A review of education in Queensland state schools for Students with Disability (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) was also discovered during this search as it was mentioned as an exhibit during the Royal Commission inquiry. A report of the results from a survey of Australian principals regarding their workplace wellbeing (Riley et al., 2020) was also discovered during the process of document analysis. This arose when a shift in terminology was observed, with terms regarding school violence appearing with increasing frequency in contemporary DoE documents. These five documents were also downloaded and saved.

      4.3.2.3. Participants. The online survey was completed by 70 participants, who are identified as respondents throughout the study. Of these, only two were male. The majority were married or partnered, with ten single female respondents. Seven respondents identified as Australian Aboriginal, two identified as British, one as Irish, and one as European. The remaining 59 respondents identified as non-indigenous Australians. Their age ranged from 22 years to 61 years, with a mean age of 41.33 years.

      Respondent occupations spanned 50 different descriptions. These were categorised as educators or non-educators during analysis. Examples of the 41 educators included principals, teachers, and teacher aides. Examples of the 29 non-educators included occupations such as nurse, counsellor, manager, and stay-at-home parent. Notably, there were only three representatives of school administrative staff: one principal and two deputy principals. Per annum incomes ranged from $20,000 to over $120,000, although 41 respondents earnt over $90,000 annually. Detailed respondent demographics are elaborated on in Chapter 6. Although parent respondents reported a total of 61 children, only 55 were included in the SDQ analysis. See Section 4.4.2.1.3 for further information regarding the elimination of 6 children to maintain the integrity of the study.

4.4. Analysis Process

      The scope of these data sets was vast, however the integrated method in which they were analysed (Plowright, 2011) created a sense of instinctiveness and sturdiness during the process of analysis. An example of this is demonstrated by the five open-ended questions contained in the survey.

While qualitative by design and content, these were also used as quantitative data, where frequency

tables were created in order to identify the most common opinions of respondents, as well as whether

certain opinions were forwarded by a higher percentage of either of the two occupation categories

identified (Johnson et al., 2007).

Survey data were extracted from SurveyMonkey®'s website as SPSS files. SPSS, or Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences, is a software package marketed by IBM® (n.d.). Version 26 was used

for this study. Its user-friendly interface and zero-cost access through James Cook University to its

research students influenced its selection as the analysis tool for the HFSE study. The following

section describes the analysis process, beginning with the qualitative data. Quantitative data and

document analysis follow.

4.4.1. Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) was applied to the worded responses received for

the open-ended survey questions, 15–19 (see Appendix B). The rich data obtained from parents, carers

and school staff for these necessitated a flexible, interpretive approach, where complex data were

examined to identify and classify common themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These themes were

initially analysed line-by-line within the boundary of each survey question. This was achieved by

firstly extracting worded responses for each open-ended question, before selected text was colour-

coded to identify themes (step 1, Figure 4.4). Once colour-coded, the identified themes were extracted

from the responses (step 2, Figure 4.4) and arranged into similar categories for each question (step 3,

Figure 4.4). They were then analysed as a whole, exploring further patterns and differences within and

across other themes to inform the discussion (step 4, Figure 4.4).

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Figure 4.4

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Questions - Process and Examples from HFSE Study
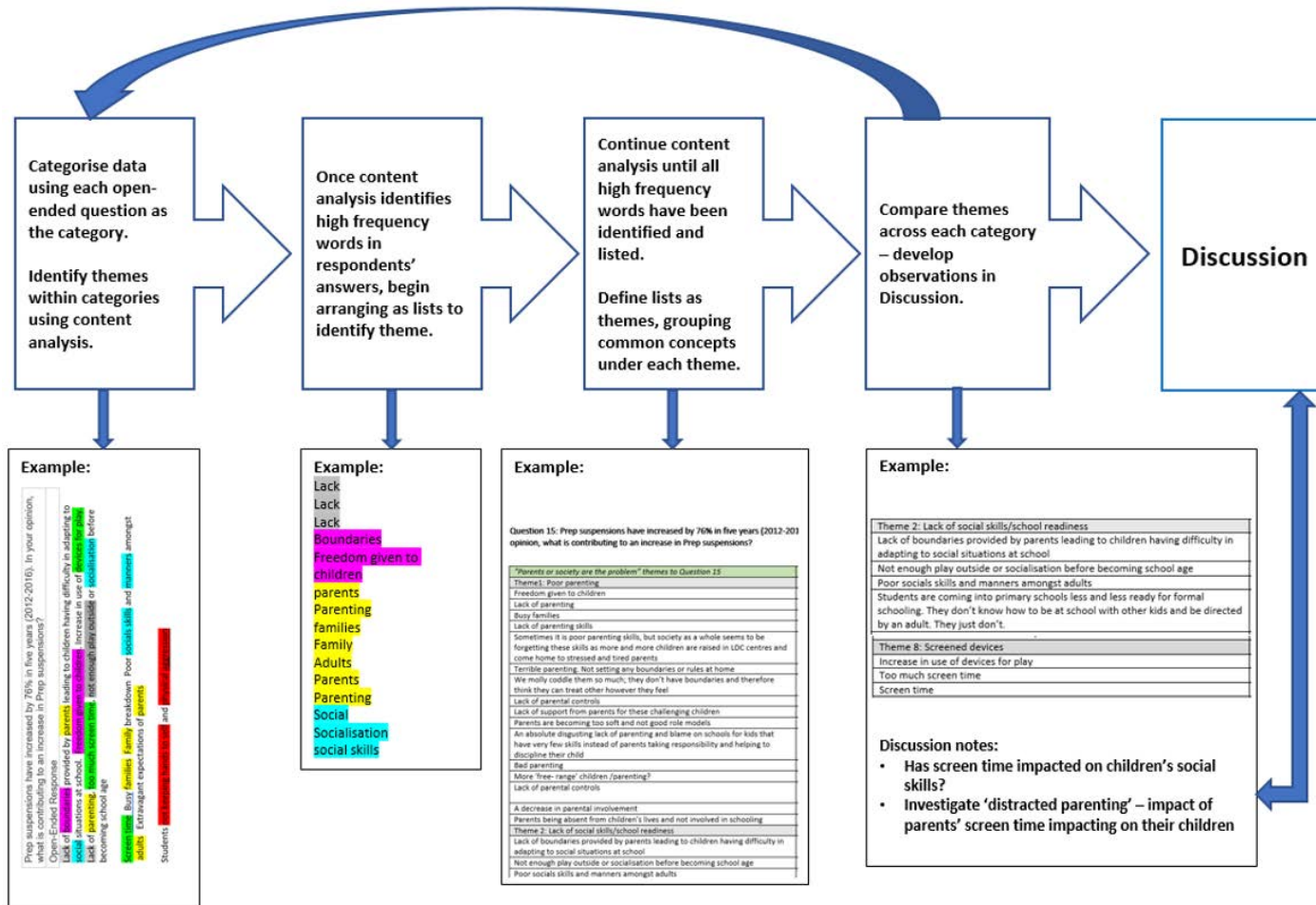
This constant comparative method, which requires the researcher to seek relationships between themes, is somewhat similar to the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014). However, grounded theory seeks to devise a theory from the data, rather than attempt to support or discredit an expected outcome (Cho & Lee, 2014). In comparison, the thematic approach seeks patterns in the data through a process of identifying categories and then establishing themes in response to pre-defined research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Respondents were asked to record demographic information, including their occupation and age. Whilst these closed questions essentially generated quantitative data, when viewed alongside the qualitative responses, a more comprehensive picture of the respondent became evident. Plowright (2011) acknowledges the personal and professional context of the researcher influences their perspective on the study topic; these contexts of the respondent similarly shape their views. This was useful during analysis, as the role of the respondent, i.e., parent or educator, uncovered nuances that shaped some thematic categories, such as locus of responsibility. An example of this is illustrated by survey question 15: "In your opinion, what is contributing to an increase in Prep suspensions?" (See Appendix B). Recording the occupations of respondents provided an added layer of transparency, illuminating how culture, position and perceptions can be juxtaposed, even in smaller community settings such as schools.

4.4.1.1. Document Analysis – Content Analysis. An online search for terms relevant to school suspension, student discipline, and student behaviour identified a number of other relevant documents. Once obtained electronically, they were read for familiarity before being collated chronologically from oldest to most recent document (see Table 4.1). Listing them chronologically also provided opportunity to evaluate whether document purpose and content have changed over time.

Table 4.1

Chronological List of Documents Relevant to Student Discipline in Queensland State Schools

Date created	Document name	Author	Document type	Student discipline	School violence
2013	Advancing Partnerships: Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Framework	DETE	Policy	0	0
07.11.13	Amendment Act 2013 (Act No. 59 of 2013): Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools)	Parliament of Queensland	Policy amendment	257	0
2013	Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013: Explanatory notes	Parliament of Queensland	Policy amendment explanatory notes	304	0
01.02.13	Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment V:7.4	DET	Procedure	124	47
2013	Statement of Expectations for a Disciplined School Environment	DETE	Statement	2	0
n.d.	The Code of School Behaviour: Better Behaviour, Better Learning	DETE	Standard	5	0
24.01.14	Guidelines for developing a Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students	DETE	Guideline	24	10
Oct 2014	Performance Insights: School Disciplinary Absences	DETE	Report	403	8
Feb 2017	Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools	Deloitte Access Economics	Independent Review	62	167
12.10.18	Occupational Violence Protection V1.0	DoE	Procedure	2	44
Nov 2019	Report of Public Hearing 2: Inclusive education in Queensland, preliminary inquiry	[a] RCVANEPwD	Royal Commission Report of Public Hearing	54	32
23.01.20	Restrictive Practices V1.0	DoE	Procedure	2	157
Feb 2020	Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey: 2019 Data	Riley, See, Marsh & Dicke	Report	0	88
May 2020	Restrictive Practices Issues paper	[a] RCVANEPwD	Royal Commission Inquiry paper	0	42
2020	Student Code of Conduct (web only)	DoE	Policy	3	0
2020	Student Discipline	DoE	Procedure	135	2
Nov 2020	Principal Guidelines: Student Discipline V1.5	DoE	Guideline	711	1
2020	Cancellation of Enrolment	DoE	Procedure	3	0
2020	Refusal to Enrol – Risk to Safety of Wellbeing	DoE	Procedure	5	1
n.d.	Student Code of Conduct (Full Exemplar)	DoE	Exemplar	112	25
n.d.	Risk Assessment – Behaviour, Safety and Wellbeing	DoE	Tool	7	19

Note. [a] Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Content analysis was applied to each document by electronically searching key words using the embedded search tool in Adobe Acrobat Reader, the PDF reader used in this study. Table 4.2 lists terminology searched to identify documents relevant to the HFSE study.

Table 4.2

Terminology of Content Analysis Search Criteria

Student discipline terminology	School violence terminology
suspend, suspension(s), suspended	physical(ly)
exclude, exclusion(s), excluded, excluding	restraint, restrictive
School Disciplinary Absence(s), SDA(s)	violent, violence
discipline, disciplinary	

Documents with a zero search-word count were eliminated from the collection. Remaining documents were then read individually by the researcher a second time. Each pre-selected word was viewed within the document to ensure the in-text context aligned with this study's focus (White & Marsh, 2006). Those that did not have relevance to suspensions or undesirable student behaviours were removed from the total word count for that particular word. This ensured the content analysis maintained a clear focus on suspension processes, rather than exposing it to "misleading interpretations" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 34). For example, "physical" was included if its use in the document expressed a behaviour likely to lead to suspension, such as physical conflict, but discarded otherwise, for example, physical disability.

The resultant document collection consisted of 21 documents, including four documents created by authors other than the DoE (see Table 4.1). These were distributed across two categories: government-created documents and independently authored documents. Each document underwent a third key search word procedure, this time with an ethnographic lens to seek evidence of historical sociocultural inferences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This led to several documents being added to the sociocultural timetable (see Figure 4.1).

After arranging documents chronologically, analysis of their content was reported narratively. Analysis focused on document purpose, association with other documents in the collection (for

example, procedures aligned with policy directives), and historical relevance. Changes to policies or procedures were tracked. Comparisons were made between retired and replacement documents with a particular focus on textual and semantic features.

4.4.2. Quantitative Data

SPSS® 26 was used to perform statistical analysis of the quantitative survey data. Descriptive statistics were either transformed into tabulated data using Microsoft Excel or used to calculate effect size (https://www.socscistatistics.com/effectsize/default3.aspx). These data were also transformed to apply comparisons across the data, such as comparing annual suspension rates in the Preparatory year with other primary grades. Detailed descriptions of specific quantitative analysis processes follow below, beginning with the SDQ data.

4.4.2.1. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Data Analysis. The SDQ is "a behavioural screening questionnaire that provides a balanced coverage of children and young people's behaviours, emotions, and relationships" (Goodman, 1997, p. 581). It has been benchmarked against existing psychometric tests, such as the Rutter parent and teacher questionnaires (Elander & Rutter, 1996), where findings indicated it was comparable to the Rutter questionnaires (Goodman, 1997). However, the SDQ was designed to be a more contemporary tool, balancing a focus on problems with the incorporation of strengths or positive attributes. The SDQ also provides "better coverage of inattention, peer relationships, and prosocial behaviour…" (Goodman, 1997, p. 584). It contains 25 qualifying statements which are rated as either *Not True*; *Somewhat True*; or *Certainly True*.

Youth in Mind (youthinmind.com) administer the SDQ and required that several stipulations be met prior to authorisation of the license. In 2018, when the online survey was being developed for this study, Youth in Mind did not have a "plug and play" online version of the SDQ available to facilitate inclusion in external surveys. They advised they were piloting a licensing system for individuals or organisations wishing to create their own online versions of the SDQ. However, Youth in Mind required the web version to duplicate the paper version of the SDQ as closely as possible, including identical wording, using similar colours, and avoidance of flashing icons.

Youth in Mind advised this was vital for maintaining the integrity of the questionnaire as a worldwide resource across many platforms and contexts. Changes to the presentation of the SDQ could essentially undermine the comparability of SDQ data collected in a variety of ways, making it less effective when comparing results across several different studies or clinics. In addition, the copyright notice on the paper version also had to be visually embedded in the web version. To ensure these conditions were adhered to, Youth in Mind mandated final approval of licensee's proposed online versions prior to authorisation (see Appendix J for further mandated stipulations). Once Youth in Mind were satisfied with the web version of the SDQ and had received payment for the administration of the license, authorisation was confirmed via email on 10th July 2018.

4.4.2.1.1. Traits Measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ was embedded in the online Home From School Early (HFSE) survey. The SDQ can be completed by parents, guardians or teachers. It can also be self-completed by individuals aged 18 or over. The HFSE study applied the parent-rated version. Survey respondents completed the rating scale questionnaire based on their observations and knowledge of their child, using the scales *Not True*; *Somewhat True*; and *Certainly True* for responses. Once scored, responses measure traits along five trait scales: emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial aptitude. Trait scales were then combined to generate three further scores identifying problematic behaviours: total difficulties, externalising, and internalising. The five strengths and difficulties trait scales are described below. Each behavioural score is described directly after the traits associated with it. To avoid confusion and to delineate between a strength/difficulty scale and a behaviour score, the former will be referred to as trait scales.

4.4.2.1.2. The Five Strengths and Difficulties Trait Scales and Three Behavioural Scores. The SDQ is comprised of 25 items, or statements, that are aligned with problematic traits or behaviours. Items are randomised throughout the questionnaire to minimise potential for biased responses. Some trait scale scores are reversed to further guard against response bias. For example, if a parent responded *Certainly True* to "Generally obedient, usually does what adults request" (Item 7) for the conduct problems scale, it contributed zero value to the *Certainly True* score. However, if the

parent responded *Not True* to Item 7, this contributed a score value of two towards the conduct problems trait scale. The higher the total score for the conduct problems trait scale, the more likely the child would exhibit these traits.

Responses are weighted according to the SDQ administrators' scoring notes to provide a measure of the child's likelihood to exhibit the five trait scales. Two scoring bands are available: a three-band categorisation and a four-band categorisation. The four-band categorisation was selected for the HFSE study due to the additional category of *very high*, providing clearer indication of those identified with at-risk of suspension behaviours. When totalled, each strength or difficulty score is scaled from *close to average* (80%), *slightly raised* (10%), *high* (5%) or *very high* (5% - or *low/very low*, in the case of prosocial skills).

Total scores for each trait scale vary (see Appendix K). The maximum total for each of the five trait scales is 10. With the exception of the prosocial trait scale, the higher the total score, the more elevated the trait is likely to be. The prosocial trait scale rates a child's tendencies towards empathy, compassion, and altruism. Scores for this trait scale operate in reverse to the remaining four trait scales; therefore, children with strong prosocial skills will likely achieve the highest scores. Items include "Considerate of other people's feelings" and "Helpful if someone is hurt." Appendix K provides the full scoring criteria.

The emotional problems trait scale consists of questions rating characteristics such as fearfulness, anxiety, and low mood. Items aligned with these traits included "Often complains of headaches" and "Nervous or clingy in new situations." Scores between 5–6 are categorised as high, while scores between 7–10 are considered a very high indication of emotional problems.

The peer problems trait scale features attributes that detract from a child's affability. These include a preference for solitary play, difficulty forming friendships, and being a target for bullying by other children. For example, Item 23 reads "Gets along better with adults than with other children." Scores above four indicate the child is at risk of experiencing negative social interactions.

The conduct problems trait scale detects tendencies toward aggressive outbursts, physical violence, and dishonesty. These are identified through items suggesting "Often fights with other children." Scores above four suggest the child may be averse to authority and quick to anger.

The hyperactivity trait scale entails questions regarding a child's predisposition toward overactivity, poor concentration, and impulse control. Items stating, "Restless, overactive" and "Constantly fidgeting or squirming" are aligned with hyperactivity traits. Scores above eight indicate the child is highly likely to demonstrate hyperactive behaviours.

Totalling the emotional and peer problems trait scale scores generates an internalising behaviour score. Social withdrawal, anxiety and mood disorders are commonly described as internalising behaviours. Scores above nine are considered high. The closer the score is to 20, the more likely internalising behaviours are demonstrated. Note that the SDQ scoring criteria do not provide scoring bands for the internalising or externalising scores. As the trait scale scores are obtained by adding sub-scores together, the score bands were similarly combined.

Tallying the hyperactivity and conduct problems trait scale scores generates an externalising behaviours score. These include behaviours such as physical aggression, quick temper, and aggressive verbal language. Scores above 12 are considered high, while scores between 15–20 suggest a very high likelihood that externalising behaviours would be observed.

Finally, summing the scores for the emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems and hyperactivity trait scales generates a total difficulties score. Scores between 17–19 are considered high, while scores between 20–40 suggest very high indicators of problematic behaviours.

4.4.2.1.3. Participant Qualification. Parents reported on 61 children in the Home From School Early (HFSE) survey. However, only the responses provided for 55 children were included in the SDQ analysis. One home-schooled child was not included due to incomplete data. Additionally, several respondents overlooked the question asking whether or not their child had experienced a suspension. With suspensions being the focus of the HFSE study, this was considered a critical element for data analysis. Thus, the additional five children with missing data were eliminated from the SDQ analysis. Of the remaining 55 children, four had been suspended once (7.2%) and nine had

experienced multiple suspensions (16.4%). The remainder were children who had never been suspended.

4.4.2.2. Survey Respondent Demographics. Respondent data such as gender, marital status, occupation, and income were collated into a spreadsheet using SPSS descriptive statistics. Data for suspended children were extracted and reported alongside parent demographics in a frequency table. Data for all 55 children included in the HFSE study were distributed into three groups for comparison: not suspended, suspended once, and suspended multiple times. Descriptive statistics provided the foundation for reporting of child data, such as type of school attended, involvement in extracurricular activities, screen time habits, grade level they were suspended in, and reason for suspension.

Survey rating scale data, which recorded respondent opinions concerning the probability of each suspension reason applying to various grade levels, were analysed for frequencies along two scales. Due to low sample size, responses for the scales *Not at all likely* and *Probably likely* were combined into the single scale category, *Not likely*, while *Likely* and *Very likely* were all counted as *Likely* scores. Similarly, SPSS descriptive statistics were used to analyse opinions regarding the single most and single least likely suspension reason for grade-level groups. Both sets of data were compared to confirm response consistency. Responses indicating opinions of the most appropriate grade/s (P–G12) to issue suspensions to were also analysed using SPSS descriptive statistics before being transformed into a bar chart.

4.4.2.3. Document Analysis – Longitudinal Statistics. The document analysis spanned both qualitative and quantitative data analyses. Quantitative data was comprised of longitudinal DoE suspension statistics. As the DoE only publish statistics for the five most current years, two sets of DoE data were collated to provide a single data table for 2012–2019 using Microsoft Excel (see Table 5.1). In addition, both suspension and enrolment statistics were recorded on the socioeconomic timeline (Figure 4.1). DoE longitudinal suspension data were downloaded in Excel spreadsheet format (see Figure 4.5). DoE spreadsheet data fields were selected to report annual suspension numbers for each of the eight suspension reasons (see Table 1.1) for each year level. These were organised into grade levels for comparison. Percentage rates of annual increase or decrease were calculated in Excel.

Figure 4.5

Example of DoE Longitudinal Suspension Data in Excel Spreadsheet Format

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School Disciplinary Absences by student demographics

Released August 2020
opendata@qed.qld.

Collection Year	2019
Semester	(All)
Region	(All)
Reason Description	Physical Misconduct involving Adults involving an object
Indigenous Status	(All)

Total Incident Count	SDA Type			
Year Level	Short Suspension	Long Suspension	Exclusion	Grand Total
Prep Year	178			178
Year 1	195	2		197
Year 2	236	6	1	243
Year 3	206	7	2	215
Year 4	213	18	7	238
Year 5	140	5	2	147
Year 6	141	7	9	157
Year 7	142	13	8	163
Year 8	123	19	12	154
Year 9	107	12	8	127
Year 10	53	5	5	63
Year 11	22	4	2	28
Year 12	8	1		9
Grand Total	**1 764**	**99**	**56**	**1 919**

Note. Image from Department of Education, School Disciplinary Absences by Student Demographics. (2020j). CC BY 4.0.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research approaches and design elements of the HFSE study. It introduced the sociocultural timetable (Figure 4.1), a valuable tool for identifying events that occurred around the time suspension increases were observed. Data collection methods and instruments were described, as was an explanation of how these contributed to the warrantability, validity and reliability of the study. Triangulation was acknowledged as core to the study's rigor. Finally, the analysis process was explained, first describing methods used for analysing qualitative data before elaborating on quantitative data analysis methods. The following chapter presents the first of these analyses, the document analysis.

Chapter 5: Document Analysis, Findings and Discussion

5.1. Preface

The previous chapter explained the HFSE study's design, data collection and methodology process. This chapter introduces and describes documents selected for their relevance to student discipline, school suspensions and school violence, before analysing them in context to the study. It also presents 8 years of collated Queensland primary school suspension statistics, identifying the increase in violent behaviours in schools. Collectively, these documents provide a framework to broadly analyse changes in language and culture before examining key government and independently authored documents in greater detail.

5.2. Analysis Process and Alignment with Research Questions

The method outlined in Chapter 4 was employed to locate and collect relevant documents before the content analysis process was applied. This identified directive terminology, consisting of vocabulary relevant to student discipline, as well as school violence terminology (see Table 4.2).

Eight documents were eliminated due to low or zero use of preselected vocabulary. From the remaining twenty-one documents, two main categories emerged: documents created by government bodies, and documents created by independent authors. These categories were further refined into two sub-categories: documents with higher frequency of terminology associated with student discipline, and documents that had higher frequency of words associated with school violence. Whilst most documents were dated, four government-authored documents were not.

The Department of Education (DoE) do not electronically cross-reference archived documents with updated versions; thus, a circa date was established for the undated documents via their authorship name. This method helped estimate their approximate date of implementation by tracing historical departmental name changes. Notably, older documents tended to use the word behaviour when referring to student behaviour and suspensions, whereas contemporary documents used the word discipline.

These subtle semantic clues have been valuable for aligning documents chronologically and to make their place as historical artifacts explicit. Sequencing them provided a sociocultural lens,

where significant events became evident in the timeline. These consisted of political party changes,

reinventions of the Department of Education's name and ideology, a cultural shift away from schools

as authoritative entities towards more collaborative communities, trending societal values, adoption of

inclusivity as strength rather than disability, and increases in school violence. Together with

observations of subtle time-stamped nuances such as language, text format, author, and audience,

evidence emerged to answer the research question: "Over the past decade, what sociocultural changes

have occurred that may be contributing to the negative behaviours leading to increased school

suspensions of young students?"

Education is a complex business, as the volume of documents authored by the DoE

demonstrates. Several documents collected during the research project (2017–2021) have since been

archived and replaced by updated documents to reflect critical policy and procedural changes. A

timeline of departmental legislation and procedural changes since 2013 are illustrated in Figure 5.1,

demonstrating the complexity of these changes. The identified key documents are elaborated on in the

discussion at the end of the chapter. Some lengthy document names have been abbreviated to improve

readability. Figure 5.1 includes these abbreviations.

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Figure 5.1

Timeline of Government Student Discipline Documents and Changes 2013-2021
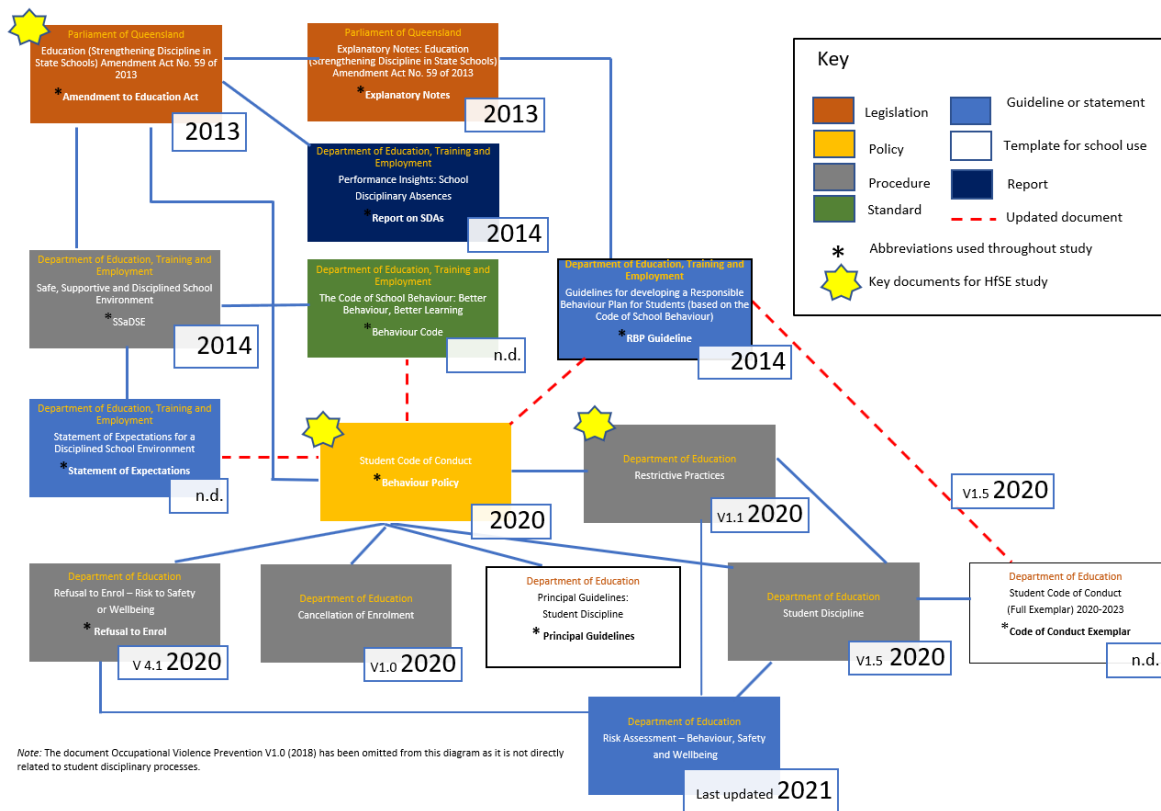
The documents illustrated in Figure 5.1 consist of the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013*, which is a formal amendment to existing legislation, and the "Explanatory Notes, Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Bill 2013,*"* which express the objectives of the policy amendment. The "Explanatory Notes" (2013) state the intention of these changes is to provide school principals with greater flexibility and autonomy to address student discipline at school level. These changes to the Education Act required the creation of the following documents to facilitate the implementation of new disciplinary actions.

The "Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment*"* (SSaDSE) procedure (DET, 2014) was one such document. Whilst it was originally introduced in 2014, there were over seven version changes to this document between 2014 and 2017, when it was retired. It is no longer retrievable from the DoE website. The SSaDSE's purpose was to mandate that all state schools develop a responsible behaviour plan for their students, stipulating when physical restraint and

outside-school-hours detention may be employed. This procedure also required additional

documentation to support its execution. These included:

- "Guidelines for Developing a Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students" ("RBP guideline"; DETE, 2014a)

- "Statement of Expectations for a Disciplined School Environment" ("Statement of Expectations"; DETE, n.d.-c)

- "Code of School Behaviour: Better Behaviour Better Learning" ("Behaviour Code"; DETE, n.d.-b)

"Performance Insights: School Disciplinary Absences" ("Report on SDAs"; DETE, 2014b) reports on statistics and trends regarding school suspensions, exclusions, and cancellations between the years 2006–2013. The report refers to the aforementioned Amendment to Education Act (2013), framing it as "expanded disciplinary powers" (2014b, p. v.). It is also the first document retrieved electronically that contains the term School Disciplinary Absences or its acronym, SDAs.

The "Student Code of Conduct" ("Behaviour Policy"; DoE, 2021g) policy was implemented in 2020, replacing the Behaviour Code (DETE, n.d.-b) and associated documents. Again, this policy implementation required an update of supporting documents. These included:

- "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i)

- "Refusal to Enrol - Risk to Safety or Wellbeing" ("Refusal to Enrol"; DoE, 2021d)

- "Cancellation of Enrolment" (DoE, 2020a)

- "Student Discipline procedure" (DoE, 2020k)

- "Principal Guidelines: Student Discipline" ("Principal Guidelines"; DoE, n.d.-f)

- "Risk Assessment - Behaviour, Safety and Wellbeing" ("Risk Assessment"; DoE, 2021e)

- "Student Code of Conduct (Full Exemplar) 2020-2023" (DoE, 2021h)

The timeline suggests "Restrictive Practices*"* (DoE, 2020i) was the catalyst for the "Student Code of Conduct" (DoE, 2021h) policy implementation. "Restrictive Practices*"* was a new procedure introduced in January 2020. The procedure stipulates when it is appropriate to restrict a student by

secluding or containing them in an environment, or restraining them by mechanical, chemical, or physical means. It includes the obligations of state school staff regarding reporting and notification of the restraint event and identifies when training in restrictive practices is essential. The document cautions that restrictive practices should only be used when a student's behaviour presents a risk to themselves or others, and when less restrictive management of the risk is deemed ineffective at the time of response. In other words, as a last resort.

"Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) is noted as superseding the SSaDSE (DET, 2014) and outlines behaviour management expectations and responsibilities of school staff in line with legislative requirements. The "Principal Guidelines" (DoE, n.d.-f) provides a single-point reference and procedural tool to ensure school principals adhere to the department's disciplinary action processes. These actions include detention, suspension, exclusion, cancelation of enrolment, and temporary removal of a student's property. Suspension processes require many steps and forms (see Figure 5.2) to ensure the method is robust, thorough, and consistent across all state school sites.

Figure 5.2

School Suspension Process Flowchart


```
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Incident reported to school staff member │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                                      ↓
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │ School staff member investigates incident │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                                      ↓
┌──────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Incident recorded on │ ← │ Staff member reports incident & provides │
│      OneSchool       │   │ evidence to Deputy or School Principal │
└──────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

- Incident reported to **school staff member**
- **School staff member** investigates incident
- **Staff member** reports incident & provides evidence to Deputy or **School Principal** → Incident recorded on **OneSchool**
- **Deputy** or **School Principal** interviews student/s
- If students' infraction warrants suspension, **School Principal** is only staff member who can authorise it
  - **Instrument of Authorisation** (Provides authority **for Deputy Principal** to inform students' parent/s of suspension/exclusion decision)
  - **Education (General Provisions) Act 2006** Legislation
  - **Student Discipline Procedure**
  - **Student Code of Conduct** outlines the school's behaviour expectations and potential consequences
- Students' parent/s are contacted to advise suspension is being considered; parent/s given opportunity to view evidence, discuss and respond.
- After discussion with parent/s, **Principal** determines whether to enforce or cease the suspension process.
- **Principal** creates and records a **Suspension Decision Notice** on **OneSchool** and provides student/parent/s with a copy
- **Principal** uploads signed copies of **Suspension Decision Notice** to OneSchool
- **Principal** arranges for educational program resources for student to access from home during suspension

Note. A further 15 legislative acts and regulations may be associated with student disciplinary processes. Adapted from DoE's Principal guidelines – student discipline (n.d.-f). CC BY 4.0.

The "Risk Assessment" (DoE, 2021e) document supports school principals to pre-emptively identify potential risks or hazards a student's behaviour may present, and actions to mitigate the risk of harm. It is embedded with a *tick and flick* risk evaluation form, which must be uploaded to the student's OneSchool record once completed.

"*Refusal to Enrol*" (DoE, 2021d) and "*Cancellation of Enrolment*" (DoE, 2020a) are aligned with the "*Risk Assessment*" (DoE, 2021e) tool. These documents generally apply to older students who have been formally charged with an illegal offence. They also had low counts of student discipline and school violence terminology and are thus not included in the document analysis. Their

significance in Figure 5.1 is to illustrate the impact a single policy change can have on document proliferation.

The "Occupational Violence Prevention" (DoE, 2018) procedure is also aligned to the "Risk Assessment" (DoE, 2021e) tool. This document is not included in Diagram 1 as it is not directly related to student disciplinary processes, but rather, the health and safety of departmental employees. However, it has relevance to issues of physical misconduct and school violence, thus its inclusion in the document analysis. Its stated purpose is to provide "the minimum standard for the prevention and management of occupational violence risks across the department with the intent of protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of staff who have the potential to experience occupational violence" (DoE, 2018, p.1). It expresses the DoE's zero tolerance stance, details the responsibilities of individuals entering the workplace dependent on their role, and describes the process for identifying, assessing, and managing occupational violence risks. It also states the critical step of reporting and recording of incidents to inform future risk processes, hence the importance of the Risk Assessment tool.

5.3. Findings

The following section describes the findings of the document analysis, beginning with DoE longitudinal suspension statistics. Datasets located in the DoE's open data portal website page only publish longitudinal data from the most recent five years. Therefore, two datasets have been downloaded and collated to illustrate the 8 years, 2012-2019, focused on in the HFSE study. Government documents (Category 1) such as policies and procedures follow the statistical data. Where updates have occurred, old and new documents have been analysed together to determine terminology used to establish policy directives. Independently authored documents (Category 2) follow government documents. The chapter concludes with a discussion elaborating on the findings.

5.3.1. Longitudinal DoE Suspension Statistics 2012–2019

The DoE report suspension statistics annually. As noted in Section 4.3, the annual reports include textural information, such as alterations to reporting processes. For example, it is noted that "[a] half cohort of Prep Year was introduced in 2007 to align with the shift in the compulsory school

starting age from 2008. In 2019 the half cohort was in Year 12" (DoE, 2020j). Reports are readily

downloadable from the DoE website in Excel spreadsheets. The HFSE study used data labelled

"Disciplinary absences by demographics" (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j), which allows data to be sorted

by year, grade level and reasons for suspensions. Table 5.1 presents annual suspension numbers and

percentage rate increases or decreases for the seven primary school grades P–G6.

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Table 5.1

Total Annual Preparatory to Grade 6 Suspension Rate Numbers (n) and Increase/Decrease (%) for 2012 to 2019

Grade level	Annual n suspensions & annual % rate suspension increase/decrease																Accum. Suspension %
	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2012-2019
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	%
Prep	582	-	572	-1.72	871	52.27	894	2.64	1,028	14.99	1,026 [b]	-0.19	1,197	16.67	1,532	27.99	163.23
G1	1,256	-	1,458	16.08	1,677	15.02	1,775	5.84	1,978	11.44	1,953	-1.26	2,562	31.18	2,385	-6.91	89.89
G2	1,916	-	2,108	10.02	2,366	12.24	2,576	8.88	2,955	14.71	2,872	-2.81	3,055	6.37	3,567	16.76	86.17
G3	2,630	-	2,855	8.56	3,018	5.71	3,651	20.97	3,900	6.82	3,762	-3.54	4,245	12.84	4,046	-4.69	53.84
G4	3,093	-	3,249	5.04	3,720	14.50	3,736	0.43	4,502	20.50	4,532	-0.67	5,160	13.86	5,198	0.74	68.06
G5	2,577 [a]	-	3,581	38.96	3,750	4.72	4,573	21.95	4,435	-3.02	5,322	20.0	5,742	7.89	5,336	-7.07	107.06 [a]
G6	4,004	-	3,088 [a]	-22.88 [a]	4,488	45.34	4,535	1.05	5,444	20.04	5,353	-1.67	6,643	18.49	6,345	0.03	58.47 [a]

Note. Adapted from DET (2017) and DoE (2020j). CC BY 4.0.

[a] A half-cohort of Prep was introduced in 2007 to align with the shift in compulsory school starting age from 2008. In 2019 the half cohort was in Grade 12.

[b] Prep enrolment was made mandatory in 2017.

Table 5.1 tracks suspension numbers and percentage rates from 2012 to 2019. Notably, 2014 had the highest annual rise in suspension rates across the entire eight years of data collected for grades P–G6. This occurred in the Prep year with a 52.27% increase. While the three subsequent years saw fluctuations in Prep suspensions, more recent years (2018–2019) have had considerable increases. This has impacted the accumulative suspension rate rise since 2012, identifying students in the first year of school with the highest rate accumulation. Table 5.2 distributes the annual Prep suspensions into the reported categorical reasons for the years 2014–2019.

Table 5.2

Preparatory Suspensions by Reason 2014-2019

Reason	Annual Prep suspensions n					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Property misconduct involving own property	1	2	1	1	1	3
Property misconduct involving others' property	30	23	23	36	33	30
Verbal or non-verbal misconduct involving students	3	14	6	7	11	5
Verbal or non-verbal misconduct involving adults	26	25	24	26	54	48
Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school	41	32	44	28	47	71
Other serious conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school	22	25	30	29	34	48
Physical misconduct involving students not involving an object	315	321	337	276	349	425
Physical misconduct involving adults not involving an object	194	202	259	310	330	447
Physical misconduct involving students involving an object	61	72	73	66	93	104
Physical misconduct involving adults involving an object	58	57	81	105	109	178

Reason	Annual Prep suspensions n					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Refusal to participate in program of instruction	22	12	27	32	21	39
Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others	95	107	123	110	115	134
Absences	3	2	0	0	0	0
Total Prep suspensions	871	894	1,028	1,026	1,197	1,532

Note: Data for 2012 and 2013 has been excluded from Table 5.2 due to a change in reporting categories for physical and verbal/non-verbal misconduct. Prior to 2014, it was reported as the single category "physical misconduct involving an object"; post-2014 this category defines whether the target was a student or an adult. Data sourced from https://qed.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/statistics/schooling/students and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). Adapted from DET, 2016 and DoE, 2020-a (see Reference list).

Table 5.2 itemises each Prep suspension against a categorical reason, illustrating differences across the years 2014-2019. In 2014, the DoE introduced new categories, defining whether acts of physical, verbal and non-verbal misconduct were directed towards students or adults. A trend involving physical misconduct involving an object can be observed post-2016. Where fellow students were the target of this category prior to 2016, this trend reverses from 2016, with adults becoming the target. In this dataset, the rate of physical violence involving an object directed towards an adult has increased annually in more recent years: in 2018, 53.9% of suspensions for this category were directed at adults; in 2019, it rose to 63.1%. Table 5.3 compares physical misconduct suspensions between Prep students and older students.

Table 5.3

Comparison of Preparatory & Grade 1-Grade 12 Suspensions for Physical Misconduct (Excluding Behaviours not Relevant to Preparatory Year) 2014-2019.

Grade	Suspension category	Annual suspension data for physical misconduct *n*						
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Prep								
	Physical misconduct suspensions	389	628	652	750	757	881	1,154
	Total suspensions	572	871	894	1,028	1,026	1,197	1,532
	Misconduct % total suspensions	68.0	72.1	72.9	72.9	73.8	73.6	75.3
G1-G12								
	Physical misconduct suspensions	19,859	20,368	23,461	25,631	27,265	30,149	31,433
	[a] Total comparative misconduct suspensions	56,577	52,460	62,511	66,287	69,258	77,630	77,084
	Misconduct % total comparative suspensions	35.1	38.8	37.5	38.7	39.4	38.8	40.8

Note. [a] Only behaviours such as physical misconduct, disruptive behaviour, property misconduct, non-compliance and serious misconduct are relevant to all students, therefore suspension data for behaviours not relevant to Prep student suspensions (substance misconduct involving tobacco & other legal substances; substance misconduct involving an illicit substance) have been omitted in this table's data to provide equivalent comparison across all cohorts. Data sourced from https://qed.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/statistics/schooling/students and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). Adapted from DET, 2016 and DoE, 2020-a (see Reference list).

When extracted from all other suspension reasons, physical misconduct (with and without an object) accounted for the majority of annual Prep suspensions between 2013–2019. By excluding suspension categories that are not relevant to Prep suspensions, such as substance misconduct categories, from the total annual suspensions for G1–G12 (collectively), a comparative total is obtained. Using this comparative total, physical misconduct suspensions accounted for less than 41% of total annual suspensions for older cohorts between 2013–2019 (Table 5.3).

5.3.2. Category 1: Documents Created by Government Bodies

Of the seventeen documents authored by government bodies, two were legislative documents created by the Parliament of Queensland. The remaining 15 documents were authored by the Queensland Department of Education. Eight documents used terminology regarding student discipline more than ten times; six documents had less than ten mentions of student discipline. Three further documents had low student discipline terminology but high use of school violence terminology. Where the terminology appeared in the reference section, header, or in a context other than school discipline or violence, it was deducted from the word count. Findings are outlined in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Category 1: Government Documents using Terminology Relevant to Student Discipline and School

Violence

Date created	Document name	Author	Document type	Student discipline	School violence
2013	Advancing Partnerships: Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Framework	DETE	Policy	0	0
07.11.13	Amendment Act 2013 (Act No. 59 of 2013): Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools)	Parliament of Queensland	Policy amendment	257	0
2013	Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013: Explanatory notes	Parliament of Queensland	Policy amendment explanatory notes	304	0
01.02.14	Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment V:7.4	DET	Procedure	124	47
2013	Statement of Expectations for a Disciplined School Environment	DETE	Statement	2	0
n.d.	The Code of School Behaviour: Better Behaviour, Better Learning	DETE	Standard	5	0
24.01.14	Guidelines for developing a Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students	DETE	Guideline	24	10
Oct 2014	Performance Insights: School Disciplinary Absences	DETE	Report	403	8
12.10.18	Occupational Violence Protection V1.0	DoE	Procedure	2	44
23.01.20	Restrictive Practices V1.0	DoE	Procedure	2	157
2020	Student Code of Conduct (web only)	DoE	Policy	3	0
2020	Student Discipline	DoE	Procedure	135	2
Nov 2020	Principal Guidelines: Student Discipline V1.5	DoE	Guideline	711	1
2020	Cancellation of Enrolment	DoE	Procedure	3	0
2020	Refusal to Enrol – Risk to Safety of Wellbeing	DoE	Procedure	5	1
n.d.	Student Code of Conduct (Full Exemplar)	DoE	Exemplar	112	25
n.d.	Risk Assessment – Behaviour, Safety and Wellbeing	DoE	Tool	7	19

5.3.2.1. Policy and Procedure Implementation. Policy documents from 2013 revealed 561

mentions of student discipline and zero mentions of school violence. In contrast, documents aligned

with the new behaviour policy implemented in 2020 have 267 mentions of student discipline and 204

references to violence. Notably, neither the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools)*

Amendment Act 2013 or the "Explanatory notes" (2013) contained the searched terminology of School

Disciplinary Absence(s) or SDA(s). Variations of the words suspension and exclusion were used 99

and 142 times, respectively.

The "Advancing Partnerships - Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Framework"

("PACE initiative"; DETE, 2021) policy was also introduced in 2013. Although it has zero mentions

of student discipline or school violence, it has contextual relevance to the discussion at the end of this

chapter, hence its inclusion in the table.

The SSaDSE procedure (DET, 2014) mentioned school discipline terminology 124 times. The

majority of this count consisted of suspension and exclusion vocabulary, which were collectively

mentioned 101 times. School violence terminology appeared 45 times in this version. However, the

word violence itself was not mentioned.

The majority of school violence terminology in the RBP Guidelines (DETE, 2014a) pertains

to the word physical. This is the first document in the data collection that mentions the word violent,

where it is used to express the philosophy that SDAs are last resort disciplinary actions. Violent

assaults are given as an example of when it is appropriate to endorse an SDA. It also mentions student

discipline terminology 24 times, with the word discipline being the most commonly utilised at 16

times.

"Performance Insights: School Disciplinary Absences" (DETE, 2014b), contained 403

mentions of student discipline, including 242 mentions of either School Disciplinary Absence(s) or

SDA(s). School violence terminology appeared eight times. The words violence or violent contributed

more than half of these mentions. In comparison, the "Occupational Violence Prevention" (DoE,

2018) procedure has 42 mentions of the word violence and only two mentions of student discipline

terminology.

The "SSaDSE" procedure (DET, 2014), originally implemented in 2014, was

decommissioned on 23rd March 2020 and replaced by the Student Code of Conduct (DoE, 2020h)

policy. The Behaviour Policy has a mere three mentions of student discipline and zero mentions of

school violence. However, this policy is only available as a webpage and has less than 300 words.

Instead, it directs the reader to additional documents via hyperlinks, including the Code of Conduct

Exemplar (DoE, n.d.-h), which contains 112 mentions of student discipline. The Exemplar also contains 25 mentions of school violence terminology, with 17 of these referring to restrictive practices.

The "Principal Guidelines" (DoE, 2020h) contained the highest frequency of words associated with student discipline than any other document. Notably, this document states that suspension is a "last resort …" (DoE, 2020h, pp. 5, 10, 33, 37, 56 & 61) a total of six times throughout the document.

Of the five new procedural documents created in 2020 to support the new policy, only two are analysed in the HFSE study. The first, "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i), had the highest frequency of language related to school violence, particularly the words physical and restraint, which are mentioned 45 and 112 times, respectively. "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k), on the other hand, only mentions school violence terminology twice, compared with 135 mentions of student discipline terminology. Suspension or exclusion contributed 94 of these mentions.

Table 5.5 compares the retired SSaDSE (DET, 2014) procedure with the "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) and "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i) procedures to illustrate changes in processes, language style and text structure over time.

Table 5.5

Comparison of Retired and Current Discipline Procedures

Key changes between documents	Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment (DET, 2014)	Student Discipline (DoE, 2020k)	Restrictive Practices (DoE, 2020i)
Implemented	2013	2020	2020
Responsibilities section	Lists responsibilities in paragraphs. Ordered from lowest authority (teachers) to highest authority (Director-General). Includes actions of physical restraint and time-out as sub-headings in this section. Principal is identified as primary staff member responsible for time-out; followed by school staff. School staff also responsible for physical restraint.	Lists responsibilities in bullet-point format. Ordered from highest authority (Director-General) to lowest authority (teachers). Adds Regional Case Manager accountabilities at end of bullet list. Restrictive Practices not explicitly mentioned, directs reader to a weblink instead.	Lists responsibilities in bullet-point format. The principal has sole responsibility for this procedure.
Process section	Refers to Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students. Includes Cancellation of Enrolment (CoE) procedure.	Refers to Student Code of Conduct. Addresses confidentiality obligations. Provides flow-charts for each exclusionary process. Cancellation of Enrolment not explicitly mentioned, directs reader to a weblink instead.	Refers to Behaviour Risk Assessment – Safety or Wellbeing tool. Includes the sub-heading Training, followed by scenarios of when and how restrictive practices are permitted. Advises that if the school foresees an potential need to utilise restrictive practices, an Individual Student Safety Plan must be developed. Describes what to include in the report of the event. Expresses a focused review by school leaders should be undertaken after the event.
Glossary section	Approved form Charge-related ground Community Service Intervention Compulsory school age Conduct Discipline improvement plan Dealt with Procedural fairness	Appropriately authorised Approved form Charge-related ground Conduct Disciplinary consequences and decisions Dealt with Last resort Oral appeals Parent Procedural fairness Serious offence	Appropriately qualified health professional Chemical restraint Clinical holding Containment Focused Review Individual Student Safety Plan (SSP) Mechanical restraint Physical restraint Seclusion

Note. CC BY 4.0.

The remaining three procedures aligned with the new policy, consisting of "Refusal to Enrol" (DoE, 2021d), "Cancelation of Enrolment" (DoE, 2020a), and "Risk Assessment" (DoE, 2021e), are included in the content analysis table, but are not analysed in depth as they do not have significant relevance to early years suspensions.

The following section continues the analysing government documents but looks beyond the linguistic semantics that have thus far been explored. Instead, a number of recently created documents are significant for what is not said, rather than what is made explicit. This includes subtle changes in authorship to incorporate community voices, the silent removal of past policies and procedural practices, and a focus on student wellbeing. The DoE's efforts to embed inclusion without fanfare are explored before moving on to documents created by non-departmental authors.

5.3.2.2. From Institution to Inclusion – A New Era.   Changes in language and text structure are not the only variations between retired procedural documents and their current replacements. There is currently a proclivity for schools to distance themselves from the traditional stance of authoritarian, top-down institutions in preference to encouraging greater collaboration and partnerships between the school, parents or carers and the wider community. The "Code of Conduct Exemplar" (DoE, n.d.-h) demonstrates this by embedding the consultation process through a consultation committee. The committee consists of staff, parents and students. Within the Exemplar (DoE, n.d.-h), the school captain/s provide a statement of endorsement, and the P. & C. Association provides a full-page statement of support. This is an explicit alignment with the "PACE Initiative" (DoE, n.d.-a), which states that "parents, students and community members play meaningful roles in school decision-making" (n.d.-a, p. 4).

The remaining differences, and the larger volume of pages in the Exemplar, are due to the inclusion of several programs or procedures that have been implemented alongside the new Exemplar (DoE, n.d.-h):

- Student Wellbeing.
- Curriculum and Pedagogy, including descriptions of Differentiated, Explicit, Focused, and Intensive teaching.

- Information regarding health plans, which includes medication, mental health, and
  suicide prevention.

- Re-entry process for students returning from suspension.

- The school's policy regarding use of personal mobile devices, including phones; and
  social media etiquette.

- The Restrictive Practices Procedure is explained at length in the Student Code of
  Conduct.

The content between old and new documents has been altered to reflect the inferred protocol
of preventing the use of restrictive practices to manage undesirable behaviours. The retired SSaDSE
(DET, 2014) procedure refers explicitly to the "provision for the use of time out … [and] physical
restraint …" (2014, p. 1), identifying these as additional strategies available as student behaviour
management approaches. In contrast, the current "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) procedure only
alludes to measures available for managing behaviour, framing it in more positive terms of support for
the student, rather than consequences: "clear expectations about staff responsibilities to support
students to understand and meet discipline expectations of the school" (2020k, p. 1). Restrictive
practices is not mentioned at all, other than as a weblink to the new "Restrictive Practices" (DoE,
2020i) procedure at the end of the 18-page document.

Another notable change between retired and current procedures is the mention of community
service intervention. The SSaDSE (DET, 2014) mentions this eight times, expressing it as an
alternative disciplinary option. The glossary describes it as a behavioural intervention where "the
student performs unpaid work or activities in their local community or school with a host organisation
or under the supervision of a school staff member" (DET, 2014, p. 14). This option is not mentioned
at all in the current "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) procedure. Instead, mentions of community are
couched in terms of consultation, such as "disciplinary consequences should be discussed with the
community during the consultation phase …" (DoE, 2020k, p. 16).

5.3.3. Category 2: Documents Created by Independent Authors

Four documents authored by identities outside the Queensland DoE were identified as having

significance to the issue of Queensland state school suspensions. These include an independent review

by Deloitte Access Economics (2017); a public hearing report (RCVANEPD, 2020b) and an issue

paper by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with

Disability (2020a); and a report on the occupational health, safety and wellbeing of Australian school

principals produced by the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education for the Australian Catholic

University (Riley et al., 2020). These are listed chronologically in Table 5.6, described briefly, then

followed by the findings.

Table 5.6

Category 2: Independently Authored Documents Using Terminology Relevant to School Violence

Date created	Document name	Author	Document type	Student discipline	School violence
Feb 2017	Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools	Deloitte Access Economics	Independent Review	62	167
Nov 2019	Report of Public Hearing 2: Inclusive education in Queensland, preliminary inquiry	[a] RCVANEPD	Royal Commission Report of Public Hearing	54	32
Feb 2020	Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey: 2019 Data	Riley, See, Marsh & Dicke	Report	0	88
May 2020	Restrictive Practices Issues paper	[a] RCVANEPD	Royal Commission Inquiry paper	0	42

Note. [a] Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

The "Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools"

(Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) reported on policies and practices current in 2017 regarding the

education of students with disability. Whilst instigated by the Minister for Education and Training, it

was authored by an independent advisory practice. The executive summary outlines that the goal of

the review is to investigate the effectiveness of current policies regarding students with disabilities to

access educational settings and support them to reach their full potential.

The "Report of Public Hearing 2: Inclusive education in Queensland" (RCVANEPD, 2020b) is a preliminary inquiry investigating inclusive education in Queensland. Its findings led to the "Restrictive Practices Issue Paper*" (RCVANEPD, 2020a). The paper's purpose was to "invite information and discussion from the public on the use of restrictive practices on people with disability." (RCVANEPD, 2020, p. 1).

The "Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey: 2019 Data*" (Riley et al., 2020) reports the results of a longitudinal survey measuring the health and wellbeing issues Australian school principals experience annually. The survey was initiated in 2011 (Riley, 2014), with data collected annually until 2019. Its goals are to identify the main causes of workplace stress on school leaders, as well as measuring the levels of violence school leaders experience as a result of their role. It also reports the effect size of wellbeing domains for principals and compares these to the general population. A significant outcome has been the identification of fifteen recommendations for improving the health and wellbeing of school leaders.

5.4. Findings

The review authored by Deloitte Access Economics (2017) mentions school violence terminology 167 times. The majority of these referred to the restraint of students by school staff, which is collectively termed restrictive practices. There are also 62 mentions of student discipline, with over half of these referring to SDAs.

The Royal Commission's Public Hearing report (RCVANEPD, 2020b) had 54 mentions of student discipline terminology, with 36 consisting of references to suspension. There were also 32 mentions of school violence terminology. The majority of these were associated with the words violent or violence. In contrast, the Restrictive Practices Issue paper published the following year (RCVANEPD, 2020a) had zero mentions of student discipline terminology. Whilst this document had 108 mentions of violence terminology, only 42 of these specifically applied to school settings. The majority of these were in relation to restrictive practices enacted upon students with disabilities.

The Australian Principal report published by the Australian Catholic University (Riley et al., 2020) included school violence terminology 95 times, including 56 mentions of the word 'violence' and 36 mentions of 'physical'.

5.5. Discussion

An aim of this document analysis was to address the research question: "What are the documented reasons, policies, and processes of Early Years suspension across Queensland schools?" This section examines and discusses the reported findings in the context of their stated purpose from a standpoint of historical perspective.

5.5.1. From Physical Misconduct to School Violence – How did we get Here?

While documents are created at a point in time with an intended purpose, examining them chronologically illuminates the reasons behind the stated purpose, whether that be changes in political parties or ideologies, societal and cultural changes, or historical events. This occurred when the documents were examined with a sociocultural lens. This perspective led to findings that addressed a further research question: "Over the past decade, what sociocultural changes have occurred that may be contributing to the negative behaviours leading to increased school suspensions of young students?"

A joint examination of both government-authored and independently-authored documents revealed a distinct change of terminology usage mid-decade. It became evident that prior to 2015, student discipline terminology was more prominent than in documents published in subsequent years. In more recent years, school violence terminology began to dominate several DoE documents, and every independently-authored document included in the analysis.

The following discussion describes the impact five core legislative, policy and associated documents had on schools suspensions and student discipline. These consist of the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013* and the supplementary "Explanatory Notes" (2013); "Behaviour Policy" (DoE, 2021h); "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) procedure; and the "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i) procedure. Documents created by independent authors are

similarly discussed, before presenting possible catalysts for the documented and reported rise in

school violence.

5.5.2. School Suspensions: Last Resort or "New Normal"?

Observing events prior to 2014 (see Figure 4.1), the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013* implemented in November 2013 is likely to have had the most impact on suspension rate increases across Queensland state schools in subsequent years.

The intent of the *Amendment Act* was to reduce school suspensions and exclusions by "providing Queensland state school principals with stronger disciplinary powers and more flexibility and autonomy around … discipline decisions" (*Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools 2013*, p. 1). "The Explanatory Notes" (2013) go on to justify that by reducing over-prescriptive red tape regarding student discipline, principals would have greater opportunity to tailor behavioural consequences when addressing problematic student behaviour. The goal was to customise discipline to accommodate the needs of the individual student and potentially avoid issuing suspensions.

To meet this goal, two new disciplinary options were introduced in the amendment: Community Service Intervention; and out-of-school-hours detention (*Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools 2013*, p. 3). These significant changes provided principals with the power to assign these two disciplinary interventions outside school hours, such as after school or on weekends. While they may have overcome the perception of suspensions being a desirable outcome in the form of a few days away from school for the student rather than a modifying consequence, there is little evidence that these have been successfully utilised. The *Amendment Act* also extends the grounds for imposing a suspension to include behaviour occurring outside the school. In addition, suspension periods were altered, with short-term suspension periods doubled from the previous maximum of five days to 10 days. This last change seems to contradict the *Amendment Act's* stated purpose of reducing suspensions.

While the intentions of the *Amendment Act* are admirable, and on the surface appear to encourage innovative behaviour management practices and reduced suspensions, longitudinal data demonstrates the opposite has occurred. This is especially true for the youngest Queensland students,

where Preparatory suspension rates increased by over 52% in 2014 (see Table 5.1), the first school

year after implementation of the amendment. As Graham put it, "these increases indicate a 'new

normal' in the use of suspension in the first year of formal schooling in Queensland …" (2018, p. 15),

rather than the DoE's explicit directive that it is reserved as a last resort consequence.

Online searches for DoE behaviour policy prior to 2020 simply redirect the web browser back

to the current 2020 "Behaviour Policy" (DoE, n.d.-h). However, an information brochure published

by the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) regarding student behaviour management identified the

SSaDSE Procedure, implemented in 2013 (DoE, 2014), as a student discipline policy (QTU, 2021).

This remained in place for seven years, until the "Behaviour Policy" (DoE, n.d.-h) policy replaced it.

The policy itself is sparse; instead, the "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k) procedure provides

direction regarding process and responsibilities. The major change between this procedure and the

SSaDSE (DoE, 2014) is the inclusion of physical restraint and time-out in the obsolete procedure.

These two strategies are considered restrictive practices, a behaviour management method deemed, in

today's social climate regarding issues of consent (Brooks, 2020), as largely inappropriate and

potentially in "conflict …[with] human rights" (RCVANEPD, 2020a, p. 2). In fact, the DoE has

implemented a dedicated procedural document to "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i). This suggests

a clear intention to distance student discipline methods from restrictive practices in the current

documents.

5.5.3. Lifting the Lid on Violence in Schools

All four independently authored documents regarding student discipline and school violence

had significant mentions of school violence terminology. The survey of Australian school principals

(Riley et al., 2020) had the second highest number of terminologies regarding school violence,

documenting reports of physical violence and threats by students or parents towards school staff. Only

two documents, the independent "Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland

State Schools" (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) and the "Royal Commission's Public Hearing

report on Inclusive education in Queensland" (RCVANEPD, 2020) also included student discipline

terminology. The context of school violence in these two documents, as well as the "Royal

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Commission's Restrictive Practices Issues paper" (2020b), related to violence towards students by staff members.

The "Royal Commission's Public Hearing report on Inclusive education in Queensland" (RCVANEPD, 2020a) addressed the use of restrictive practices in schools in compelling terms, including examples of "children being tied to chairs or locked in their wheelchairs" and "suffer[ing] bruising from their attempts to escape the restraints" (RCVANEPD, 2020a, p. 57). The lack of staff professional development was also raised, with explicit mention of training in the use of functional behaviour analysis tools. Additionally, both policy awareness and development, including behaviour management and restrictive practices, were presented in their recommendations. Given the timing of the report and the inclusion of these recommendations, it is likely it led to the introduction of the new "Behaviour Policy" (DoE, 2021h), "Student Discipline" (DoE, 2020k), and "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i) procedures.

In the education arena, restrictive practices as behaviour management strategies have historically been associated with students with disabilities. The independent "Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools" (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) expresses restrictive practices as a last-resort option for "the most extreme and challenging … behaviour in order to prevent imminent harm to students and staff" (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017, p. 107). The Royal Commission Issues paper (RCVANEPD, 2020a) identifies restrictive practices as akin to abuse, while also noting schools have "fewer regulations about the use of restrictive practices … compared to other sectors, such as health" (RCVANEPD, 2020a, p. 5). While there is no doubt issues surrounding restrictive practices such as physical restraint or seclusion are centred on diagnosed disabilities, Deloitte's review identified other groups of students with challenging behaviours, such as those with aggressive or high risk behaviours and complex needs. This is an important observation when considered alongside findings in the HFSE literature review that suggests Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU) is associated with some of these heightened, aggressive behaviours (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021; Rich et al., 2017).

Physical student behaviours are also addressed in a survey measuring Australian school principals' health and wellbeing (Riley et al., 2020). While there was only one mention of the word restrictive in this document, it was part of an anecdote recounted by a survey respondent. The male respondent was responsible for actioning restrictive practices when necessary at his school of employment. He recounted being hit by students several times in the fortnight prior to completing the survey, as well as having broken glass thrown at him (Riley et al., 2020). This is just one of many incidences reported, with over 84% of principals surveyed between 2011–2019 indicating they have been "subjected to 1 or more offensive behaviour[s]" (Riley et al., 2020, p. 157).

Further statistics reported in the principals' survey data demonstrate that school violence has increased considerably in recent years. For example, principals experienced physical violence seven times higher than the general population rate in 2011 (Riley et al., 2020, p. 158). In 2019, this increased to almost 11 times greater than the general population rate (Riley et al., 2020, p. 158). Similarly, observing percentage rates illustrates acts of physical violence towards principals have risen significantly, from 27% in 2011, to 42% in 2019 (Riley et al., 2020, p. 159). Notably, there has also been a shift of perpetrators of physical violence towards school leaders. In 2011, parents and students physically assaulted principals at a similar rate of approximately 6% each (Riley, 2013, p. 60), while in 2019, students contributed 39.8% of physically violent acts compared to parents, who only contributed 9.3% (Riley et al., 2020, p. 162).

5.5.4. School Violence

One of the most significant findings of the document analysis has been the observed rise in school violence. The increase in student assaults on principals reported in the survey above is borne out by DoE suspension data. Most alarming is the observation that the youngest students contribute the highest suspension rate increases (see Table 5.3). Whilst Grades 1–6 have the highest number of suspensions, the Preparatory Year is increasing at the highest rate.

It is difficult to conceive that a four or five-year-old child is capable of misconduct so extreme that the only suitable consequence is to suspend them. However, analysis of longitudinal suspension data detects a trend: approximately 72%–75% of Prep suspensions between 2014 – 2019

are attributed to physical misconduct, compared to approximately 37% - 41% of older grade cohorts (see Table 5.3).

Most concerning is a trend observed regarding suspension rates for physical misconduct involving an object. Data for the two consecutive years prior to 2016 show that for this category of suspension, Prep students targeted students more frequently than adults. However, from 2016–2019 (DoE, 2020j), this trend has reversed, with adults increasingly being the target (see Table 5.2). This suggests that physical misconduct by young students is escalating and is not responding to current models of behaviour management, particularly school suspension.

Without access to the DoE's internal suspension statistics that provide anecdotal evidence for each suspension, it is difficult to determine why young students are becoming increasingly violent. It is almost certain to be due to a number of issues, rather than a single reason. The section below considers the effects of sociocultural and political changes, technology advances and PIMU, and changes in education that impact children with disabilities or special needs.

5.5.5. Sociocultural and Political Impacts

As Bronfenbrenner's' Ecological Systems Theory (1979) posits, there are a myriad of impacts on an individual, from relationships to events. These include personal events, such as career choices, as well as more distant events, such as technological advances or changes to governing bodies. Whether near or distant, they still have an impact on the individual, including very young students.

Investigation of documents relevant to school suspensions identified that several documents were implemented to align with political party agendas. The *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendement Act 2013* is one example of how a single policy change can have far-reaching and unintended results. The date of the amendment is historically significant. The year 2013 saw the Australian Labor Party (ALP), who were the sitting federal government from November 2007, defeated by the Liberal/National Party (LNP) in September 2013 (AustralianPolitics, n.d.). One of the major policies promised by the LNP was to provide public schools with "local boards and more autonomy" (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 116), which in essence, is the purpose of the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendement Act 2013*. Similarly, the two Royal

Commission documents (2020a; 2020b) undoubtedly prompted the new "Restrictive Practices" (DoE, 2020i) procedure, which in turn required changes to existing student disciplinary documents to remove ad-hoc inferences linking restrictive practices with behaviour management strategies.

The independent "Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools" (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) also addressed restrictive practices. However, this document offered a different perspective, that of workplace culture. It raised the issue of embedded culture, identifying cultural change within the department as a vital element to realise true inclusion, where every student achieves their full potential.

The concept of culture reaches beyond schools, however. The DoE recognises the benefits of authentically engaging parents and the wider community. The PACE initiative (DoE, n.d.-a) uses an evidence-based approach to communicate the importance of fostering a sense of community built on respectful relationships. It emphasises diversity as a strength, encouraging a school culture of inclusion, acceptance, and collaboration. Adopting a culture of partnership based on strong, supportive relationships introduces a new era of schools as communities, rather than as authoritarian, top-down entities.

When identifying sociocultural changes, they are often couched in terms of generational change, particularly from the point of view of parenting. From Boomers to Gens X, Y and Z, the traditional role of early-20th Century parents as stern authoritarians has altered to what is largely perceived as softer parents and a more permissive society (Center for Generational Kinetics, 2020). The statistics shared by Riley et al. (2020) seem to support this, with children increasingly defying those in positions of authority, such as principals and teachers. An element of this permissiveness could well be associated with distracted parents, a term coined to describe the constant distraction that mobile devices provide (Christakis, 2018).

5.5.6. Technology Impacts

Christakis (2018) suggests that overuse of digital devices and distracted parenting may be interfering with a primeval form of human bonding. The constant electronic trill of notifications has reconfigured carer/child relationships, where we are "always present physically, thereby blocking

children's autonomy, yet only fitfully present emotionally" (Christakis, 2018, p. 13). The bond, or

attachment, between parent and child runs deeper than a physical needs-based attachment; it is a

powerful emotional bond that incorporates a "biological function … situated within the central

nervous system …" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 135). Constant interruption to the parent-child, and particularly

the mother-child relationship is associated with increased internalising and externalising behaviours in

the child (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018).

Technology impacts parents in other ways, too. Contemporary parents have much greater

access to information and support regarding child-rearing and development than previous generations,

courtesy of the internet (Sclafani, 2012). This has an empowering effect on parenting: greater

knowledge around education and school processes provides a foundation for contesting disciplinary

actions against their child, while social media provides a platform for venting and garnering support

from like-minded groups. The ready access to information and awareness may also explain increases

in childhood autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses (Sclafani, 2012). Once considered a rare

disorder, childhood ASD diagnoses have risen from 2-6 children per 10,000 pre-1990s, to 260

children per 10,000 in the mid-2010s (May et al., 2017). The "Review of Education for Students with

Disability in Queensland State Schools" (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017) also identified significant

increases in ASD diagnoses, alongside hearing impairment. It noted that these two conditions have

both been increasing by 9% per annum.

5.5.7. Special Needs or Misdiagnosis?

While some researchers suggest wider understanding of disorders such as ASD and attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have led to increased diagnoses, others suggest these increases

could be due to misdiagnoses. As detailed in Chapter 3, there is some evidence that undesirable

behaviours exhibited due to addiction to screened devices could potentially be misdiagnosed as

ADHD (Lissak, 2018). Another study found that externalising behaviours and inattention problems

were significantly higher in 5-year-old children who accessed screen time for more than 2 hours/day,

compared to those who accessed screen time for 30 minutes/day (Tamana et al., 2019).

In recent years, the body of evidence regarding the negative effects of digital media use on young children, including externalising behaviours (McNeill et al., 2019; Niiranen et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2017), has been growing exponentially. This is certainly an avenue to consider, given the increasing use of digital media devices in schools, and the advice from government and medical bodies recommending reduced screen time for young children (DET, 2015; The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, 2021; World Health Organisation, 2019). Additionally, the trend for mobile device users to utilise headphones or earbuds to avoid disrupting those around them, including in classroom environments, has been associated with high-frequency hearing loss (le Clercq et al., 2018). Growth in uptake of mobile devices at younger ages could potentially influence the observed increases of both disorders reported in the SWD Review (Deloitte, 2017).

Diagnoses of disorders such as ASD and ADHD have their own inherent behavioural concerns, such as sensory overload or social cue impairments, emotional regulation challenges, anxiety (Westwood, 2021), inattentiveness and hyperactivity (APA, 2013). Clinicians have described similar behaviours occurring through problematic interactive media use (PIMU; Young & Nabuco De Abreu, 2017). Behaviours observed include ADHD symptoms, anxiety including social anxiety, oppositional defiance disorder (ODD), and mood disorders. Most concerning for the HFSE's focus on school-age children are reports that "PIMU frequently include[s] school avoidance and academic failure, increasing conflicts with and isolation from peers, and family discord" (Young & Nabuco De Abreu, 2017, p. 10). Many of these symptoms are externalised behaviours, the very behaviours that are perceived as physical misconduct in school settings and frequently lead to suspension.

5.5.8. Global and Local Aspects of School Violence

Evidence reveals aggression and violence towards school personnel is rising annually. Threats of violence reported by Australian school principals have risen from almost 38% in 2011 to 51% in 2019; and 27% of principals experienced physical violence in 2011 compared to 42% in 2019 (Riley et al., 2020). However, school violence is not a uniquely Australian concern. It is a worldwide phenomenon, with parental style, domestic violence (Völkl-Kernstock et al., 2015), use of illicit substances (Valente et al., 2020), and exposure to mass media identified as potential causes (King,

2021; Ruff et al., 2004). While Australia has not experienced the extreme weaponised school violence seen in other parts of the world, such as the Columbine High School shooting (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999) in America, there are ample examples of physical assaults. A list of DoE WorkCover claims lodged between January and November 2016 (DoE, 2016) lists 175 claims of student to teacher/principal assaults. These ranged from bites, scratches, kicks, punches, pushes, spitting, thrown objects and twisted limbs. The WorkCover list included an additional 28 incidences involving restraint, known as restrictive practice. Injuries such as twisted limbs may have been caused by staff attempting to restrain students.

5.6. Conclusion

In some ways, the HFSE study continues the work begun in the Education Department's report, Performance Insights: School Disciplinary Absences (DETE, 2014b). Both have collected and analysed suspension rate data across several years, acknowledging that suspension numbers do not equate with the number of students suspended but rather, include a smaller cohort of students who have experienced multiple suspensions. Both have also identified that, alongside verbal and non-verbal misconduct, and disruptive behaviour, one of the most common reasons for school suspension is physical misconduct. Both authors have cited research that indicates school suspensions are not always the most appropriate or successful response for managing undesirable behaviours. Finally, both identified the importance of developing strong relationships within the wider school community as a pathway away from suspension and towards behaviour modification.

However, the purpose of the HFSE study alters from the DETE report in several ways. This study's aim was to investigate why Queensland state school Preparatory student suspensions have experienced increases over the past eight years and explore potential reasons around the particularly large increase in the 2014 school year. Additionally, the HFSE study connected with community members, seeking their opinions and experiences around school suspensions in an effort to reveal the stories behind suspension events, rather than reporting only on statistical data readily available from the DoE website. The HFSE study also addresses a further research suggestion outlined in the report

to explore disordered behaviour that may be exhibited by students with ASD or ADHD, albeit through the lens of potential misdiagnoses of screen addiction (Lissak, 2018).

In recent years, research has built a body of evidence detailing negative effects of school suspension. Effects such as lowered academic achievement, higher rates of disengagement and school drop-out (Noltemeyer et al., 2015) as well as the much-cited school-to-prison pathway (Mallett, 2016; Mittleman, 2018; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Novak & Fagan, 2021) provide sufficient evidence for deep analysis of current school suspension policies and procedures. In particular, it may be advantageous to consider alternative discipline policy or procedures for younger students in light of the reported increased risks of cumulative suspensions (Mowen & Brent, 2016; Zeng, 2021) and young children's cognitive development (Piaget, 1999).

5.7. Chapter Summary

Key documents created by the DoE and independent authors have been analysed in this chapter. It has chronicled the changing landscape of student discipline in Queensland state schools and identified a substantial rise in school violence. Three sources provided evidence of escalating violence in schools.

Analysis of longitudinal DoE statistics revealed suspensions for physical misconduct have risen considerably in recent years (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). School principals, reporting on their personal experiences of violent acts in the workplace, indicated school violence is increasing annually (Riley et al., 2020). Rising WorkCover compensation claims, presented during Queensland parliamentary sessions, suggest that not only have personal assaults on teachers and school staff increased in number, but their intensity has also increased (Queensland Parliament, 2019).

The *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013* was identified as potentially influencing the alarming rise in Prep student suspensions in 2014. Sociocultural issues such as political leader changes, the shifting role of parents, impact of higher use of digital technology, and children with special needs have also been considered as potential factors contributing to the rise in violent behaviour in schools. The next chapter presents an analysis of the quantitative data from the HFSE survey.

Chapter 6: Are School Community Members in Tune With Suspension Reality?

6.1. Prelude

The previous chapter analysed and discussed documents associated with student discipline and school violence. These included documents created by the DoE and several independent authors. This chapter reports on the demographics of survey respondents and their children. In particular, it analyses the data of suspended children and their families, as reported in the HFSE survey. It also examines survey respondents' experiences and opinions regarding school suspensions.

The context of research question 3 is the focus of this chapter: "Are the experiences and opinions of community members supportive of the observed increases in EQ suspension rate data and sociocultural changes?" Survey responses are analysed to identify whether community beliefs reflect actual suspension events and trends. The chapter concludes with a discussion positing that one trend, the increased uptake of screened digital devices by young children, may be contributing to increased externalising behaviours that commonly lead to school suspensions. It also addresses the overrepresentation of special needs children in school suspension statistics and considers whether similarities between screen addiction behaviours and ADHD symptoms may be associated.

6.2. Demographics of Survey Respondents

Although the focus of this study is school-aged children, and in particular, Preparatory year students, data regarding their family were also collected to provide context. Table 6.1 compares elements such as income, marital status, gender, and occupation of surveyed households. It also aligns the 13 suspended students with their reporting parent to observe whether there are trends between suspended students and family demographics.

Table 6.1

Suspended Students by Reporting Parent Gender, Marital Status, Occupation, and Income

Parent demographics	Parent		Suspended children	
	n	%	*n*	%
Gender				
Male	2	2.9	0	2.9
Female	68	97.1	13	97.1
Total	70	100.0	13	100.0
Marital status				
Married	60	85.7	9	69.2
Single	10	14.3	4	30.8
Total	70	100.0	13	100.0
Occupation				
Educator	41	58.6	3	23.1
Non-educator	29	41.4	10	76.9
Total	70	100.0	13	100.0
Annual household income				
$20,000–$35,000	2	2.8	1	7.7
$35,001–$45,000	2	2.8	1	7.7
$45,001–$50,000	5	7.1	2	15.4
$50,000–$60,000	1	1.4	0	0.0
$60,001–$75,000	6	8.6	0	0.0
$75,001–$90,000	13	18.6	2	15.4
$90,001–$120,000	16	22.9	1	7.7
Over $120,001	25	35.8	6	46.1
Total	70	100.0	13	100.0

Survey respondents were aged between 22 and 61 years at the time of completing the survey, with a mean age of 41 years. More than half of the surveyed households earn over $75,001 per annum, with one quarter of these earning over $120,001. While the study sample of seventy respondents was not a probability sample and cannot be generalised to all families with children attending schools, it is notable that almost half of the suspended children were from married nuclear families with household incomes of over $120,001 p/a. Similarly, the ratio of suspended children between occupations is also notable.

6.2.1. Demographics of Family Size

Just over half of the respondents (*n*=37) had at least one child, with one set of twins in this count. Twenty-one respondents had a second child, while a further three respondents had a third child. Eleven respondents reported at least one of their children had experienced the suspension process, with two respondents indicating they had two children each who had been suspended.

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

6.2.2. Schooling of Respondents' Children

Respondents were provided with five school categories: public, denominational, non-denominational, community, and home-schooled. State schools are publicly funded by the government and are considered to be free education in Australia, although some state schools ask for a small, non-compulsory contribution towards resources (DoE, n.d.-g). Denominational schools are administrated by churches or religious entities, while the non-denominational category identifies privately-owned schools. Both denominational and non-denominational schools are classified as independent options, which are partially funded by government but largely supplemented by fees paid by families of enrolled students (Independent Schools Queensland, n.d.).

Only the first three school categories were attended by children of survey respondents: public, denominational, or non-denominational. Note that one additional child was home-schooled; however, due to missing data, they have not been included. Figure 6.1 illustrates distribution of suspended students across the three school types.

Figure 6.1

Suspension Category by Type of School Attended
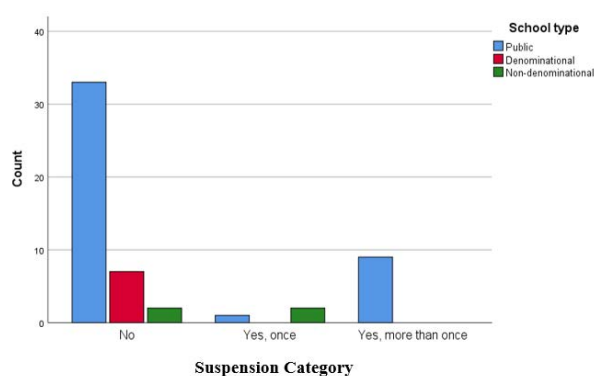
The majority of children in this survey attended public schools (79.6%). Of these, 61.1% have never been suspended, 1.9% have been suspended once, and 16.7% have experienced multiple suspensions. Notably, in this data set, all multiple suspensions were experienced within the public-school sector. Denominational schools accounted for 13% of school type attended, while 7.4% of

children attended non-denominational schools, half of whom were siblings and experienced one

suspension each.

Unfortunately, 19 respondents did not indicate which state or territory their child attended

school. Twenty-seven children were reported as having attended school in Queensland. However,

there were also eight children schooled in New South Wales, four in Victoria, and three in Western

Australia. All four states had similar suspension criteria at the time of writing, so all Australian

children reported on by respondents were included in the data collection and analysis. Parents

indicated which grade their child/ren was/were suspended in, rather than their age (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2

Grade Child was Attending When Suspended
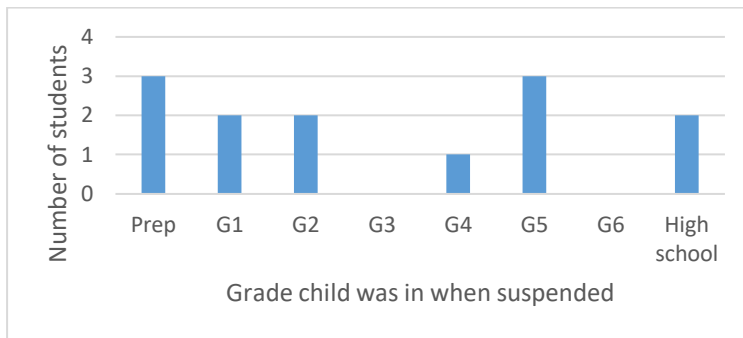
Seven suspended children were verified with special needs. Of these, three were suspended

while in lower primary, or P—2; three in upper primary, or G3–G6; and one was in high school. A

further two lower primary students were undergoing the verification process at the time of their

suspension. All suspended students were male with the exception of one Preparatory student.

6.2.3. Participation in Formal Extra-Curricular Activities.

Respondents selected yes/no responses to indicate whether their child participated in a range

of extra-curricular activities. These questions were designed to enable observation of patterns of

participation in sports or Arts-based activities between suspended and non-suspended children.

Sixteen children participated in more than one extra-curricular activity, including three suspended

children. The sample was insufficient for drawing inferences between suspensions and participation in extra-curricular activities.

6.2.4. Screened Device Habits of Children

To identify potential trends between suspensions and screened device use, respondents reported on four screened device categories: television, iPad (or similar), laptop or computer, mobile phone, and gaming console (PlayStation, Xbox or similar). Dose-response relationships were of particular interest, so reported time spent on devices was analysed, rather than number of children with access to the devices.

Results were largely unremarkable due to the small sample numbers. Some observations included: over 76% of children in the HFSE study accessing television had not experienced suspension; the majority of children watch television for less than two hours per day; distribution patterns for iPad-type devices, electronic consoles, and mobile phones were similar to television results.

School grade-level data was also analysed for screened device use. Distribution patterns identified that the youngest children (P–2) mainly accessed television and iPad-type devices. Older children (G3 to high school) tended to access mobile phones more frequently than younger children. Older children used iPad-type devices for study purposes for longer periods of time than younger children, who tend to access these devices for leisure purposes. Again, issues with the sample selection and size preclude any generalisations. Results are reported here as notable for future research, rather than contributing conclusive evidence to the HFSE study.

6.2.5. Reported Reasons for Suspensions and Respondents' Reactions

Parents of children who have experienced suspension were asked to convey the reason the suspending school provided for the suspension event. They were also asked whether or not they agreed with the school's decision. Responses are recorded in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Reasons Respondents were Given by Suspending School to Explain Their Child's Suspension

School type	Gender	Grade suspended	More than once?	Special needs?	Reason for suspension	Agree with decision?	Comment
State	Male	Prep	Yes	Yes	Incidents of physical violence [a]	No	Nil
State	Male	Prep	Yes	Awaiting verification	Kicking the classroom door after being locked out by the teacher [a]	Yes	Nil
State	Female	Prep	No	No	Told a child she wanted to hurt her because she didn't share. (Stupid especially for kindy)	No	Nil
State	Male	G1	No	Yes	Failing to abide with the PBL (Positive Behaviour for Learning) values of the school	No	Child's special needs are such of a history of trauma prior to living with myself. Has poor social skills and school isn't interested in implementing his aide money to assist him to learn further positive social skills in the playground.
State	Male	G1	Yes	Yes	Meltdown in class, kicking at teacher [a]	No	Nil
State	Male	G2	Yes	No	1st for offering urine to students to drunk, misunderstanding from a science program he saw; 2nd from a temper tantrum he swore at a teacher and avoided staff and avoided the thinking room.[a]	No	No - 1st time was innocent misunderstanding and age-appropriate mistake, 2nd time I agree consequences were needed, but after calming down and discussing what triggered the outburst, the cause could have been avoided and the course of action for future was established. Suspension was an extreme measure when he could have been made to apologise to the class for the outburst.
State	Male	G2	Yes	Awaiting verification	Not resilient. Aggressive. Violence with an item [a]	Partially	To a degree, yes. I never condone the action my son takes however, to make their case, I feel the school compiles things that are irrelevant to make it worse than it is.
State	Male	G4	Yes	Yes	Being involved in fights, constant disruptive behaviour [a]	No	In some instances, yes, I did but when he was only defending himself from violence/bullying, no I don't agree
State	Male	G5	Yes	Yes	Shoved another child that consistently teased him despite asking teachers for help often nothing was done [a]	No	I don't condone physical violence at all but other child had no repercussions at all. Was very unfair
State	Male	G5	Yes	Yes	Not participating, incorrect behaviour, swearing, not listening to the teacher	No	Nil
Non-denomination	Male	G5	No	No	In school suspension - kicked another student - 3 days [a]	Yes	Nil
State	Male	High school	Yes	Yes	Behaviour against other students consistent with his ASD diagnosis [a]	No	Nil
Non-denomination	Male	High school	No	No	In school suspension - plagiarised - 1 day	Yes	Nil

Note. [a] Denotes physical misconduct

Applying the eight DoE suspension categories (see Table 1.1) to these reasons, Table 6.2 illustrates that 60% of suspended children in this study were suspended from school due to physical misconduct. All children in this sample who were suspended for acts of physical misconduct have experienced multiple suspensions, with the exception of one child. Fifty-three percent of children suspended had additional needs, with a further two awaiting verification. Two children who attended private schools experienced a single suspension, which was managed internally. The remaining suspended children all attended state, or public schools. More than three-quarters of parents indicated they did not agree with the school's decision to suspend their child, with most providing justifications. All parents of children with special needs disagreed with the reason given for suspension.

6.3. Community Opinions Regarding School Suspension

The previous section described the demographics of survey respondents and their children, including gender, household income, school type and suspension details. The following section chronicles and analyses opinions of school community members in relation to school suspensions. Respondents were asked to consider the DoE's eight formal suspension reasons (see Table 1.1), evaluating which of these they thought were the most and least common reasons for actual suspension events. Opinions regarding which grade level/s were appropriate for disciplinary suspension enforcement is also visited.

Using rating scales and response selection, opinions of survey respondents were analysed using frequency distributions. They are then compared to DoE suspension statistics to address research question 3: "Are the experiences and opinions of community members supportive of the observed increase in DoE suspension rate data and sociocultural changes?" This is followed by a discussion of these findings in the context of current evidence.

6.3.1. Opinions Regarding Most and Least Likely Reasons for Suspension

A list of eight categories define the DoE's official reasons for suspensions (see Table 6.3), excluding legal and illegal substance misconduct. These were eliminated from the HFSE study as they are not relevant to Prep suspension rates. Survey respondents were asked to rate which behaviours they believed would be most and least likely to lead to suspension across three grade-level groups: P–

2; G3–G6; and G7–G12. The rating scale survey included four categories for respondents to select

from. These have been combined to compensate for the modest data set. Responses for "Not at all

likely" and "Probably likely" were merged to become "Not likely." Similarly, "Likely" and "Very

likely" have been merged to become a second category, "Likely." Results are detailed in Table 6.3

and elaborated below.

Table 6.3

Rating Scale Results: Most to Least Likely Reason for Suspension per Grade Level Group

Reason for suspension	Grade level	Not likely	Likely	Total
		n	n	n
Refusal to participate in program of instruction	P–2	65	5	70
	G3–G6	56	14	70
	G7–G12	47	23	70
Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others	P–2	36	34	70
	G3–G6	33	37	70
	G7–G12	28	42	70
Physical misconduct – involving an object	P–2	18	52	70
	G3–G6	9	61	70
	G7–G12	7	63	70
Physical misconduct – not involving an object	P–2	26	44	70
	G3–G6	16	54	70
	G7–G12	7	63	70
Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of this school (including serious misconduct)	P–2	34	36	70
	G3–G6	30	40	70
	G7–G12	18	52	70
Verbal or non-verbal misconduct	P–2	48	22	70
	G3–G6	41	29	70
	G7–G12	30	40	70
Property misconduct	P–2	44	26	70
	G3–G6	36	34	70
	G7–G12	20	50	70
Absences	P–2	65	5	70
	G3–G6	66	4	70
	G7–G12	60	10	70

The two physical misconduct categories had the highest response rates for the most likely

reason for suspension across all grade levels. Absences were identified as the least likely reason for

suspension across all grade levels, with more than three-quarters of respondents selecting absences.

One participant, a mature-age student, selected "Very likely" for every suspension category across all

grades. Participants were also invited to provide a written response for any other reasons they believed

warranted a suspension. Six responses were received. One simply wrote "other"; this respondent

selected "Not at all likely" for all suspension categories across all grades. A second respondent who identified as a caregiver noted "Bathroom issues" without further explanation. A neuropractitioner indicated cheating as a justifiable suspension offence and an early years' teacher expressed "drug use, weapons, high level bullying." Two respondents inferred the number of times the offence has occurred should be a consideration when issuing suspensions.

In addition to the rating scale questions above, respondents were asked to answer two confirmatory questions to strengthen respondent validity: the single reason they believed was the most common cause for a suspension in each of the grade-level groups, and the single reason they believed was the least common reason for suspension. The results for the two confirmatory questions were analogous with responses given for the ratings scale questions, with physical misconduct involving an item being selected as most common reason for suspensions and absence as the least likely reason.

6.3.2. Opinions Regarding Appropriate Grade Level to Issue Suspensions

Currently, any Queensland state school student, from five-year-old Preparatory students to 18-year-old grade 12 students, can be suspended for each of the formal reasons stated in Table 6.3. To examine whether respondents' opinions aligned with this broad approach, they were asked to indicate which grade level or levels they believed are appropriate for suspensions to be issued to students. The survey allowed multiple selections for this question. Results are reported in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3

Opinions Regarding Appropriate Grade Levels for Issuing Suspensions
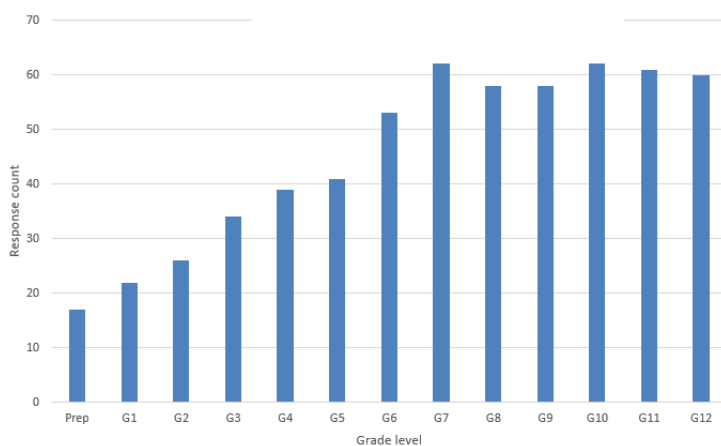
Less than one quarter of respondents believe it is appropriate to suspend Preparatory students. Almost 90% of respondents believe the first year of high school, or Grade 7, and the year prior to senior high school, or Grade 10, are the most appropriate grades to suspend students. The findings infer most respondents assign suitability of suspension enforcement with increase in age of students, with primary grade students receiving the lowest responses for this question. Discussion of findings in relation to current literature and theoretical paradigms follows.

6.4. Discussion

Demographics play a significant role in the dynamics of family and community constructs. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) determined, the environments you live in, move in, and participate in have strong influences on your personality, life path and belief systems. As such, socioeconomic and sociocultural positions can impact on individuals in both subtle and profound ways.

This is demonstrated by the HFSE study's data with the finding that six of the 13 children suspended reside in households with an annual income of over $120,000 p/a (Table 6.1). Whilst the sample selection and size is insufficient for generalising to the population, it is notable that the highest income bracket reports the highest rate of suspensions in this data set. This is contrary to previous studies that cite low socioeconomic status related to higher suspension risk (Hemphill et al., 2014; Paget et al., 2018) and higher daily screen time (Tandon et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2019). It is posited this could be an emerging sociocultural trend aligned with the HFSE study's focus on whether increased access to, and use of, screened digital devices may contribute to negative behaviours that lead to school suspension.

Studies on digital inequity, colloquially termed the digital divide, have identified a relationship between household economic status and access to screened digital devices. One study carried out in India demonstrated that households of economic advantage not only have higher ownership of screened devices than households with lower economic status, but also the highest internet access (Bheemeshwar & Vaidehi, 2020). Others argue that even when children have access to digital technologies, they may experience an alternative divide: the risk of forsaking its use for

learning in favour of more engaging, non-academic online pursuits (Robinson et al., 2015; Talaee &

Noroozi, 2019).

As noted in the literature review, symptoms of screened digital device addiction can mimic

behaviours recognised as special or additional needs, such as attention and self-regulation problems

attributed to ADHD (Lissak, 2018; Ra et al., 2018; Yen et al., 2007), and the observation of

heightened anxiety and impaired social ability (Calhoun et al., 2017) associated with ASD (APA,

2013). Children of trauma may also exhibit these symptoms, as well as mood disorders, intense

emotions (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.), and increased internalising and

externalising behaviours (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Overrepresentation of children with special or

additional needs in suspension data has long been a concern (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019; Sullivan &

Bal, 2013; Zeng et al., 2021). The HFSE study seems to support these findings, with more than half of

the suspended children reported on in this study identifying as special, or additional, needs students.

The definition of the label *special needs* has altered throughout the years. Originally labelled

students with disabilities (SWD), it referred to children who were verified with a hearing, physical,

visual, or speech-language impairment, intellectual disability or ASD (DoE, 2020c). The current term

special needs is interchangeable with *additional needs*, which now includes conditions such as ADHD,

dyslexia, or coordination and processing disorders (DoE, n.d.-i). One author posits children "in need"

(Hayden, 1997, p.36), or what is now recognised as children of trauma (National Child Traumatic

Stress Network, n.d.), require similar support as those officially verified and recognised as special

needs.

It is uncertain whether individuals with special or additional needs are more likely to be

attracted to the attributes of screened digital devices, or whether Problematic Interactive Media Use

(PIMU) is potentially being misdiagnosed as special needs disorders (Lissak, 2018; Machado et al.,

2018). Parents or teachers attempting to manage children's screen time by refusing access or

attempting to remove devices from children who refuse to relinquish them may trigger frustration.

This frequently presents as aggression (Dollard, 1939; Miller et al., 1941), a reaction that may be

interpreted as physical misconduct under state schools' codes of conduct (DoE, 2021h) and potentially result in suspension.

There is some evidence that extra-curricular activities can have a moderating effect on children's behaviour. Sport and physical activity are associated with lowered social anxiety and internalising behaviours (Aumètre & Poulin, 2018; Moeijes et al., 2018; Schumacher & Seiler, 2011), and may moderate adolescent risky behaviours (Cohen et al., 2007; Metzger et al., 2009). Younger children may benefit too; one study reported that Preparatory students participating in extra-curricular activities demonstrate lower problematic behaviours than those who did not participate (Simoncini et al., 2012). It has also been reported that structured physical activity can potentially improve "school-day social and behavioral functioning …" for young children with ADHD (Smith et al., 2013, p. 78). While the HFSE sample size was too modest to draw conclusions, existing evidence suggests further research could be valuable.

Physical misconduct featured strongly in the reasons respondents' own children were suspended (Table 6.2). Kicking, fighting, violence with an item are all terms used by parents to describe why their child was issued a suspension. Nonetheless, even with such aggressive terminology, the majority of these parents perceived their child's undesirable behaviour as a function rather than deliberate and unruly behaviour, thus disagreeing that the adjoining consequence should be a suspension.

Physical misconduct was also rated by respondents as the most likely category to lead to suspensions, as well as the most common reason for suspensions across all grade levels (see Table 6.3). This included Preparatory student suspensions, the focus of the HFSE study. Physical misconduct and violent events (Riley et al., 2020) appear to be an escalating matter within this young cohort.

Physical misconduct has been increasing annually since 2013 (see Table 5.3). In more recent years, the percentage of Preparatory suspensions attributed to physical misconduct have continued to increase. In 2018, it accounted for over 73% of the total Preparatory year suspensions and climbed to over 75% the following calendar year. In comparison, physical violence accounts for less than 40% of

suspensions for Grades 1–12 when reasons not associated with Preparatory suspensions, such as substance misconduct, are excluded (see Table 5.3).

The statistic that approximately three-quarters of all Preparatory suspensions involve physical misconduct is concerning. It has particular relevance to this study's premise investigating whether increased access to digital media via screened technology, especially mobile devices, may be contributing to young children's undesirable behaviours. There are several notions, based on existing studies, that have led to this premise.

The considerable increase of over 52% in Preparatory student suspension rates in the 2014 calendar year was the catalyst for investigating this phenomenon (see Table 5.1). Global tablet sales peaked in 2013/2014 (Statista, 2018), which coincided with this extraordinary suspension increase. Noted alongside the growth in mobile digital devices was the increase of over 10% in ADHD diagnoses in recent years (Xu et al., 2018).

While associations between ADHD symptoms and digital media addiction have been reported (Gentile et al., 2012; Linebarger, 2015; Stenseng et al., 2020), there is debate regarding the directionality. Until recently, it was generally believed that elements of the digital environment, such as rapid pace and stimulating content, may incite an "arousal-habituation response …", making individuals with ADHD more prone to PIMU (Beyens et al., 2018, p. 9879). Symptoms of the disorder itself have also been suggested as predisposing individuals with ADHD to engage in excessive screen time, such as impaired self-control and sensitivity to reward (Yen et al., 2007).

However, more recent neuroimaging studies observe similarities in the volume of grey matter in the brain between participants with internet gaming disorders (IGD) and those with ADHD when compared to normal controls (Lee et al., 2019). Other studies describe similarities between behavioural addictions, such as screened gaming disorders and substance addictions, particularly in regard to dopamine sensitivity (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015). Regardless of directionality, individuals exposed to more screen-time demonstrate significantly higher rates of problematic behaviour (Tamana et al., 2019). These include externalising behaviours (Vernon et al., 2017), the very behaviours that commonly result in school suspensions, particularly for Preparatory students.

This is reflected in respondents' opinions regarding school suspensions. Thus, the findings in this chapter have addressed research question 3, which asks whether the opinions of community members support the observed increases in the DoE's suspension rate data. Findings confirm that school communities are in sync with current reasons for suspension rates for Preparatory student statistics (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). However, while respondents accurately believe that physical misdemeanours account for the majority of Preparatory suspensions, most indicate that the Preparatory year is the least appropriate cohort to issue suspensions to (see Figure 5.4). This is out of step with current policies and procedures, which have been revisited as recently as 2020. There is a clear need to thoroughly investigate violent behaviour in young students. With significant rises in the diagnoses of ADHD (Xu et al., 2018), ASD (King & Bearman, 2011; Maenner et al., 2020), and increasing awareness of children of trauma and their additional needs, it is timely to expand research into the phenomenon of children accessing screened digital devices. The findings detailed in this chapter indicate a strong need for further research regarding young children's access to and use of screened digital devices.

6.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and analysed the demographics of survey respondents and their children. It analysed the opinions of survey respondents regarding most and least likely reasons for suspensions across three school-age cohorts. It observed similarities between community beliefs and DoE longitudinal suspension data. The views of respondents with children who have experienced the suspension process were collected and analysed. This revealed a sense of injustice expressed by the majority of parents in this survey with suspended children, with most indicating they did not agree with the school's decision to issue a suspension.

It also examined respondents' beliefs regarding appropriate grade levels for suspension enforcement. Most notably, it discovered a significant difference in physical misconduct percentage rates when compared to like-for-like reasons between Preparatory student suspensions and G1-G12 students (see Table 5.3). Whilst the HFSE data set is too modest to generalise beyond this data set or draw significant conclusions, it has identified some relationships and trends worthy of future research.

The following chapter presents and analyses the traits of children included in this survey. Using Goodman's (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, it examines whether there are patterns of traits particularly common in suspended and non-suspended children. Using frequency distributions and descriptive statistics, it analyses trait scores for three categories of children identified in this study: non-suspended, suspended once, and suspended more than once.

Chapter 7: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Results

7.1. Prelude

The previous chapter detailed the demographics of survey respondents and their children. Family demographics and participation in extra-curricular activities and screen habits were explored before examining the reasons respondents' children were suspended. Respondent opinions regarding most and least common reason for suspensions and appropriate grade level for suspensions to be issued were also analysed.

Chapter Seven analyses the results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). The attributes and personality nuances of children included in this study are examined. In particular, it compares the traits of non-suspended children with suspended children, investigating whether there are notable characteristics, habits or behaviours that provide insight into their suspensions beyond the numerical statistical representation.

The SDQ rating scales were analysed using the method described in Chapter 4. The data were organised into two sets to provide comparison between traits of suspended and non-suspended children. The first set included all children in the data set; the second set consisted of data extracted regarding the 13 suspended children. Three categories of children were identified: non-suspended, suspended once, and suspended more than once. Data were analysed using frequency distributions as well as descriptive and inferential statistics. Results enabled comparison between the three categories of children to identify whether suspended children were associated with definitive traits that identified at risk markers.

Whilst the number of children included in the survey via parental report is small, the findings below are indicative of hyperactivity and peer problems being an issue of the suspension process for the children in this sample. As suspension events occur within a finite set of conditions and affect only a small percentage of students, it is likely that SDQ analysis of a larger group of suspended students would present similar findings. The author recognises and cautions these results are generalisable to this study's data only but offer a valuable starting point and methodology for much needed further research.

7.2. Frequency Distribution Findings

This section expresses the statistical analysis of SDQ data provided by survey respondents. Data are firstly presented in frequency tables, comparing the Strengths and Difficulties trait scales (see Tables 7.1,7.2, 7.3, 7.5, and 7.6) with the associated Behaviour score (see Tables 7.4, 7.7, and 7.8), for all three categories of children ($n = 55$). Descriptive statistics follow (see Tables 7.9 and 7.10), comparing non-suspended children ($n = 42$) with extracted suspended children's ($n = 13$) results.

Table 7.1

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Prosocial (n = 54)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Prosocial scale	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Close to average (8–10)	30	57.0	2	3.6	5	9.4
Slightly lowered (7)	4	7.3	0	0.0	2	3.6
Low (6)	3	5.5	2	3.6	0	0.0
Very low (0–5)	4	7.5	0	0.0	2	3.6
Total	41	75.3	4	7.2	9	16.6

Notably, seven suspended children scored the highest scores of 9 or 10 for this trait. It was observed that parents rated first-born children as either *Somewhat True* or *Certainly True* for all five prosocial traits (see Appendix L), while 5.5% of second-born children were rated as *Not True* for either helpful when others were hurt or altruism. Third-born children received the highest frequency (10.9%) of not true ratings, with one unsuspended third child rating *Not True* for four of the five prosocial traits. Altruism through volunteering was the most common trait to be rated as *Not True* with 3.6% of second children and 7.2% of third children being identified with low altruism.

The result that the majority of both non-suspended and suspended children scored in the *close to average* and *slightly lowered* band, i.e., well-developed prosocial skills such as kindness and empathy, was unanticipated and is elaborated on in the Discussion.

Table 7.2

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Emotional Problems Score (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Emotional problems scale	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Close to average (0–3)	30	54.5	4	7.2	2	3.6
Slightly raised (4)	4	7.3	0	0.0	1	1.8
High (5–6)	3	5.5	0	0.0	3	5.5
Very high (7–10)	5	9.1	0	0.0	3	5.5
Total	42	76.4	4	7.2	9	16.4

Nine children in the *close to average* band scored zero. All are children who have never been suspended, with the exception of a private school student in G5 with a history of a single suspension.

A single child scored 10 in the *very high* band. This child was in Prep when suspended, experienced

multiple suspensions, and was undergoing special needs verification at the time of data collection.

Table 7.3

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Peer Problems Score (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Peer problems scale	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Close to average (0–2)	29	52.7	2	3.6	1	1.8
Slightly raised (3)	6	11.0	0	0.0	2	3.6
High (4)	5	9.1	1	1.8	1	1.8
Very high (5–10)	2	3.6	1	1.8	5	9.1
Total	42	76.4	4	7.2	9	16.3

Fourteen children scored zero in the *close to average* band for peer problems; all six had not

been suspended, with the exception of a private school student in G5 with a history of a single

suspension. Of the six suspended children who scored in the *very high* band, five had special needs

and one, a Prep student, was undergoing verification. Half of the suspended children scoring *very high*

were in the early years of school (P–2).

Peer problems, such as collaboration, friendships, and bullying, are particularly problematic

for suspended children. This contradicts results from the prosocial scale (Table 7.1), where the

majority of suspended children scored in the *close to average* and *slightly lowered* scoring bands,

indicating normal levels of empathy, compassion, and altruism.

Table 7.4

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Internalising Problems Score (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Internal problems scale	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Close to average (0–6)	31	56.3	3	5.5	2	3.6
Slightly raised (7–8)	4	7.3	0	0.0	1	1.8
High (9–11)	4	7.3	1	1.8	2	3.6
Very high (12–20)	3	5.5	0	0.0	4	7.3
Total	42	76.5	4	7.3	9	16.3

Eight non-suspended children scored zero for this trait. While non-suspended children

accounted for 63.6% of children scoring in the *close to average* and *slightly raised* bands for

internalising problems, suspended children contributed 10.9% to this band. However, 25.4% of all

children scored in the *high* and *very high* bands, equally distributed between suspended (12.7%) and non-suspended (12.7%) children.

Table 7.5

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Hyperactivity Problems (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Hyperactivity problems scale	n	%	n	%	n	%
Close to average (0–5)	37	66.0	1	1.8	1	1.8
Slightly raised (6–7)	2	3.6	2	3.6	0	0.0
High (8)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Very high (9–10)	3	5.5	1	1.8	8	15.0
Total	42	75.1	4	7.2	9	16.8

Most children who scored zero for hyperactivity had not been suspended (7.3%), with the exception of one child who had experienced a single suspension (1.8%). While only 16.4% of all 55 children scored the highest score of 10, suspended children accounted for 77.8% of these. Children in the early years (P–G2) accounted for 77.8% of suspended children scoring in the *very high* band.

Of note, within this data set, children who have been suspended more than once contributed the largest proportion of children (12.7%) who scored in the highest band for the hyperactivity scale, or, in other words, had the most evident inattention and hyperactivity traits. This is compared to 5.5% of unsuspended children and 1.8% of children with single suspensions.

Table 7.6

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Conduct Problems (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Conduct problems scale	n	%	n	%	n	%
Close to average (0–5)	40	72.7	4	7.2	7	12.8
Slightly raised (6–7)	1	1.8	0	0.0	2	3.6
High (8)	1	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Very high (9–10)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	42	76.3	4	7.2	9	16.4

Eighteen children scored zero for conduct problems. The majority were unsuspended children, although one child who had been suspended once also scored zero. Unexpectedly, the highest score of eight was achieved by a non-suspended child. One of the next highest scores (7) for aggressive traits

was also recorded by a child who had not been suspended. The remaining score of seven was

attributed to a Grade 7 child with special needs who had experienced multiple suspensions.

Table 7.7

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Externalising Problems Score (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Externalising problems scale	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Close to average (0–8)	38	69.1	2	3.6	2	3.6
Slightly raised (9–11)	2	3.6	1	1.8	2	3.6
High (12–14)	1	1.8	0	0.0	2	3.6
Very high (15–20)	1	1.8	1	1.8	3	5.5
Total	42	74.5	4	7.2	9	16.3

Five children scored zero. The majority of these were attributed to children who have not been

suspended; however, one child who had experienced one suspension in high school also scored zero.

A child with multiple suspensions recorded the highest score of 17, had special needs verification and

was suspended in high school. The next highest score of 16 was attributed to a child with no

suspensions.

Table 7.8

Frequency Distribution of Parent Ratings: Total Difficulties Score (n = 55)

SDQ scoring band	No suspension		Suspended once		Multiple suspensions	
Total difficulties scale	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Close to average (0–13)	34	61.8	2	3.6	1	1.8
Slightly raised (14–16)	2	3.6	1	1.8	0	0.0
High (17–19)	3	5.5	1	1.8	0	0.0
Very high (20–40)	3	5.5	0	0.0	8	15.0
Total	42	76.4	4	7.2	9	16.8

The lowest score for this trait was one, with 5.5% of children, all non-suspended, accounting

for this score. The highest score recorded was 30 (3.6%) and was attributed to children with multiple

suspensions. All suspended children in the early years (P–G2) scored in the *very high* band with the

exception of one G2 child with multiple suspensions who scored 12, and one child in Prep who had

received a single suspension, who scored 15. Despite the sample limitations, it is notable that almost

all children who have received multiple suspensions scored in the *very high* band for total difficulties.

To put this into perspective, this is a rate of 88.9% of children with multiple suspensions compared to 8.8% of non-suspended children.

7.3. Differences Between Suspended and Non-Suspended Children

This section will consider differences between suspended and non-suspended children for each of the SDQ sub-scales and total score. Table 7.9 will present descriptive statistics for the non-suspended children for the SDQ sub-scales and total SDQ score. Table 7.10 will repeat this for the suspended children. Note that both categories of suspended children, i.e., suspended once and multiple suspensions, have been merged into a single category of thirteen children in Table 7.10.

Table 7.9

Descriptive Statistics for the Non-Suspended Children: SDQ Sub-Scales and Total Score (n = 42)

SDQ Scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Problems	0	10	2.76	2.60
Hyperactivity Problems	0	10	2.88	2.55
Peer Problems	0	10	1.74	1.56
Conduct Problems	0	10	1.45	1.86
Externalising	0	20	4.33	3.75
Internalising	0	20	4.50	3.77
Prosocial	0	10	8.32	2.11
Total Difficulties Score	0	40	8.83	6.44

Table 7.10

Descriptive Statistics for the Suspended Children: SDQ Sub-Scales and Total Score (N = 13)

SDQ Scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Problems	0	10	4.08	3.07
Hyperactivity Problems	0	10	8.08	3.09
Peer Problems	0	10	5.08	2.93
Conduct Problems	0	10	3.46	2.11
Externalising	0	20	11.54	4.75
Internalising	0	20	9.15	4.98
Prosocial	0	10	7.69	1.75
Total Difficulties Score	0	40	20.69	8.75

Suspended children consistently scored higher for all traits, with the exception of the prosocial scale which reverses the scoring method, i.e., lower prosocial score equates to lower tendencies towards empathy, compassion, and altruism. Despite this, suspended children ($M = 7.69$; $SD = 1.75$)

generally scored almost as high as non-suspended children ($M = 8.32$; $SD = 2.11$) for the prosocial scale.

A notable observation within this data set relates to hyperactivity problems. Suspended children's mean scores ($M = 8.08$; $SD = 3.09$) were almost triple those of non-suspended children ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 2.55$). This score is used in combination with other sub-scales to generate both the internalising and total difficulties scores, hence these scores are also notably higher for suspended children than for non-suspended children.

7.4. T-tests and Effect Size Findings

T-tests were significant for all SDQ traits and sub-scale scores with the exception of emotional and prosocial problems. Hedges' g was used to calculate effect size, which assumes 0.2 => small effect; 0.5 => medium effect; and 0.8 => large effect (Glen, 2016). Results are reported below from largest effect size to lowest. Both suspended groups (suspended once and multiple suspensions) were merged into one group of 13 suspended children for these analyses.

7.4.1. Hyperactivity Problems

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group ($M =8.08$, $SD =3.09$) reporting higher scores on the hyperactivity problems scale, 95%CI [3.21, 7.19], than the non-suspended group ($M =2.88$, $SD =2.55$, $t(17) = 5.5143$, $p < 0.001$, *Hedges' g = 1.93*.

7.4.2. Externalising Problems

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group ($M =11.54$, $SD =4.75$) reporting higher scores on the externalising problems scale, 95%CI [4.16, 10.26], than the non-suspended group ($M =4.33$, $SD =3.75$, $t(16) = 5.0108$, $p < 0.001$, *Hedges' g = 1.80*.

7.4.3. Peer Problems

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group ($M =5.08$, $SD =2.93$) reporting higher scores on the peer problems scale, 95%CI [1.52, 5.16], than the non-suspended group ($M =1.74$, $SD =1.56$, $t(14) = 3.941$, $p < 0.001$, *Hedges' g = 1.71*.

7.4.4. Total Difficulties

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group (*M* =20.69, *SD* =8.75) reporting higher scores on the total difficulties scale, 95%CI [6.30, 17.42], than the non-suspended group (*M* =8.83, *SD* =6.44, *t*(16) = 4.5226, *p* < 0.001, *Hedges' g* = 1.69.

7.4.5. Internalising Problems

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group (*M* =9.15, *SD* =4.98) reporting higher scores on the internalising problems scale, 95%CI [1.47, 7.83], than the non-suspended group (*M* =4.5, *SD* =3.77, *t*(16) = 3.1027, *p* < 0.003, *Hedges' g* = 1.14.

7.4.6. Conduct Problems

The *t* test was statistically significant, with the suspended group (*M* =3.46, *SD* =2.11) reporting higher scores on the conduct problems scale, 95%CI [0.64, 3.38], than the non-suspended group (*M* =1.45, *SD* =1.86, *t*(18) = 3.0838, *p* < 0.003, *Hedges' g* = 1.05.

7.4.7. Emotional Problems

The *t* test was not statistically significant, with the suspended group (*M* =4.08, *SD* =3.07) reporting higher scores on the emotional problems scale, 95%CI [-0.67, 3.31], than the non-suspended group (*M* =2.76, *SD* =2.60, *t*(17) = 1.4025, *p* > 0.05, *Hedges' g* = 0.49.

7.4.8. Prosocial Problems

The *t* test was not statistically significant, with the suspended group (*M* =7.69, *SD* =1.75) reporting higher scores on the prosocial problems scale, 95%CI [-1.84, 0.58], than the non-suspended group (*M* =8.32, *SD* =2.11, *t*(23) = -1.078, *p* > 0.05, *Hedges' g* = 0.31.

Findings from this section are elaborated on in the discussion below.

7.5. Discussion

Despite the HFSE sample containing a modest number of children that parents provided data for, some notable observations arose from the SDQ data. A clear trend emerged from this data set: suspended children consistently scored higher for problematic behaviours than non-suspended children did. This is particularly observable in the total difficulties score (Table 7.8 and section 7.4.4), where

all four problem scales (emotional, peer, hyperactivity and conduct) are summed. However, highest

effect sizes were observed for hyperactivity, externalising, and peer problems (see Section 7.4).

Results for the prosocial scale (Table 7.1) are somewhat contrary to expectations. Descriptive

statistics demonstrate that mean scores for suspended children is only marginally less than those for

non-suspended children. Previous studies have determined that high prosocial traits are associated

with lower hyperactivity and problematic behaviours (Andrade et al., 2014; Ragnarsdottir et al., 2018).

However, the SDQ results for children in the HFSE study are dissimilar to these findings. While the

majority of suspended children scored in the moderate to high range for the peer problems scale,

indicating difficulty in navigating and securing friendships, conversely, only two suspended children

scored in the low range for the prosocial scale. This suggests that suspended children in this data set

demonstrate moderate to proficient prosocial skills, such as altruism and empathetic traits.

This disparity may have occurred for several reasons. Firstly, children who are diagnosed with

a special need, particularly disorders associated with compromised social skills and emotional

regulation such as ASD (Sokol et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2020) and ADHD (Hoza, 2007; Westwood,

2021), are often provided with intensive social skilling lessons (Espelage et al., 2016; Naylor et al.,

2019). These seek to establish the behaviours assessed in the SDQ, such as turn-taking, sharing,

helping others, and showing empathy (Schrandt et al., 2009). Almost all suspended children reported

in the HFSE study have, or are undergoing, verification for special needs; thus, there is high

probability that they have engaged in explicit training of social skills. Whilst these skills are helpful

during managed situations, they are less effective in uncontrolled environments (Hoza, 2007), such as

unsupervised play or during peer-to-peer interactions. These less structured settings expose them to

conflict and risk of suspension.

Secondly, it is possible the subjective format of the SDQ questionnaire affected responses. For

example, the Prosocial Scale questions include traits that are easily observed, such as whether the

child is "helpful if someone is hurt" (Appendix J) and whether they frequently volunteer. The Peer

Problems Scale questions, on the other hand, asks whether the child tends to be solitary or is

"generally liked by other children" (Appendix J), qualities that require more subjectivity by the parent-

reporter and are more difficult to quantify. Parents responding to the questionnaire may have found the observable prosocial traits easier to identify than less visible traits in other SDQ scales such as whether their child has anxious thoughts or whether other children like them. Alternatively, social desirability, or the "tendency to underreport socially undesirable attitudes and behaviors and to over report more desirable attributes" (Latkin et al., 2017, p. 133) may have distorted responses. Future studies might benefit from the inclusion of a social desirability measure.

Thirdly, the existing studies mentioned above associating hyperactivity with lowered prosocial skills involved children with existing ADHD diagnoses (Andrade et al., 2014) or identified ADHD symptoms (Ragnarsdottir et al., 2018). In contrast, the HFSE study's finding that hyperactivity may contribute to suspension risk emerged inductively, rather than deductively. That is, the design of the HFSE study and research questions did not explicitly seek associations between prosocial traits and hyperactivity. Additionally, the HFSE study is based on a small volunteer sample with issues of generalisability.

Despite this, some findings were robust enough to warrant further study. For example, this data set suggests that not only do higher scores of hyperactivity, peer and total difficulties increase a child's suspension risk, these two traits also present a risk of multiple suspensions. Existing research supports this, identifying that children with repetitive, low-level classroom behaviours, which are insignificant singly but increase irritability when on high rotation, contribute to a high proportion of suspensions (Daly, 2013; Michail, 2011; Owora et al., 2018; Wiley et al., 2020). While diagnoses of children in the HFSE study are not known beyond the blanket term of special needs, all suspended children in this study who were diagnosed, or undergoing verification, for special needs scored high on the hyperactivity scale, including five who were suspended in the early years (P–2). The growing evidence that problematic interactive media use (PIMU) is associated with disorders such as ADHD, coupled with the HFSE study's SDQ data suggesting hyperactivity as a suspension risk, merits further investigation.

The association between high SDQ scores for hyperactivity and peer problems in children who have experienced multiple suspensions in this study are worrisome on two fronts. Firstly, the high

rate of suspended children in this study who have a special needs verification suggests the possibility that suspensions may have been issued as a result of behaviours associated with their disorder, rather than intentional misconduct. Functional behaviour assessments could be a beneficial addition to suspension processes to determine whether antecedents align with disordered or neuro-diverse behaviours rather than wilful disobedience.

Secondly, these findings reveal that school staff may not be skilled in distinguishing disordered behaviours from deliberate disciplinary infractions. This supports concerns HFSE study respondents raised concerning the need for teacher education and training in the area of special or additional needs. It also highlights the need to establish a separate, universally accepted set of differentiated behaviour management strategies addressing special needs. While the Essential Skills for Classroom Management (Classroom Profiling Association Inc, n.d.) has been endorsed by the DoE as a behaviour management guide, children with special or additional needs often require adaptations to their environment to facilitate successful behaviour management. Examples include providing calm spaces they can retreat to when overwhelmed and including movement or sensory breaks to diffuse hyper-arousal (Emerging Minds, 2018).

These findings may be valuable in guiding changes to suspension policy directives. Variations reported between suspended and non-suspended children's SDQ scores suggest it may be possible to use the SDQ, or a similar psychometric measure, as a profiling tool to identify children at risk of exhibiting behaviours that lead to suspensions. Addressing these concerns through policy could potentially reduce suspension rates.

7.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and analysed the results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). It found that suspended children in the HFSE study frequently scored high for hyperactivity and peer problems. Hyperactivity was particularly evident as a potential marker for suspension risk, with suspended children's mean scores almost three times higher than the hyperactivity scores of non-suspended children, who tended to score in the low, or average, range for these traits. Hyperactivity also had the highest effect size. This suggests it may be possible to use psychometric tools such as the

SDQ as a profiling tool to identify children at risk of suspension, providing opportunities for preventative interventions to reduce or eliminate their likelihood of being suspended.

The overrepresentation of children with special or additional needs receiving suspensions was also raised. Suggestions for this occurrence included the possibility of teachers misunderstanding disordered behaviour as misconduct. Failure to provide environmental adaptations to reduce the need for behaviour prompts was also considered, as were suspension policy and procedure changes. These, and other recommendations emerging from this study, will be discussed in the final chapter. The following chapter examines qualitative data arising from survey respondents' opinions and experiences regarding increasing Preparatory student suspension rates. Respondent recommendations for alternatives to external suspensions is also presented in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Survey Respondents' Opinions Regarding Increasing Preparatory Suspension Rates

and Suggestions for Alternatives

The previous chapter detailed findings for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), comparing trait scale scores between non-suspended and suspended children. Descriptive and inferential statistics identified a marked increase of problematic behaviours in the suspended children of survey respondents, particularly for hyperactivity and peer problems. This chapter further probes survey responses regarding suspensions. Two open-ended online survey questions are the focus. The first asked: "Prep suspensions have increased by 76% in five years (2012–2016). In your opinion, what is contributing to an increase in Prep suspensions?" The second posed the question: "In your opinion, what alternatives could you suggest in place of school suspensions, and why?"

Responses for both questions expressed opinions around locus of responsibility. This produced some overlap of themes. While the findings for the two questions are presented separately, the chapter discussion draws on themes from both questions. Findings for respondent opinions regarding potential causes for increasing Prep suspensions, or question one, are set out below. Findings for respondents' suggested alternatives to suspensions, or question 2, follows directly below this, with the discussion presented prior to the conclusion.

8.1. School Community Perspectives on the Increase in Preparatory Suspensions

Using thematic analysis as described in Chapter 4, two distinct categories emerged from responses to survey question one. The categories are labelled *parents or society are the problem*; and *teachers or schools are the problem*. Twenty-one themes were identified and distributed across the two categories. Themes are presented in frequency tables, with categories defining the table headings. Elaborations on themes follow each table, with respondent quotes supporting findings. Note that theme responses (124) outnumber respondents (70), as many provided multiple opinions regarding the topic of increasing Prep student suspensions.

8.2: Category 1: Parents or Society are the Problem

From the 79 responses aligning to this category, eleven themes were established: Poor parenting; Lack of respect/discipline; Lack of social skills; Physical bullying/misconduct; Behavioural

issues; Parental attitudes; Family breakdown; Screened devices; Sense of entitlement; Verbal

misconduct; and Special needs. Data representing these themes, in descending frequency order, are

reported in Table 8.1 below. Notably, the first three themes contributed 57% of responses.

Table 8.1

"Parents or Society are the Problem" Responses

Themes	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Poor parenting	14	23.0	2	11.1	16	20.3
Lack of respect/discipline	10	16.4	5	27.8	15	19.0
Lack of social skills	13	21.3	1	5.6	14	17.7
Physical bullying	5	8.2	2	11.1	7	8.9
Behavioural issues	3	4.9	4	22.2	7	8.9
Parental attitudes	3	4.9	3	16.7	6	7.6
Family breakdown/violence	6	9.8	0	0.0	6	7.6
Screened devices	3	4.9	0	0.0	3	3.8
Sense of entitlement	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	2.5
Verbal misconduct	1	1.6	1	5.6	2	2.5
Special needs	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.3
Total	61	100.0	18	100.0	79	100.0

8.2.1. Poor Parenting

The majority of contributions for this theme were from educators. Examples provided by

educators for the perceived issue of poor parenting included a "lack of parental controls" and "lack of

support from parents of challenging students." Passionate justifications were also provided, such as

"an absolute disgusting lack of parenting and blame on schools for kids that have very few skills

instead of parents taking responsibility and helping to discipline their child" and "terrible parenting.

Not setting any boundaries or rules at home."

Contemporary lifestyles were also offered as an explanation for poor parenting, with a

classroom teacher stating "busy families" are part of the problem. This was elaborated on by an early

childhood teacher who wrote, "sometimes it is poor parenting skills, but society as a whole seems to

be forgetting these skills as more and more children are raised in LDC [Long Day Care] centres and

come home to stressed and tired parents." A similar perspective, "parents being absent from children's

lives and not involved in schooling," was provided by a public servant and echoed by a business owner, who blamed "a decrease in parental involvement."

Parenting styles, rather than absence, were suggested by others. Some implied a laissez-faire parenting approach as problematic, commenting "freedom given to children" and "more 'free-range' children/parenting" are part of the issue. A teacher commented, "parents are becoming too soft and are not good role models," a sentiment that was shared by another educator: "we molly coddle them so much, they don't have boundaries and therefore think they can treat others however they feel."

8.2.2. Lack of Respect/Discipline

Although educators were found to contribute most responses for this theme, educators and non-educators equally suggested children's behaviour is not being regulated at home, with variations of "lack of discipline at home" cited. Elaborating on this, one teacher commented that "children arriv[e] to Prep year having had little discipline or boundaries at home and are suddenly expected to adhere to school rules and procedures." A stay-at-home parent supported this, stating a "lack of direction, guidance and discipline at home before they commence school" contributes to Prep suspensions. The observation by an early-childhood teacher that they "see a big difference between children who are given responsibility, respect, routine and expectation [of] follow-through at home, compared to those children who do not" illustrated the visibility of these attributes. Some mentioned lack of respect alongside lack of discipline, including two educators who explicitly identified teachers as the target of disrespect. In the words of an early childhood teacher, "children display less respect toward their teachers, become defiant and will not engage in routine, work, friendships – sometimes becoming physical to avoid what is expected of them."

8.2.3. Lack of Social Skills

Almost all responses for this theme were reported by educators except for one non-educator. A cake decorator situated the onus of responsibility of social skills on the family, implying that "children who have not been taught proper social standards by their parents" are contributing to increases in Prep student suspensions. Several educators also conveyed the opinion that young children are coming to school with inadequate social skills, although they stopped short of identifying

who they believe are responsible for developing these skills with generalised comments. However, a few educators indirectly blamed parents, inferring that neglecting to expose children to pre-prep or kindy programs contributes to inadequate school readiness. As a teacher commented, "many children have also not previously been in any day-care/kindy or early learning environments where a routine is followed." A deputy principal raised a concern regarding "low verbal language issues upon enrolment," which could be a further effect of low socialisation in young children. The final response also mentioned social skills, but from the perspective that it is adults who are lacking in social skills and manners. This inference suggests a lack of parental modelling of these skills and attributes that has led to a generational decline in them.

8.2.4. Physical Bullying/Misconduct

Notably, all but one response for this theme included the word 'physical.' Most respondents mentioned physical misconduct in broad terms, such as "students not keeping hands to self, and physical aggression" or "bullying involving physical harm." However, two educators explicitly mentioned physical misconduct towards peers and teaching staff as a reason for increasing Prep suspension rates. Only one respondent, an early childhood teacher, linked the behaviour to a function, stating, "children sometimes become physical to avoid what is expected of them."

8.2.5. Behavioural Issues

Behaviour was largely undefined by most respondents for this theme, although three non-educators provided more specific comments, such as "disruptive behaviour," "deliberately manipulating for a day off," and "defiant behaviour, non-compliance." The latter response was echoed by an insurance administrator, who gave the example of "poor behaviour, e.g., not listening to instructions." A more empathetic approach was offered by a teacher, justifying that "kids have poor coping skills, which leads to negative behaviour."

8.2.6. Parental Attitudes/Influences From Home

Educators and non-educators equally responded to this theme. Two non-educators implied that teachers and school administrators suspend students out of fear: "fear of reprisals from other parents," and "fear of parental reactions, of seeming too lenient." In contrast, a primary school principal asserted

the problem is due to "parents having no respect for authority." The home environment was also addressed, with a teacher suggesting that "changes in parenting over time, [and] society condoning children being exposed to age-inappropriate materials, experiences [and] expectations" may be contributing to the issue.

8.2.7. Family Breakdown/Family Violence

All responses for family dysfunction were from educators. One provided a particularly passionate response: "I have been teaching for 20 years and the Preppies we see now … they are broken babies. So many issues and traumas and family dysfunction …" Another response was in terms of personal experience: "I have also worked in some areas that have a myriad of stresses in the home which the children witness and experience."

8.2.8. Screened Devices

Educators were the only respondents who viewed screened devices as problematic. Most attributed screen time in general terms, without elaborating on whether it is the type of screen being accessed that is of concern, or how long it is being used, or for what it is being used. However, an "increase in use of devices for play" was suggested by an education support employee as being the issue, inferring it may be interfering with face-to-face social play.

8.2.9. Sense of Entitlement

Although this theme only contained two responses, the recurrence of the word "entitlement" from a sample of 70 respondents was deemed significant enough to express as a theme. Both respondents used the word in a similar way, inferring that "children …[are] becoming too spoilt and entitled in many ways."

8.2.10. Verbal Misconduct

This theme also contained just two responses. However, verbal misconduct is one of DoE's eight official reasons for issuing suspensions (see Table 1.1). Verbal misconduct has also arisen as a theme in other sections of this study, so it has contextual relevance to the study. Within this category, both respondents expressed it as verbal abuse: "students verbally abusing staff or students," and "poor behaviour, e.g., verbal abuse."

8.2.11. Special Needs

Although there was only a single response for this theme within this category, it arose throughout several other question responses, so it has been included here to provide opportunity for comparative analysis. The response was from an educator, who stated that:

Suspension is more for parents to take action and get medical support to help their child. A lot of parents don't want a "label" on their child, so [they] refuse to get medical support and then their child doesn't get the support they need. (Teacher, age 31).

8.3: Category 2: Teachers or Schools are the Problem

Category 2 had a total of 48 responses (see Table 8.2). Educators contributed 58% of these responses; non-educators provided 42%. Three responses have been eliminated from the response count as they were broad, unclassifiable responses. These respondents raised issues such as a lack of options other than suspension, and that there is no single, overall solution for modifying difficult behaviours.

Ten themes were established from the remaining 45 responses, presented in descending order: Lack of support and/or knowledge of special needs; Enrolment age/lack of school readiness; Curriculum issues; Lack of play-based learning; Increasing class sizes/inadequate in-class support; Poor teaching; Misunderstanding students' needs; Outdated school processes; Administration having unrealistic guidelines; and Culturally entrenched teachers. The first two themes contributed almost 42% of total responses. Findings for these themes are described in Table 8.2.

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Table 8.2

"Teachers or Schools are the Problem" Responses

Themes	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Lack of support/knowledge special needs	4	14.3	7	35.0	11	22.9
Enrolment age/lack of school readiness	7	25.0	2	10.0	9	18.7
Curriculum issues	6	21.4	0	0.0	6	12.5
Lack of play-based learning	5	17.9	0	0.0	5	10.4
Increasing class sizes	3	10.7	2	10.0	5	10.4
Poor teaching/teacher education	2	7.1	3	15.0	5	10.4
Outdated school processes	1	3.6	1	5.0	2	4.2
Misunderstanding students' needs	0	0.0	2	10.0	2	4.2
Admin having unrealistic guidelines	0	0.0	2	10.0	2	4.2
Culturally entrenched teachers	0	0.0	1	5.0	1	2.1
Total	28	100.0	20	100.0	48	100.0

8.3.1. Lack of Support and/or Knowledge of Special Needs

Although this theme had the highest total response rate, non-educator responses were almost

double those from educators. The most common concern was that teachers do not have adequate

training in managing students with special needs. This was elaborated on by a counsellor, who

believes that "inadequate training of staff in the areas of ASD [autism spectrum disorder], ADHD

[attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], ODD [oppositional defiance disorder], etc, [and] lack of

preventative measures including sensory tools [and] calm down spaces" are contributing to rising

numbers of Prep suspensions. The preventative measures mentioned in this comment are adjustments

of the students' environment, a concern raised by other respondents. As noted by an air traffic

controller, "school does not accommodate those children [that] do not 'fit' the box." However, an

educator highlighted how the move to an inclusive education model has its own challenges:

> Another reason for [the] increase in Prep suspensions is the drive for inclusion. Prep students
>
> with disabilities are weighted as though they are EAP [education adjustment plan] profile 1
>
> students [profile = funding weighting, where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest], when in fact
>
> they can be much more complex and have far more support need than that weighting would

suggest. Schools are meant to work it out themselves and support these preppies from their own resources, but the reality is that [due to the] complexity of schools there are limited resources and staffing. Preppies with complex needs who have not responded to supports put in place by the school team are often suspended as a way of giving the team a break, a chance to regroup, look at what's not working and form a new plan to support the student. (special education teacher, age 43).

Others claim it is not necessarily a lack of knowledge or support for special needs students that is the issue, but the failure to diagnose a special need in the first place. This is implied in a teacher's response that "undiagnosed mental health issues and emotional trauma" may be contributing to Prep student suspensions, while a nurse's comment that "[an] autism diagnosis may not have been issued yet" alludes to the difficulties in obtaining a verification of a special need. Notably, several respondents included children affected by trauma in their comments about students with special needs. For perspective, child trauma is an area that has attracted considerable research and development of teacher education programs in recent years in response to growing knowledge of the effects of traumatic childhood events, such as child abuse or neglect, on the brain, regulation of emotions, and behaviour (Bell et al., 2021).

8.3.2. Lack of School Readiness

Enrolment age was a concern for both educators and non-educators, with the predominant concern around developmental readiness. A teacher summed up this viewpoint with her comment that "children are beginning formal schooling before they are emotionally and developmentally equipped to cope." Lack of school readiness was also expressed in terms of the unfamiliar rules and regulations young students encounter in formal education settings. This was evident in the comment from a parent that "Prep students are new to schools and learning how they work and it's overwhelming for them … boys do a lot of rough play, which can lead into violent fights, resulting in school suspension." Another perspective raised was the lack of funding for government-subsidised pre-prep programs, which help familiarise young children with the routines and expectations of formal schooling.

Presumably from the same school or district, two educators made the identical statement, "In our community we know of 25 kids for whom there is no kindy placement – our kindies are full!"

8.3.3. Curriculum Issues

Significantly, half of all responses for this theme addressed the strain of "an overloaded curriculum expectation" on Prep students, making it the leading concern regarding curriculum issues. The Australian Curriculum, introduced in 2014, and Queensland's Department of Education's prescriptive Curriculum to Classroom (C2C) units of work were both mentioned as impacts on teaching and learning loads. The impact on teacher-student relationships was also addressed, with an early years' teacher noting, "teachers are stressed as they have so much they have to get through and that leaves little time for the trusting bond that a positive learning environment is based on."

8.3.4. Lack of Play-Based Learning

The value of play-based learning in the role of developing young children's social skills was raised by several educators. A teacher aide acknowledged the correlation between curriculum issues and play-based learning with her comment, "Prep curriculum requirements have made it impossible to have time to play and socialise. These skills are required to produce students capable of coping with school requirements."

8.3.5. Increasing Class Sizes/Inadequate In-Class Support for Teachers

Most responses for this theme focused on increasing class sizes, inferring that larger class numbers impede a teacher's behaviour management efforts. Several others asserted that the provision of more teacher aides would make supervision of disruptive students more effective.

8.3.6. Poor Teaching

Observing responses between educators and non-educators for this theme illuminated subtle nuances in how each occupation-type expressed their interpretation of poor teaching. For example, most non-educators used broad statements such as "non-educated teachers in many areas. Soft teachers." In contrast, educators tended to cushion the critique by elaborating with a justification. For example, an educator reiterated the concern regarding poor teacher skills, but added the context of inexperience, stating, "unclear and unenforced policy by staff, inconsistent approaches, unrealistic

expectations and inexperienced/poorly trained teachers" are impacting on Prep suspension rates. Another educator observed the fault as poor communication between teachers:

> Staff need to all work together, one teacher might know if something is wrong or happening with a student and is understanding … then they go to lunch or change classes and then the student gets in trouble for the most littlest thing … teachers and staff must all be on the same page, especially when it comes to discipline. (Student Learning Support Officer, age 36).

8.3.7. Outdated School Processes

Responses for this theme raised two issues: current school discipline practices rely on outdated authoritarian processes, and current students experience higher stress levels than previous generations, leading to an escalation in behaviour responses. The present approach to school discipline was critiqued by an educator, who identified it fails to act on current knowledge regarding the effects of stress on brain chemistry, and in turn, on behaviour. In her response, she suggests that our current generation of young people have increased levels of stress compared to previous generations, so existing modes of behaviour management, such as suspension, are ineffective. In her words:

> Distressed children [act] out as a way of communicating their distress combined with out-dated "discipline" programs. There are more distressed children and teens now and we now know that punishment and suspensions are cruel, inappropriate, and ineffective. Yet schools don't have any other "system" to use. We now know how children's brains develop and work, what cause[s] off-track behaviour and what the need from adults [is] to help them learn to manage their difficult feelings. Yet this knowledge is slow to filter down to schools and so most teachers still believe children need punishment in order to behave better. (Primary school teacher, age 54).

A café manager also addressed current disciplinary processes, claiming they are inadequate, noting: "in my experience, the school [is] unable to appropriately handle certain types of behaviour, choosing to remove a student, making it the family's problem."

8.3.8. Misunderstanding Students' Needs

Two perspectives were provided around this theme. The first is from a carer who reflects that an increase in Prep suspensions may be due to a "misunderstanding of the child's needs." Although the cause of misunderstandings was not elaborated on, it is possible the respondent may have been alluding to the limited vocabulary of young children. The second perspective was from a manager who posited that "adults [are] not listening to children/young adults," an inference that school personnel assume an authoritative stance towards discipline.

8.3.9. Administration Having Unrealistic Guidelines

Responses to this theme also took two different viewpoints, the first, that "Administration of the school having too high expectations and unrealistic rules" for students impacts on suspension numbers, and a second, which addresses an "inadequate level of approved responses," presumably regarding the current range of authorised behaviour management processes.

8.3.10. Culturally Entrenched Teachers

The final theme for this category supports some of the thoughts expressed in themes above regarding out-dated processes and beliefs, but from the perspective that older teachers and ingrained culture are to blame, rather than antiquated processes. This respondent states, "teachers in Prep years are getting older and are "set" in their ways."

8.3.11 Summary

The previous section reported on the HFSE survey responses received for the question "What is contributing to an increase in Preparatory suspensions?" Analysis identified a trend for assigning responsibility: parents largely framed teachers and schools as culpable, while teachers tended to perceive families or society as the accountable party. The four themes with the highest rate of responses across both categories included, in descending order: Lack of support/knowledge of special needs (22.9%); Poor parenting (20.3%); Lack of respect/discipline (19%); and Lack of social skills (17.7%). In the next section responses for the question, "In your opinion, what alternatives could you suggest in place of school suspensions, and why?" will be examined.

8.4. Respondents' Suggestions for Alternatives to School Suspensions

The tendency to assign responsibility for suspension alternatives to either the family or the school was evident, with four clear categories arising from the responses to this question: *Families* vs *Schools* and *Punitive* vs *Remedial* actions. As each of these four categories provide a powerful lens in which to view the data, it has been arranged into two categories, *Actions for families to take* and *Actions for schools to take*. Each category was then assigned two sub-categories, *Punitive* and *Remedial* approaches to organise themes.

A theme was considered punitive if it was non-inclusive or clearly a punishment rather than a consequence. For example, punitive actions include undesirable tasks or loss of privileges. A theme was considered remedial if it was inclusive in nature, such as collaboration between the school and family, or sought to identify and remedy the source of undesirable behaviours, such as psychological support or skill development.

A total of 110 responses were distributed across 20 themes. Over 76% of responses were recorded for the *Actions for schools to take* (Category 1) and approximately 24% aligned to *Actions for families to take* (Category 2). Results are set out below, beginning with sub-categories for Category 1. Where more than two themes emerged for a sub-category, findings are organised in frequency tables. Respondent comments are interspersed throughout the elaboration of findings as both context and evidence.

8.5. Category 1: Actions for Families to Take

Some themes for this category may be organised or offered by the school or teacher. However, they have been allocated to Category 1 rather than Category 2 as they would not proceed without family collaboration. For example, the school may offer parenting programs, but without the parent participating, the program is ineffective.

8.5.1. Sub-Category - Actions for Families to Take: Punitive Actions

Five responses corresponded to this sub-category, with just two themes emerging: Parental presence at school, and Police intervention. Non-educators did not contribute responses to this sub-category. A total of 80% of educators suggest parental presence at school as a solution, while 20%

believe police intervention was required. The classroom was explicitly identified as the locale for

parent support in three-quarters of the responses. Comments supporting this strategy included "in-class

observations by parents" and "parents assisting in the classroom to help develop strategies for their

child."

8.5.2. Sub-category - Actions for Families to Take: Remedial Actions

Both educators and non-educators contributed to this sub-category. A total of three themes

were identified for soft actions for families to take: School/family collaboration; Psychological

support; and Parenting programs. Results are set out in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3

Sub-category - Actions for Families to Take: Remedial Actions

Themes	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	n	%	*n*	%
School/family collaboration	6	42.9	5	71.4	11	52.4
Parenting programs	7	50.0	2	28.6	9	42.8
Psychological support	1	7.1	0	0.0	1	4.8
Total	14	100.0	7	100.0	21	100.0

8.5.3. School/Family Collaboration

This theme accounted for more than half of the total responses for this sub-category.

Recommendations included strategies such as "meetings with parents" to more specific suggestions,

such as collaboratively designed behaviour management programs or remedial consequences. A

primary school teacher suggested "involving parents and child when providing consequences. If the

parents are on board the decision is more likely to be respected by the child." This was supported by a

neuro practitioner, who proposed, "calling parent conferences to make a plan to help involve home

with corrective consequences."

8.5.4. Parenting Programs

Responses for this theme contained variations on upskilling families, particularly in relation to

understanding and managing behaviour. One teacher recommended "parenting classes for parents who

often explain that they are unable to manage their child's behaviour themselves." A non-educator

suggested, "parents [need] a better understanding of expectations at school."

8.5.5. Psychological Support

The final theme contained just one response. Despite the low response rate for this theme, it

arises across several other data analyses, so it has been included. Within this theme, a teacher was

explicit in identifying that parents may require psychological support in addition to the suspended

student with her comment, "Psychological help for children and parents with issues."

8.6. Category 2: Actions for Schools to Take

This category is self-explanatory; these are measures the school can implement without

requiring parental effort or direct involvement. A total of 90 responses were collated across the two

sub-categories. Educator responses still dominated, however there was a distinct difference in

occupation response rates across the two sub-categories, which are set out under each sub-category

below.

8.6.1. Sub-Category - Actions for Schools to Take: Punitive Actions

Responses for this sub-category was more equally distributed between educators and non-

educators. Eight themes were identified: Internal suspensions; Alternative program; Undesirable task;

Loss of privileges; Outside school hours detention; Non-remedial consequence; Corporal punishment;

and No alternative – endorse suspension. Table 8.4 elaborates on these, providing frequency rates for

each theme.

Table 8.4

Sub-Category - Actions for Schools to Take: Punitive Actions

Themes	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Internal suspensions	15	55.6	9	37.5	24	47.06
Alternative program	5	18.5	4	16.7	9	17.65
Loss of privileges	3	11.1	4	16.7	7	13.73
Undesirable task	1	3.7	3	12.5	4	7.84
Outside school hours detention	1	3.7	3	12.5	4	7.84
Non-remedial consequence	1	3.7	0	0.0	1	1.96
Corporal punishment	0	0.0	1	4.2	1	1.96
Endorse suspensions	1	3.7	0	0.0	1	1.96
Total	27	100.0	24	100.0	51	100.0

8.6.2. Internal Suspensions

This theme had the highest response frequency across the entire four sub-categories, demonstrating high support for this alternative. Internal (sometimes called in-school or school-based) suspensions require students to physically attend school during their period of suspension but separate from their regular classroom for the duration of the suspension. Notably, this theme accounts for almost half of the 51 total responses for this sub-category, *Actions for schools to take: Punitive actions*.

Responses ranged from two-or-three-word sentences recommending "internal suspensions" as an alternative to external suspensions, to suggestions for including behaviour education or counselling within the internal suspension model. An educator elaborated, "Inter[nal] suspensions. This gives students the opportunity to still engage with [the] curriculum." Several respondents expressed similar sentiments, noting one benefit of internal suspensions is the non-interruption of the students' learning. Others put forward the view that "often suspension is seen as a holiday" or "a few days off school …" by offending students, thus negating the effect of it as a consequence. This may explain the popularity of internal school suspensions as an alternative to external suspensions.

8.6.3. Alternative Program

This theme is closely aligned to the previous theme of internal suspensions in that it proposes suspended students should attend an on-site alternative program, classroom, or behaviour unit. The difference between the two themes is the suggestion that this option is structured as an alternative program or course, separate from mainstream teaching. Nine respondents endorsed this concept, with most elaborating on their response. Some provided justifications, such as providing, "a safe place in the school …" or that the "alternative space in school [is] monitored by trained PBL [Positive Behaviour for Learning program] staff." An educator suggested that "schools have a behaviour unit where students attend and work through issues in a non-classroom structured environment. This would happen after [a] student had served one suspension and was about to [receive] another suspension."

8.6.4. Loss of Privileges

Most respondents elaborated on this theme as excluding the student from extra-curricular or sports activities, or denying the student lunch or playtime sessions, such as "no playtime or contact with friends or peers, under strict supervision and that a return to the classroom is conditional upon improved behaviour." An educator suggested the student could use the exclusion from playtime to "write/draw an apology."

8.6.5. Undesirable Tasks

Most responses for this theme were framed as recommendations for suspended students to provide a community service at the school site, such as the student "doing other work at the school." Two responses suggested variations on "good old rubbish duty, etc," which is traditionally carried out during lunch or recess breaks, essentially incorporating a loss of privilege within the undesirable task.

8.6.6. Outside School Hours Detention

Only one educator raised this option, suggesting the student "stay[s] after school to do cleaning/maintenance …" This essentially overlaps with the previously raised theme, Undesirable task. However, it has been included here, as recommendations for undesirable task do not stipulate that the activity takes place outside school hours. The remaining responses were from non-educators, who all used the term detention, with one recommending, "detention on weekends like America do."

8.6.7. Single-Response Themes

The final three themes: Non-remedial consequence; Corporal punishment; and No alternative – endorse suspension, elicited only one response each. An educator mentioned consequences but was not specific about what these would entail: "consequences are required in all situations. Restorative practices are not sufficient. Children will not stop behaviour if they believe they are achieving something from it." A return to corporal punishment was endorsed by a cake decorator, who commented, "the odd caning wouldn't go astray, either." An educator voiced the opinion that there was no alternative, stating, "if they are physical towards another student or staff member they should be suspended without a doubt." This respondent specified physical misbehaviour; however, it was not clear whether they believed suspensions should be utilised only for physical misdemeanours.

8.7. Sub-Category - Actions for Schools to Take: Remedial Actions

A total of seven themes were identified for Remedial options: Trauma-informed practice; Social skill development; Meditation; More staff/resources; Counselling; Restorative Justice; and Policy Changes. Educators outweighed non-educators for most themes, while concerns regarding policy changes were raised exclusively by non-educators. Trauma-informed practice was equally represented by both occupation types. These results are outlined in greater detail in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5

Sub-Category - Actions for Schools to Take: Remedial Actions

Themes	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Trauma-informed practice	5	23.8	5	41.7	10	30.3
Social skill development	4	19.0	2	16.7	6	18.2
Meditation	4	19.0	1	8.3	5	15.2
More staff/resources	3	14.3	1	8.3	4	12.1
Counselling	3	14.3	1	8.3	4	12.1
Restorative justice	2	9.5	0	0.0	2	6.1
Policy changes	0	0.0	2	16.7	2	6.1
Total	21	100.0	12	100.0	33	100.0

8.7.1. Trauma-Informed Practice

The term trauma was explicitly mentioned by three participants, all educators. The remaining seven respondents used more general terminology, such as "educating teachers on strategies to read the situation better and step in earlier … Look at causes not reactions." Compared to other categories for this question, this theme also had the most detailed responses, with lengthy explanations or justifications. Two examples are provided below:

> Educating teachers about developmental trauma (attachment disorders), the way stress affects young brains and how emotions drive behaviour would help teachers learn to connect emotionally with children and prevent the behaviours which typically lead to suspensions. There is evidence that this works, including teachers who are educating other teachers about how to do this. When children's behaviour is off-track, there are ways to manage this that do not involve suspensions and which nurture and teach children how to do better in future. When humans feel better, we do better. (Primary school teacher, age 54).

The second response reasoned:

> Suspension is not necessarily the answer as the reason behind the behaviour may be because
> they wish not to be at school. It is important to investigate the reason behind the behaviour.
> Children from trauma backgrounds may simply be reacting to that. (Education support, age
> 58).

Several respondents recommended teacher training in behaviour management and suggest that understanding functions of behaviour are key to reducing undesirable behaviours. As an air traffic controller suggests, "educat[e] teachers on strategies to read the situation better and step in earlier. Don't let [the] child reach that point. Look at causes, not reactions." A special education teacher suggests using knowledge of functional behaviour to avoid behaviour-triggering events by "changing the conditions or environment in which the behaviour occurs so that the student doesn't … feel like they need to act out." A neuro practitioner recommends, "coaching for corrective behaviours to teachers, to help engage students [by] understanding their choices and how their actions lead to consequences; assigning work directly related to resolving the incident [by] learning about it."

8.7.2. Social Skill Development

This theme addressed concerns such as the need for a "play-based curriculum with a stress on social skills, health and wellbeing." A teacher noted it may be counter-productive to suspend "students who exhibit such behaviour [as they] may possibly need to be at school to support the development of social skills. Not at home." Intervention programs designed to develop social skills were also suggested, while a counsellor provided examples of resources and collaborative approaches, such as, "social stories, sensory areas … educational resources to help everyone work together."

8.7.3. Meditation

Several respondents, mostly educators, mentioned meditation as beneficial for the development of self-regulation. One stated that the benefits of meditation are supported by evidence, saying:

> There is very strong research, particularly in the US, [that] teaching children to meditate …
> provid[es] help for them to regulate their emotions when necessary. This is a whole-school

approach which works, whereas suspensions are based on out-dated behaviourist ideas which

don't work. Young people … want to enjoy warm, cooperative relationships with those

around them. If this is not happening, it's because they are feeling either emotionally

distressed or overwhelmed and lack the skills to manage these feelings in healthy and

appropriate ways. Suspending them does not teach these skills, but only deepens their feelings

of distress, despair and disconnection from those around them. (Primary school teacher, age

54).

Another educator suggested, "a retreat room where children who become overwhelmed, angry

– all the intense emotions - can go to just reset," while a teacher aide proposed a calming space "with a

mentor or suitably trained adult to facilitate students in bettering behaviour and understanding their

emotions" Positive reinforcement and sensory breaks were also mentioned.

8.7.4. Counselling

Most respondents advocating for psychological support were educators. All used the words

counselling or psychological in their comments, with an early childhood teacher providing a detailed

justification for her belief that:

More needs to be invested in school counsellors. I believe children rarely misbehave 'just

because'. I believe there is always an underlying reason. Were they being bullied and the only

way they knew to cope with it was to physically hurt the bully? Does this child need support

in learning how to approach adults for help? Has a child had a past or present [experience] of

sexual abuse and those behaviours and intense confusion, fear and other emotions transferred

to their behaviour at school? Is it simply a lack of routine and expectations at home – do the

parents need support? (Early childhood teacher, age 25).

8.7.5. More Staff/Resources

Not surprisingly, educators were also the main contributors for this theme. One recommended

"more staffing to help these students" while another determined a ratio of "one-on-one support …"

Resources were included in two responses, with a counsellor stating a need for "educational resources

to help everyone work together. It is not one solution that will fix the broken system. Rather, a wholistic approach is required."

8.7.6. Restorative Justice

Aspects of restorative justice were proposed exclusively by educators. One described it as students reflecting on and being accountable for their behaviour and the effect it has on others. A second suggested a process of "apologising and taking positive action to rectify the bad behaviour …" Both responses have similar features to restorative justice, thus they have been included here.

8.7.7. Policy Changes

In contrast, both responses for policy changes were put forward by non-educators. One participant simply stated, "change current school processes," while a second alluded to current inclusive practices.

8.7.8. Summary

This section presented findings arising from survey responses for the question "In your opinion, what alternatives could you suggest in place of school suspensions, and why?" Two main categories emerged, framing either families/society or teachers/schools as the entity responsible for providing the alternatives. These are discussed below, together with findings presented in the first section of this chapter regarding Prep student suspension increases.

8.8. Discussion

The thematic analysis of both questions analysed in this chapter elicited responses indicating that either families/society or teachers/schools were responsible for the issues around student behaviour and school suspensions. Responses for the first question identified either parents/society or teachers/schools as culpable for the increases in Prep suspension rates with these responses being indicative of educators rather than non-educators.

The second question, regarding alternatives to suspensions, was similarly divided. A large proportion of educators felt that families should be involved in school disciplinary processes. Suggestions included parental presence, police intervention and parenting programs. The opinion that

schools are responsible for managing alternatives to school suspension received the overwhelming responses, with educators contributing the majority of responses across the two sub-categories.

Repetition of some themes was observed across the two questions. Knowledge of special needs, including trauma-informed practice, bridged both questions, as did development of social skills. Staffing number concerns were also identified across both questions; one from the perspective of increasing class sizes; the other expressing the need for more staff and resources to adequately manage issues around behaviour. The following section discusses suggestions received from survey respondents. Although broadly sequenced in category order beginning with Question 1, overlapping themes are discussed jointly.

8.8.1. Locus of Responsibility Debate

Similar locus of responsibility categories emerged from responses for both questions addressed in this chapter. Clear demarcations dividing culpability between teachers/schools and parents/society were observed. While educators account for a higher percentage of total survey respondents than non-educators (see Section 4.3.1.2), educator response rates were noticeably dominant in two categories. Educators contributed over three-quarters of responses for *Parents or society are the problem responses* (Table 8.1). Responses for the second category, *Actions for families to take: Punitive actions* (Section 8.4.1.1), were all from educators. In contrast, the highest non-educator response rate was related to *Actions for schools to take: Punitive actions* (Table 8.4), followed by *Teachers or schools are the problem* responses (Table 8.2).

Further, by extracting themes that could be considered outside the educators' control from the category *Teachers or schools are the problem* (Table 8.2), such as enrolment age, curriculum issues including play-based learning, increasing class sizes and outdated school systems, a mere two themes are within educators' locus of control. These are lack of knowledge of special needs and poor teaching. This extraction almost halves the educator response rate for *Teachers or schools are the problem* (see Table 8.2). Educators seemingly feel poorly supported by families and the education system itself.

Advocating for family or parental involvement at school is not a new concept (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Lesneskie & Block, 2017; Roffey, 2012). Globally, it has driven education policy and, in some cases, mandated it (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). Queensland's DoE acknowledge the value of parental involvement through the implementation of the PACE Initiative (DoE, n.d.-b). This framework advocates for meaningful parental engagement, rather than mere involvement. It is comprised of five elements: targeting communication between school and home; partnerships with parents to promote student learning and wellbeing outcomes; meaningful involvement of school stakeholders in decision-making; collaboration with the wider community to strengthen student outcomes; and working together to develop a positive, respectful school culture (DoE, n.d.-b).

The above DoE document cites a meta-analysis of over 800 studies on student achievement (Hattie, 2008), claiming "effective parent engagement could add the equivalent of 2 or 3 extra years to a child's education" (DoE, n.d.-b, p.2). However, Hattie cautions that not all parental involvement is equal, nor is it always positive. In fact, it can also have negative effects. Of note is the negative effect of surveillance-type parental involvement (Hattie, 2008), a suggestion endorsed by several educator survey respondents as an alternative to external suspensions. Hattie (2012) also analysed 800 studies to identify 150 factors that influence student achievement, ranking them from highest (1) to lowest effect (150). The home environment was ranked at 44/150 and parent involvement at 51/150. In contrast, teacher-student relationships rank at 12/150 (Hattie, 2012). Cornelius-White's (2007) meta-analysis of learner-centred teacher-student relationships identified the teacher-student relationship as being especially effective for behaviour outcomes, with high effects on participation, motivation, self-esteem, and social skills.

Strong relationships between teachers, students and families can also help overcome the barriers of parental participation, such as intergenerational negativity, low adult literacy affecting parental confidence, and time constraints (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). What has emerged from the HFSE study is the finding that there is bi-directional discord between families and schools. Both entities have critical roles in the development of the child/student. The immediate relationships between parent/child and teacher/student are likely to have the greatest influence, particularly in the

early years of transitioning to school (Wickett, 2019). However, events occurring in the wider community can also impact the individual.

COVID-19 is a prime example when considered in light of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) which describes the expanding tiers of interactions within the many environments and relationships of an individual. This single global event has deeply impacted 21st Century society, introducing children to wide-spread death, fear, constraints, restrictions, and divisions usually associated with war. Family incomes are insecure, delivery of goods and services have been interrupted, and costs, particularly for food and fuel, have soared (Gupta, 2020). Lockdowns and school closures have broadened the digital divide, with internet access unavailable to almost 50% of the world (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Technology has become an essential side effect of COVID-19. Online shopping, workplace meetings and classes have contributed a 70-80% increase in Australian internet broadband usage (Sebire, 2020). Parents and school principals reported increased screen time and reduced physical activity of primary school students in 2020, brought about by COVID-19 impacts (Camp Australia, 2020). Home-schooling is no longer a choice, with mothers in particular bearing the responsibility for this, often while managing working-from-home status (Petts et al., 2021).

A government brief investigated difficulties Australian students experienced during COVID-19 lockdown and home schooling, or aptly-coined 'hybrid learning' (Dictionary.com, n.d.) delivery. The document noted five central elements of disadvantage: "the material divide … the digital divide … the skills and dispositions divide … the parental support divide … [and] the adjustments divide (Lamb et al., 2020, p. 3). It advised students most at risk are those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students, students living in remote areas of Australia with inadequate internet broadband coverage, and students with additional needs (Lamb et al., 2020). Notably, the issues raised regarding parental support centred on a deficit of skills or parental education, without addressing the added stressor of parents adapting to working from home while attempting to assist children with schoolwork.

This may have produced an unexpected advantage, however. This new, online education platform provides both the need and the opportunity for supporting students. Online collaboration that not only involves the student, but also their family, may be an effective strategy for achieving parental involvement and potentially bridge the current discord between parents and school.

8.8.2. Perspectives on 21st Century Parenting

Poor parenting was the highest-ranked theme for Category 1, *Parents or Society are the Problem* (see Table 8.1). Responses for this theme imply that poor parenting skills are equated with poor conduct in children. This perception is not uncommon (Campaert et al., 2018; Unnever et al., 2006; Walters, 2019); indeed, much research focuses on the deficit, rather than positive parenting qualities. This is demonstrated in one literature review, which identified nine 'good' parenting attributes and 27 'bad' parenting attributes (Taylor et al., 2000). Hoghughi and Speight (1998) noted this focus on deficit models of parenting and set out to correct it with a focus on identifying the elements of good child-rearing. They determined three core areas of emotional need in children: "(1) love, care, and commitment; (2) consistent limit setting; and (3) the facilitation of development" (Hoghughi & Speight, 1998, p. 294). Survey respondents provided the antithesis of these three core elements in their descriptions of poor parenting: absent parents; a decrease in parental involvement; lack of boundaries set for children; 'free-range' kids/parenting; poor role models; and lack of guidance. Evidence suggests children of disengaged, permissive parents may demonstrate problematic behaviours and have less success at school (Kaniušonytė & Laursen, 2021).

Lack of respect/discipline (Table 8.1) had the second highest response rate, with twice as many educator responses as non-educator responses. This may be due to societal and generational changes in parent/child relationships. Sax (2016) observes there has been a shift in the past 30 years or so from the traditional, hierarchal parental roles, where community values influenced parental guidance. He notes that the contemporary parent embraces autonomous family roles, where children are consulted and have largely become the decision-makers in the family unit. Put another way, in traditional families, the parental role is one of authority, where respect from the child is an expectation, whereas in contemporary families, the child is considered an equal independent entity

(Sax, 2016). It is not surprising then, that teachers expect students to respect them on the basis of the authoritative role they fulfill.

Disciplinary methods are also affected by societal and generational perspectives. To illustrate, according to an American national survey of parents (Zero to Three, 2016), over 57% of parents surveyed were struggling to locate effective disciplinary practices. The majority of participants indicated the methods their parents used to manage discipline had a strong effect on their own liberal disciplinary style. More than half of the participants indicated they believe they use less harsh, more positive disciplinary measures than their parents did, which highlights generational differences in disciplinary actions used by families. As millennial and Generation X parents begin to avoid the harsher punishments handed out by previous generations, such as spanking or hitting, yelling or humiliation (Zero to Three, 2016), educators may perceive less authoritarian disciplinary measures as 'soft' or ineffective. These changing parenting styles could also explain responses for the themes Behavioural issues, Parental attitudes, and Sense of entitlement (Table 8.1).

The third highest response rate was for lack of social skills. While most raised the issue in general terms, some respondents suggested that families are limiting their young children's social skill development by not utilising early learning or day-care centres in the years prior to formal schooling. This is quite the opposite view of 1940-50s society, when research emerged claiming that the absence of a child's mother, or maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1952), can cause the child to experience "acute anxiety, … guilt and depression" (1952, p.12). This paved the way for research that endorsed the opinion that children of working mothers were psychologically damaged (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Glueck & Glueck, 1957). However, more recent findings dispute these earlier attitudes, identifying both short-term and long-term positive effects, particularly regarding aspirations of female offspring (McGinn et al., 2019). The suggested negative effects claimed by Bowlby (1952) have also been challenged by more recent research, indicating children of working mothers demonstrate lower internal and external problem behaviours (Salimiha et al., 2018).

This supports the claim by some respondents that early learning centres may enhance social skill development. The need for subsidised care is apparent though, with average childcare fees in

Australia currently more than $100/day, and some families paying a hefty $24,000 a year (Duffy & Sadler, 2020). For many families, childcare consumes a considerable portion of their household income, with approximately 39% of families struggling to afford it (Hurley, 2021).

Several HFSE survey respondents reported reservations regarding the use of screened devices (Table 8.1). It is possible the uptake of mobile screened devices may be contributing to perceived lowered social skills. A study by Rideout and Robb (2020) reported that 34% of parents felt that screened media use helps their 0–8-year-olds develop social skills, while a further 19% believe screen media use is harmful. This is a topic that has gathered traction in recent years. A growing body of evidence reports excessive screen time may have negative effects on children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018; Lissak, 2018; Raman et.al, 2017; Tamana et al., 2019; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

8.8.3. Perspectives on 21st Century Teaching

The expression of culpability was reversed for Category 2, from parents to teachers. Lack of support/knowledge of special needs had the highest response rate, with non-educator responses almost double those from educators. The view that children with special needs are frequently suspended from school is concerning. It is difficult to prove or disprove using Education Queensland's published suspension data, as suspended students with special needs are included with their year level peers and not identified separately (DoE, 2020j). However, an independent report, prepared with internal access to the Department's data, states that students with a recognised disability are over-represented in suspension data, with an occurrence rate of 21% of students with disability being suspended in comparison to 7.9% of students without a disability (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017, p.21). Over one third of HFSE survey respondents for this theme explicitly stated teachers are under-educated in the area of special needs. This may account for the over-representation of special needs in suspension data, as typical behaviours attributable to disorders, such as aggression, non-compliance, disruptive behaviour, and verbal abuse (Gaastra et al., 2016; O'Nions et al., 2018), are perceived by under-educated teachers as deliberate misbehaviour.

Of note is the fairly recent category of children-with-trauma as an area of special needs. Trauma is defined as "the emotional, psychological and physiological residue left over from heightened stress that accompanies experiences of threat, violence, and life-challenging events" (Thomas, 2019). This definition is useful for summarising the complexities of trauma. The explicit mention of trauma-informed practice by educators may be a response to the education sector's current spotlight on the effects of trauma on children's brain development (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014; Voineskos, 2020). The term 'trauma-informed practice' has been coined to recognise schools that are upskilling their staff around childhood trauma and adverse experiences (Berger & Martin, 2021). This theme also emerged from responses for Category 2 as actions for schools to take. It is difficult to obtain a national figure for Australian children experiencing trauma due to a complicated tiered reporting process. This is based on demographics such as out-of-home care services, Indigenous and remote communities, and children with disabilities, to name a few. In addition, there are differences between each State's policies, processes, and reporting practices. However, one government report indicates approximately 3% of Australian children under 17 receive child protection services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). Notably, school staff (19%) were one of the most common sources of child service notifications in 2019-20, second only to police (22%). This represents 92,397 school-aged children notified via school personnel (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021), providing relevance to calls for schools to be trauma-informed in an effort to be fully inclusive and responsive to student needs.

Trauma can be acute and from a singular event, or chronic, from ongoing trauma such as neglect, or physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse (Persyn, 2016). Traumatic stress can cause neurophysiological changes, which in turn can be expressed as behavioural issues such as conduct disorder, hypervigilance and hyperactivity (Waite, 2020). These align with behaviours commonly leading to school suspension, so potentially, a percentage of suspended students are experiencing the unidentified effects of trauma (Breedlove et al., 2020).

Lack of school readiness had the second highest response rate for Category 2, with educators contributing the majority of responses. Mandatory Preparatory student enrolment was introduced in

Queensland schools in 2017, with students as young as 4.5 years of age able to enrol, provided they

turn five before 30th June in their enrolment year (DoE, 2021-a). There is much debate, supported by

research, that delaying enrolment age has positive effects on behaviour (Balestra et al., 2020; Dee &

Sievertsen, 2018), as well as social-emotional and cognitive development (Hanly et al., 2019). These

findings support constructivist approaches of child development, which are affected by stages of

maturation (Piaget, 1954).

While curriculum issues had the next highest response rate for Category 2, lack of play-based

learning had only one less response, so it is valuable to look at these two themes in combination. The

introduction of the Australian Curriculum (AC), which Queensland began to implement in 2011

(Queensland Studies Authority, 2014), has encountered much criticism, including the issues of an

overcrowded curriculum and lack of play-based learning (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). There is a

parallel between the documented criticisms raised regarding the AC and concerns expressed by HFSE

survey respondents. Comments such as "cramped curriculum," "lack of time for the children to learn

about social and behavioural boundaries," "the push away from play-based curriculum," and Prep

students "not given enough 'play time' to promote social skills" illustrate that the issues raised by the

academic authors of the AC review reflect the real-world challenges experienced in classrooms.

Internal suspensions had strong support as an alternative to external suspensions. While

internal suspensions appear, on the surface, to be a softer option to traditional out-of-school

suspensions, they are still exclusionary. Exclusionary discipline has its roots in zero tolerance, a

movement devised to "send a message that certain behaviors are not tolerated" (Skiba & Peterson,

2000, p.337). The function of zero tolerance is to increase a sense of safety and order within

institutions (Brownstein, 2010).

The advantages of imposing an internal suspension over an external one include less

disruption to the students' learning through supported engagement of the curriculum, enforced

supervision of the student, and continuation of the students' regular routine. The DoE stipulates that

externally suspended students' are to be provided access by their school to their educational program

during the period of the suspension (DoE, 2020h). However, the onus is on the parent to support the

student towards completion of the learning materials. This is especially problematic for students who are already disengaged from learning, compounding their academic disadvantage, and leading to a sense of hopelessness and potential school drop-out (Baroni et al., 2016).

The disadvantages of internal suspensions include alienation from their peers, counter or revenge aggression (Skiba & Peterson, 2000), apathy, and disengagement (Perry & Morris, 2014). Exclusionary disciplinary practices are implemented to remove the negative element of undesirable behaviours from classrooms to allow well-behaved students the opportunity to learn without disruption. However, overuse can cause a toxic environment of increased anxiety and mistrust for all students and may lead to lower academic success, even in non-suspended students (Perry & Morris, 2014).

The teacher-student relationship is also disrupted when the student is removed from school. This relationship, when positive, has shown evidence of providing protective factors against peer victimisation and social risk (Elledge et al, 2016). It can also lead to a reduction of drop-out rates, increased academic improvement (Quin, 2017), and higher graduation rates (Barile et al., 2012). Student voice also demonstrates the importance of the teacher-student relationship in powerful ways. In one study, 220 11–16-year-old students were interviewed to gauge their perceptions on teaching approaches, school discipline and school climate (Bergmann, 1989). The author noted that disengaged students who were frequently removed from class due to disruption were rarely removed from their easiest class. When asked what made the class easy, 58 students stated it was because of the teacher. When asked what made a class hard, 42 students indicated the personality of the teacher made it difficult for them to learn. Developing positive relationships appears to offer some protection against student disengagement which can lead to disruptive behaviour. As persistent disruptive behaviour is often cited as a reason for Preparatory year student suspensions (DoE, 2020j), fostering strong teacher-student relationships may buffer these behaviours and lead to lower suspension rates.

The concept of alternative programs or classrooms was also popular (see Table 8.4). Evidence suggests alternative programs may be effective in reducing suspensions and expulsions. These include initiatives such as school-wide programs designed to develop social/emotional skills (Lacoe &

Steinberg, 2018), teacher training programs such as the "My Teacher Partner" based on improving

teacher-student interactions and student outcomes (Gregory et al., 2014), and the "Response to

Intervention" model, which provides tailored interventions to students to address their academic and

behaviour needs (Shapiro, 2011). Two things are worth noting about these programs. Firstly, they are

defined as non-exclusionary alternatives to suspensions. This means that survey respondent

suggestions for these programs to be conducted in alternative spaces to the students' regular classroom

is contrary to the aims of the alternative programs. Secondly, analysis of these programs emphasises a

common underpinning of relationship building, whether the relationship is between offending student

and victim or offending student and teacher.

Restorative justice was also promoted by survey respondents (see Table 8.5). Restorative

justice programs, based on repairing harm through mediation of involved parties to address and

resolve conflict (Robbins, 2021; Sandwick et al., 2019), are more contemporary interventions. Aligned

with therapeutic benefits for both victim and offender, these programs promote healing and

empowerment rather than punitive measures to convert undesirable behaviours into desirable

outcomes.

8.9. Conclusion

An overarching theme of culpability emerged from the qualitative data analysed in this

chapter. Two distinct entities were identified as having accountability for both Prep student suspension

increases and implementation of proposed alternatives: parents/society, or teachers/schools. Analyses

were derived from responses to two survey questions, the first asking: "Prep suspensions have

increased by 76% in five years (2012–2016). In your opinion, what is contributing to an increase in

Prep suspensions?" The second posed the question: "In your opinion, what alternatives could you

suggest in place of school suspensions, and why?"

The themes poor parenting, lack of respect and discipline, and lack of social skills had the

highest response rates for the first question. These three themes collectively contributed more than half

of the responses to the category of parent or society culpability. Modern lifestyles and parenting styles

were attributed to poor parenting. Several respondents inferred that young children are becoming

increasingly aggressive, resorting to physical misconduct and bullying, sometimes to avoid an event or outcome. Others expressed undesirable behaviour in more general terms, although non-compliance and disruptive behaviours were explicitly mentioned. Some believe children engage in these behaviours to deliberately provoke a suspension to gain several days away from school. Family breakdown or violence, screened devices, children's entitled attitudes, verbal misconduct and special needs were also forwarded as family or societal factors contributing to rising Prep suspension rates.

Suggestions for alternatives were either punitive or remedial in nature. Only educators recommended punitive actions for families to implement; these consisted of parental presence at school and police intervention. Remedial actions for families included collaboration between school and home, parenting programs and psychological support.

The three most common themes identified as teachers' or schools' responsibilities were lack of support for or knowledge of special needs, low enrolment age or lack of school readiness, and curriculum issues. Despite a total of ten themes for this category, these three themes accounted for 54% of responses. Remaining themes consisted of lack of play-based learning, increasing class sizes, poor teaching or teacher education, outdated processes, misunderstanding students' needs, unrealistic guidelines from school administrators, and culturally-entrenched teachers.

Punitive actions for schools were broader than those proposed for families. Internal suspensions were the most common alternative to external suspensions. The discussion addressed this, providing evidence that while it maintains the students' connection to school and curriculum, it is still an exclusionary consequence. Other punitive suggestions consisted of alternative programs, loss of privileges, an undesirable task, outside school-hours detentions, non-remedial consequences, and corporal punishment. One staunch respondent believes there are no alternatives and endorsed that suspensions remain a behaviour management procedure.

Remedial recommendations for schools included trauma-informed practice, social skill development, meditation, more staffing and/or resources, counselling, and restorative justice. Policy changes were also mentioned. Notably, trauma-informed practice had almost one third of responses for this category.

Analysis of respondents' suggestions for alternatives to school suspension has identified useful recommendations. These will be examined in the final chapter, alongside concepts forwarded by survey respondents regarding proactive behaviour management suggestions. While Chapter 8 has offered alternatives to suspensions, Chapter 9 presents proactive suggestions forwarded by respondents, with the aim of reducing student behaviours before they escalate to suspension.

Chapter 9: Respondent Suggestions for Reducing Student Behaviours Leading to Suspensions

The previous chapter expressed survey respondents' views regarding possible explanations for rising Preparatory student suspensions, and their suggestions for alternatives to school suspensions. A common categorical theme emerged for both survey questions: the locus of responsibility. Perceived roles of parents/society and teachers/schools were discussed in the context of current literature.

This chapter addresses responses to the survey question: "What suggestions would you like schools to consider to help reduce student actions/behaviours causing suspensions?" A total of 107 responses were received. Analysis of these responses also identified a trend for themes based on responsibility relationships. However, while Chapter 8 observed responsibility being placed on singular sections of the school community, responses for this chapter aligned with five tiered relationships: *Department/executives to school, School/teacher to parent, School to teacher, School to student,* and *Teacher to student.*

These category labels have been based on the direction of the identified responsibility relationships. For example, Category 1: *Department/executives to school*, expresses the responsibility the Department of Education (DoE) holds for providing schools with policies and procedures or funding, while school executives apply these in-situ. As the DoE is a top-down hierarchical organisation, categories are set out to replicate this model, rather than highest to lowest response rates, as has been the structure in previous chapters. Twelve themes are distributed across the five categories mentioned above: Policies/procedures, Parental involvement/accountability, Support for parents, School/teacher to parent relationship, Staff up-skilling, Additional support staff, Special needs support, Meditation, Student welfare support, Psychological services, Social-emotional education, and Anti-bullying. Results are elaborated on below, followed by a discussion of the findings, where Human Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides as a lens for exploring the relationships within school communities.

9.1. Category 1: Department/Executives to School

A single theme emerged from the twenty-two responses aligned with this category: policies/procedures. Educators contributed 63.6% of responses, while non-educators accounted for

36.4%. Some suggestions could be implemented at school level with an instruction from the principal, while others require more official intervention through departmental directives, such as mandating class size limitations or considerable curriculum changes.

Suggestions for swifter action by school staff had the highest response rate. There was strong belief that this action may prevent escalation of behaviours and thus, circumvent suspensions. An educator inferred this, commenting: "clamp down on behaviours before they become a serious problem. Consequences need to be given before behaviour reaches the point of needing suspension." Criticism regarding lax follow-through by school executives was voiced by several educators, such as the need for "stronger admin who follow through with their words and not palm it off onto teachers because they are being disturbed in their office …"

Dissatisfaction with existing disciplinary practices was raised, with a stay-at-home mother commenting, "reinstate an actual discipline programme back into schools, instead of these 'responsible thinking rooms,' which are a joke." The recommendation for making "more discipline measures available to teachers" was forwarded by a field interviewer. However, most respondents did not elaborate on what disciplinary measures or consequences they were referring to, so it is assumed they were indicating current policy and procedural measures.

Changes to the curriculum were proposed by educators. The inclusion of more sport was suggested, as was art and play-based learning. In the words of a primary school principal, "reduce academic expectations until Year 2 – go back to play-based learning."

Funding and finances were also mentioned. A non-educator linked funding to classroom accommodations for special needs students with the comment, "their legal/moral obligation when they take money to educate the child. Is it what is good for the child? What can be changed in the classroom to help the child instead?" Additional funding for learning support was also suggested, while another advocated for "more funding directed toward resources for high behaviour students."

Some suggestions for this theme were extremely punitive, such as recommending: "corporal punishment. Children have no fear or respect for authority. Perhaps if there was a consequence that was less pleasant than a few days off school, they might take note." Another punitive approach

involved the recommendation that welfare payments should be withdrawn for parents of offending

students, an opinion that infers that most "troublemakers" are from low-income families in receipt of

welfare. A third suggestion implied difficult students might benefit from interventions from

specialised, external behaviour schools. Notably, all punitive suggestions were raised by educators.

More compassionate options included suggestions for changes that affect students in a

positive, inclusive manner. One teacher was mindful of students' social-emotional wellbeing,

suggesting that "high risk behaviour students are removed from [their] normal classroom to another

familiar class when [the] regular teacher is away to decrease the chance of meltdowns." Another

addressed class sizes, recommending "lower class sizes," which indirectly suggests a higher teacher-

to-student ratio would have a positive effect on classroom behaviours. Again, these suggestions were

raised exclusively by educators.

9.2. Category 2: School/Teacher to Parent

In this category, school is expressed as whole-school staff support. The action may be

undertaken by the teacher; however, it has the support and endorsement of all staff members. Category

2 elicited 12 responses across three themes: Parental involvement, Support for parents, and

School/teacher to parent relationship. These are organised in Table 9.1, with findings elaborated

below.

Table 9.1

Responses Aligning to School/Teacher to Parent Category

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Parental involvement	3	33.3	3	100.0	6	50.0
Support for parents	3	33.3	0	0.0	3	25.0
School/teacher to parent relationship	3	33.3	0	0.0	0	25.0
Total	9	100.0	3	100.0	12	100.0

9.2.1. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement and accountability were equally represented by both occupation

categories. Some respondents explicitly recommended that parents be present not only at school, but in

the classroom, while others implied parents should be accountable for their child's behaviour at

school. These ranged from an educator, who suggested that "parents are given a list of behaviours that will create a suspension" to a non-educator, who stated, "I don't think it comes from the schools. Parents need to take ownership [for] guidance of their own children."

9.2.2. Support for Parents

This theme focused on suggestions for informing and supporting parents, such as parent courses. The recommendation of "early intervention and easier access for parents to get help with outside agencies for behaviours" was provided by a teacher. Several respondents expressed support from teachers as "closer relationships with home." Others perceived it as vital: "communication between home/school is key. When everyone knows what's going on, it's easier to manage." The absence of non-educator input in these two latter themes is notable.

9.3. Category 3: School to Teacher

This category describes ways the school, particularly principals, deputy principals, support personnel, and support teachers, manage student behaviour. Four themes were established for this category: Staff upskilling, School processes, Additional support staff, and Special needs support. The majority of suggestions were forwarded by educators. Frequencies for these themes are outlined in Table 9.2. below.

Table 9.2

Responses Aligning to School to Teacher Category

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Staff upskilling	10	41.7	6	60.0	16	47.1
School processes	8	33.3	0	0.0	8	23.5
Additional support staff	5	20.8	1	10.0	6	17.6
Special needs support	1	4.2	3	30.0	4	11.8
Total	24	100.0	10	100.0	34	100.0

9.3.1. Staff Upskilling

This theme had the highest response rate for Category 3. Educators forwarded the majority of responses. Recommendations for behaviour management training and detection of triggers were a popular topic. One teacher made the relevant connection between intensifying behaviours and the potential for harm by stating, "ensur[e] teachers have training to de-escalate a potentially harmful

situation." A counsellor made an equally relevant observation: "take time to understand where the behaviour is coming from; children are not born naughty; they are acting out as they need help in some area of life."

Trauma-informed practice, a theme that emerged in Chapter 8, was also raised several times as an essential skill for teachers in this theme, with one respondent providing an impassioned insight into why understanding the effects of trauma is critical:

> Schools need to change their mindsets and approaches completely. They need to understand why children's behaviour can be off-track and what they need from the adults around them to help them. They need to understand developmental trauma, how children's brains develop and what developmental trauma does to children's brains. They need to understand that all children are inherently good and learn to ask not "What's wrong with this child?" but "What happened to this child?" (Primary school teacher, age 54).

Surprisingly, only non-educators, namely a mature-age student, a carer and a retail assistant, raised the necessity for teachers to receive training about special needs. The mature-age student voiced this concern, stating that "more training for teachers [about] students with extra requirements" is necessary. The carer echoed this sentiment with the comment that there is a need to "understand children's needs. Re-educat[e teachers] about children with mental disabilities." Maintenance of routines was also raised. The retail assistant expressed the importance of routines in developing students' sense of security and stability: "planning, keep to the planning, making sure the children know what's happening that day."

9.3.2. School Processes

Consistency and clarity of communications and processes across the school were a common topic within this theme. Variations of clear or consistent guidelines, consequences, expectations, or approaches were raised. Comments ranged from "consistency in consequences; consistency in expectations" to "clear, concise instructions from all teachers about appropriate behaviour." Clarity of communication was also raised, with a neuro-practitioner identifying a need for "teachers to create a communication method for students to express when they need to use the safe place." The high

frequency of educator responses mentioning consistency and clarity may reflect that school site internal practices are not always delivered reliably. This was inferred by an educator's comment that "communication inside the school is key. When everyone knows what's going on, it's easier to manage."

9.3.3. Additional Support Staff

Recommendations for additional support staff were primarily forwarded by educators and focused on extra support staff, such as a "greater need for teacher aides and teacher support to work one-to-one with these children." Another identified that "more support [is needed] for teachers who … [find it] difficult to manage students." A Human Resources advisor, the only non-educator response for this theme, simply stipulated "more supervision."

9.3.4. Special Needs Support

Some responses for this theme mentioned specific areas of special needs, such as, "find out if they have any behaviour issues [such as] ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], ODD [oppositional defiance disorder] or any other underlying reasons why the child is acting out or misunderstanding the teacher's instructions." A clinical nurse recommended "SEP [special education program] intervention in classrooms at Prep level to identify learning difficulties and autism, etc." Another non-educator, a vet nurse, advocated for more compassion for children with mental health issues, stating there is a need for "more empathy for students with anxiety or other mental health related issues."

9.4. Category 4: School to Student

This category had a total of 21 responses. Notably, the majority were from educators. These were organised across three themes: Meditation/retreat room, Student welfare support, and Psychological services. Table 9.3 elaborates on these.

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Table 9.3

Responses Aligning to School to Student Category

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Meditation	7	43.8	1	20.0	8	38.1
Psychological services	5	31.2	2	40.0	7	33.3
Student welfare support	4	25.0	2	40.0	6	28.6
Total	16	100.0	5	100.0	21	100.0

9.4.1. Meditation

Meditation or retreat room arose eight times, predominantly by educators. A primary school teacher voiced their firm belief, stating that "all schools should teach meditation." Variations on calming spaces arose three times, with suggestions ranging from "having a calming room" to providing "calm down spaces." Trauma-informed practice was mentioned again, this time by a teacher aide who noted, "I think most schools are already trialling lots of options. Trauma sensitive schools are on the right track with 'chill out' rooms or zones within the school." A neuro practitioner stressed the need for "a safe space for children to retreat to when angry and reactive, not a punishing space," identifying that removing a disruptive student from the classroom does not always need to be exclusionary.

9.4.2. Psychological Services

This theme had the second highest response rate for this category. While most responses did not specify who the psychological service should be available to, two respondents suggested counselling services should be available to families, while another specified the support should be for the student. There was strong support for professionally trained counselling services to be available in schools, with a stay-at-home mother stating this explicitly: "each school should have a professional psychologist employed on a fulltime basis."

9.4.3. Student Welfare Support

Student welfare support was not far behind psychological services, with only one less response. These ranged from recommendations for specific programs of support, including: "school breakfasts," "lunchtime clubs and activities," and "reviews of health and lifestyle" for students.

Another advocated for the integration of stress management into the classroom. They suggested routines such as "starting the day with dancing, phrases around the school walls and in the toilets."

9.5. Category 5: Teacher to Student

Eighteen responses aligned with this category. These were distributed across two themes: Social-emotional education, and Anti-bullying. This was the only category where responses from non-educators outnumbered those from educators, with 11 responses from non-educators and seven from educators (see Table 9.4).

Table 9.4

Responses Aligning to Teacher to Student Category

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Social-emotional education	7	100.0	5	45.5	12	66.7
Anti-bullying	0	0.0	6	54.5	6	33.3
Total	7	100.0	11	100.0	18	100.0

9.5.1. Social-Emotional Education

The theme social-emotional education and support had a number of variations recommended. Some were generic, such as "social skilling" and "self-management courses." Others suggested more explicit coping skills, such as resilience, personal development, and life skills. While one suggested targeting younger students: "work with primary students so they understand social skills," another believes students of all ages would benefit from social-emotional education. She reasons:

> All schools should prioritise learning about emotions, the brain and social connections, every year from Kindy to Year 12. This learning can be integrated with other learning (especially literacy) and the time it takes will be recouped over and over again in calmer classrooms which leads to less time spent "managing" off-track behaviour. (Primary school teacher, age 54).

Two respondents – one from each occupation category – suggested providing more opportunities for students to engage socially. One suggestion was to "provid[e] regular class time to discuss problems and discrepancies." Another perspective was forwarded by a non-educator, who

indicated that peer pressure and materialism were impacting on student behaviour with their recommendation to "completely eliminate peer group pressure to conform [and] have all the latest trendy gadgets."

9.5.2. Anti-bullying Programs

Anti-bullying programs or support had a total of six responses, exclusively from non-educators. Four respondents provided explicit examples for managing bullying. A business owner suggested "the MTV "If You Really Knew Me" program in the USA is a perfect example of a bullying program," while a retail assistant recommended separating offending students by "splitting children up if they have caused an issue." A third offered "segregation of persistent troublemakers" as a solution; while another, a neuro practitioner, took an empathetic stance, suggesting access to "a person [that] students can trust to listen to grievances of student social problems, including bullying."

9.6. Discussion

These findings, which analysed respondents' suggestions for reducing negative behaviours that lead to suspensions, revealed an overarching theme of accountability within relationships, as did the previous chapter. However, unlike Chapter 8, which drew responses that inferred a stance of culpability, this chapter identified relationships that are solution-based or collaborative. These varied in intimacy, from external influences such as departmental influences on schools, through to more personal relationships, such as the impacts teachers have on students.

The following discussion examines the suggestions forwarded by respondents, drawing on existing literature to explore their viability. It adopts Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Systems labels (1979) as headings, drawing on this wider theoretical framework to situate the five categories identified through the analysis process. This theory, as described in Chapter 2, offers an astute approach for viewing these expanding domains of relationships. Rather than the position of culpability identified in previous chapters, this discussion takes a more constructive view, situating the child/student's wellbeing at the epicentre of the interplay of relationships.

9.6.1. Macrosystem to Exosystem: Department/Executives to Schools

Of the 22 responses aligned to Category 1, *Department/executives to schools*, many recommendations involved policy or procedural approaches. Examples included curriculum-based changes, such as extending the roles of sports, the Arts and play-based learning in the curriculum.

While sweeping changes to an existing national curriculum model is burdensome, there is certainly scope for teachers to devise creative ways to achieve this. A program integrating food and nutrition into the curriculum reported diverse learning opportunities beyond nutrition (Hunter et al., 2020). Conservation and sustainability, knowledge on local and Indigenous food, and research skills were direct benefits of the program, while increased student engagement and parental involvement were unexpected bonuses. Integration of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) has been recognised as an authentic and valuable interdisciplinary platform by the DoE's dedicated webpage (2021f), where a number of initiatives, grant opportunities and teacher professional development opportunities are showcased.

Suggestions such as additional funding for resources or learning support were also raised by respondents. Funding is quite a contentious issue, with some sectors of the community reproachful of the government funding provided to privately operated schools (Gerrard et al., 2017). Many of the suggestions made by respondents throughout this chapter are commendable, but not necessarily financially viable due to funding cuts in recent years (Fair Funding Now, n.d.).

Almost 50% of responses for Category 1 suggested that existing disciplinary actions for minor behaviours are either not adhered to or inadequate. Queensland student discipline policy has recently been overhauled (DoE, 2020k) and analysed in the HFSE study's document analysis (see Chapter 5). While State and Territory governments are responsible for establishing disciplinary policies and procedures within their jurisdiction, executives and teachers at individual schools are responsible for their timely and consistent enforcement. The issue of consistent follow-through of consequences perhaps reveals a more internal issue of poor communication between school executives and teaching staff, a concern that was also raised in Category 2, *School/teacher to parent.*

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9.6.2. Exosystem to Mesosystem: School/Teacher to Parent

Communication was posed as an essential component of the home/school relationship in Category 2, *School/teacher to parent.* Responses expressed a need for parental involvement and accountability, consistent communication between the school and home, and closer relationships between teachers, families, and students. Two groups of conviction were evident: support for parents to be more involved in the students' supervision by having a physical presence, and the inclusive approach of cultivating collaborative relationships between school and home.

The DoE's Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Framework (DoE, n.d.-a) recognises the value of effective communication and the school-home connection. This framework is a government initiative that addresses the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) Domain 9, school-community partnerships (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2016). It identifies that students spend less than 15% of their time at school, citing research (Hattie, 2008) that correlates successful parent engagement with "the equivalent of 2 or 3 extra years to a child's education" (DoE, n.d.-a, p.2).

However, the response rate for this category implies that perhaps these tools and strategies do not address barriers to parental engagement. Barriers range from situational, such as unavailability of parents due to work hours (Lepkowska & Nightingale, 2019); institutional, such as cultural or racial stigma (Lechuga-Pena & Brisson, 2018) and language barriers (MacPhee, 2021); to psychological issues, such as generational distrust (Luet, 2017) and low self-confidence (Koerting et al., 2013). These barriers largely assume on-site parental attendance is necessary for successful engagement. Potentially, adjusting the view of schools and learning as institutional, and instead facilitating parents to support their children's learning from home can dissolve perceived barriers (Barnett et al., 2020). These interactions between school and home can benefit the family as a whole. For example, one school's encouragement to foster family discussions around learning led to a family investing in the purchase of a dining table to provide both a homework station for the children as well as a new family tradition of eating together (Goodall, 2018).

Building strong connections and support between home and school, such as those mentioned above, positively benefits students' social-behavioural proficiency and mental health (Sheridan et al., 2019). However, positive teacher-student relationships (TSR) have also been shown to affect student academic success (Pandolpho, 2020). For instance, one study identified a correlation between lower rates of student drop-out and positive TSR, identifying that "the more positive the TSR climate, the lower the student dropout rate, even when controlling for prior and current student achievement" (Barile et al., 2012, p.263). Fostering the TSR is particularly beneficial for moderating negative student conduct, with 96% of teacher participants in one study reporting improvements in both student behaviours and their relationship with students (Kaltenbach et al., 2018).

9.6.3. Exosystem to Microsystem: School to Teacher

Staff up-skilling had the highest rate of responses for Category 3, *School to teacher.* Suggestions to increase essential skills such as behaviour management, provide reasonable adjustments for students with special needs, and become trauma-informed are particularly relevant in light of increases in school violence, as reported in Chapter 5. Notably, 28% of responses for this theme specifically mentioned behaviour. Some framed the up-skilling in terms of specialised training, such as responding to high-level or harmful behaviours; others suggested knowledge of functional behaviour is essential for teachers.

Functional behaviour is challenging behaviour that "is not part of the student, but the result of an interaction between that student and [their] environment" (Leif & Ahlgren-Berg, 2019). Functional behaviour assessments (FBA) are useful for identifying the antecedents that trigger a child's behavioural response. For instance, young Patricks' behaviour, introduced in the opening chapter, occurred because he did not want to attend Music class. Completing an FBA after the incident is beneficial in not only identifying an antecedent, but also determining which supportive strategies may prevent or deescalate a similar response in the future. The DoE provides schools with an online guided FBA tool that, once an incident is entered, compiles a list of suitable strategies that may prevent similar future events (DoE, 2020f).

Others did not mention behaviour itself but inferred that more teacher understanding regarding children with special needs would be helpful in reducing suspensions. The area of special needs, including childhood trauma, is particularly relevant post-COVID-19. Several researchers have raised the likelihood of COVID-19 events increasing and causing trauma in children (Collin-Vezina et al., 2020; Zhou, 2020). Thus, providing teachers with professional development on the effect of trauma on children's brains and behaviour is a timely, proactive strategy. Trauma affects more than just memories and emotions; it can "disrupt … the development of brain architecture and other organ systems …" (Nelson et al., 2020, p. 1), particularly young, developing brains. Childhood trauma is complex and beyond the scope of this study. At its essence, it is the biological process of toxic stress causing dysregulation of the stress hormones, central nervous system and brain responses (Dombo & Sabatino, 2019). From a psychological perspective, trauma involves invisible "attachment injuries …" (Hopper et al., 2019, p. 4), where neglect or abuse disrupts normal development of essential functions such as self-concept, emotion and self-regulation, and executive function (Hopper et al., 2019; Waite, 2020). These biological and psychological changes can affect behaviour, where children with trauma develop internalising and externalising disorders (Dombo & Sabatino, 2019). These are behaviours associated with suspension risk, where disruptive behaviour, such as physical, verbal and non-verbal misconduct, are the most common reasons for suspension measures (DETE, 2014b).

9.6.4. Exosystem to Individual: School to Student

Meditation/retreat rooms and Psychological services accounted for the majority of suggestions for Category 4. Meditation is not a new concept; it "dates back thousands of years … [and] has been associated with religious traditions, particularly Buddhism" (Cherry, 2020). Meditation is the practice of training the mind to maintain focus on an intention by filtering out distractions, such as the immediate environment or intruding thoughts (Tarrant, 2017). Evidence suggests that mindfulness meditation is associated with "neuroplastic changes in the structure and function of brain regions involved in regulation of attention, emotion and self-awareness" (Tang et al., 2015, p. 222). Given that many childhood disorders are neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ASD, ADHD and trauma (APA, 2013), daily meditation practice could be beneficial in reducing behaviours that escalate to suspension

events. The added benefit of potential stress and anxiety management (Cherry, 2020; Tang et al., 2015) could make meditation advantageous across the school, improving the sense of well-being to all students and staff.

Psychological services are not as easily accessed by schools as meditation. While schools may employ specialist teachers to fulfill a guidance officer role (DoE, 2020e), many schools only have part-time access to them, dependent on student enrolment numbers (Queensland Teachers' Union, 2020). Queensland schools also have the option to provide support through the provision of chaplaincy or student welfare workers, with some government funding available. They can also be funded via local community fundraising (DoE, 2020b). These services provide social-emotional support, whereas guidance officers offer more specialised support, such as providing counselling and psychoeducational assessments (DoE, 2020e).

9.6.5. Microsystem to Student: Teacher to Student

Category 5 only had two themes emerge: social-emotional education and anti-bullying programs/support. Social-emotional education and support had advocates from both occupation categories. Social-emotional learning (SEL) originates as far back as the Ancient Greek philosophers, Artistotle and Plato (Vaida & Ormenişan, 2013). SEL is useful for assisting students to develop coping strategies. It is reported to help manage stress and depression by understanding how emotions work, providing effective communication skills and emotional regulation strategies to cope with overwhelming thoughts and emotions (Southwick & Charney, 2012). These approaches support students to identify and manage their behaviour before it escalates. Solutions suggested by survey respondents, such as meditation, mindfulness (Moreno- Gómez & Cejudo, 2019), and student welfare support programs, are corroborated by research and can easily be embedded in a schoolwide SEL program (Frydenberg & Liang, 2021; Hoerr, 2020).

The second theme, bullying, including cyberbullying, is a pressing issue in Australia with several high-profile media agencies reporting incidences in recent years (Healy, 2020; Baker, 2019). Tragically, bullying led to the suicide of a 14-year-old student, Dolly Everett, in the Northern Territory (Graham, 2018). A campaign initiated by her parents led to criminal law amendments regarding

bullying (NSW Government, 2018), demonstrating that school community members have the capacity to instigate change. Australian state schools have implemented a range of anti-bullying programs, however as many as 50% of students and 35% of families are unaware of these, according to a South Australian study (Rigby & Johnson, 2016). Further, it is suggested teachers frequently provide inconsistent support for reported bullying, with incidents involving overt bullying more likely to elicit empathy and teacher intervention than covert bullying (Byers et al., 2011). However, a promising finding from Rigby and Johnson's study (2016) is that students and families from schools that provide social-emotional programs believe SEL is helpful at preventing bullying from occurring, further supporting the importance of SEL in schools as addressed above.

While most suggestions aimed at reducing behaviours that lead to suspension were positive, there were still several that had an element of punishment rather than restitution. One of these was corporal punishment, which has been prohibited in Queensland state schools since 1989 (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2021). The abolishment of the cane reinforces the need to re-evaluate laws and policies retrospectively, as observed in Chapter 2 (2.1.2). The prohibition of the use of the cane as a disciplinary measure demonstrates how changing societal norms or researched evidence necessitate alterations to departmental policies and procedures.

9.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented survey respondents' suggested options for reducing behaviours that commonly lead to suspensions. These were organised into five categories identifying relationship responsibilities and communication channels between the Department of Education, teachers, parents, and students. The most common themes involved policy or procedural changes or implementations, particularly regarding student behaviour and funding for support services and resources; and up-skilling teachers. Areas mentioned for teacher upskilling included communication processes, behaviour management skills and knowledge about children with special needs, including trauma. Other themes discussed included communication processes, the benefits of meditation and SEL. Bullying was expressed in terms of events that have led to legislation changes.

Despite the rare suggestion of prescriptive, non-inclusive disciplines such as caning, the majority were inclusive and supportive. Educators and non-educators are unanimous on one matter: there is a need to review suspension processes and consider alternative solutions. These suggestions will be revisited in the final chapter of the thesis. Prior to that, the following chapter addresses survey respondents' opinions regarding what student behaviours or incidents warrant immediate suspension.

Chapter 10: Crime and Punishment - Reasons for Immediate Suspensions

The previous chapter examined and discussed suggested actions schools could take to reduce behaviours that lead to suspensions. Suggestions largely proposed top-down accountability, with the department responsible for disseminating support to school executives, who are then responsible for filtering support to families and teachers; teachers to family and finally, directly supporting the student. Recommendations included changes to education policies and procedures, modifications to curriculum, up-skilling teachers, delivering social-emotional education, and providing more concise communication between schools, parents, and students. Essentially, suggestions intimated that strong, positive relationships may help manage negative behaviours through supportive collaboration.

This chapter begins by exploring community opinions regarding the survey question: "What student behaviours do you believe attract an immediate suspension?" Responses for this question were more united than those observed in previous chapters, where opinions were quite divisive. A total of 100 responses were received and distributed amongst three distinct categories: *Violent behaviours* (78), *Unlawful behaviours* (13) and *Non-violent behaviours* (9). Results are reported in frequency tables below in descending frequency of responses.

10.1. Category 1: Violent Behaviours

From 78 responses, four themes emerged for this category: Aggression; Physical harm/misconduct; Sexual abuse/misconduct; and Verbal abuse/bullying. While two themes, Aggression and Physical harm/misconduct, have similar concepts, they have been separated to distinguish between aggressive acts which do not cause physical harm and violent or physical acts which do imply harm. To illustrate, a student who has a stick in their hand is told to put it down by a teacher; if the child throws the stick on the ground directly in front of themselves it would be considered an aggressive act, whereas a child who throws it at the teacher with the intent of hitting them is engaging in an act implying harm. Responses for Category 1 have been organised into the four themes in Table 10.1 below, with findings following.

Table 10.1

Responses Aligned to Immediate Suspensions for Violent Behaviours

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Physical harm/misconduct	30	66.7	21	63.6	1	65.4
Violence	9	20.0	6	18.2	15	19.2
Verbal abuse/bullying	5	11.1	4	12.1	9	11.5
Sexual abuse/misconduct	1	2.2	2	6.1	3	3.9
Total	45	100.0	33	100.0	78	100.0

Category 1 was well populated by both educator and non-educator responses. This suggests there is strong support for immediate suspension of students engaging in acts of violence. However, some respondents specified further caveats, such as limiting immediate suspensions to "continued, repeated behaviour that causes injury to others [with] emphasis on the repeated and continued – even after teaching has taken place to change the behaviour."

10.1.1. Physical Harm or Misconduct

Most respondents focused on violence that resulted in physical harm/misconduct. Comments such as "physically harming another person on purpose" and "wilful harm to staff and students" infer a belief that physical harm needs to be intentional to warrant immediate suspension. While the word 'harm' was used almost equally by both occupation categories, educators used the term 'abuse' twice as often as non-educators. Notably, from a total of 33 respondents who mentioned harm to another (e.g., teacher, student, other), only one, a special education teacher, included self-harm as a reason for immediate suspension. This was expressed as "deliberate behaviour that causes serious harm to themselves or others that requires first aid, a d[octo]r or hospital visit." Although the respondent did not clarify, it is assumed this would not be a regular disciplinary suspension, but rather, adherence to departmental student protection requirements.

10.1.2. Violence

The word 'violence' was given its own authority, with several respondents providing it as a single-worded response. It was also commonly used in association with the words 'physical' and 'behaviour.' A distinction between initiated violence and self-defence was provided by a business

owner, who stated that suspension should be immediate for "[acts of] violence if [a] perpetrator, but I believe the victim has the right to self-defence without punishment."

10.1.3. Verbal Abuse or Bullying

Verbal abuse and bullying was largely expressed as swearing or foul language. Over half the responses for this theme explicitly linked it to verbal misconduct directed at teachers or school staff. Notably, only one response for bullying was received, although bullying may have been indirectly implicated in the theme of physical harm/misconduct.

10.1.4. Sexual Abuse or Misconduct

Sexual abuse/misconduct also emerged in the violent behaviours category. It should be noted that this survey question did not restrict responses solely to the Preparatory year, so respondents may have been responding more broadly when providing opinions regarding suspensions. For example, sexual abuse and illegal substances are more likely to involve, and lead to suspensions of, older students.

10.2. Category 2: Unlawful Behaviours

This category consisted of behaviours that were not just troublesome to the school but flaunted legislated law. These laws were drawn upon as themes: Property damage, Illegal substances/weapons, and Theft. Table 10.2 lists these along with their rate of response, which are expanded on in the findings directly below the table.

Table 10.2

Responses Aligned to Immediate Suspensions for Unlawful Behaviours

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Property damage	7	87.5	1	20.0	8	61.5
Illegal substances/weapon	1	12.5	3	60.0	4	30.8
Theft	0	0.0	1	20.0	1	7.7
Total	8	100.0	5	100.0	13	100.0

10.2.1. Property Damage

This was the most common theme for Category 2. However, only two responses stipulated the damage had to be to school property, such as "damage to classrooms by throwing and destroying

objects" to warrant immediate suspension. Vandalism was mentioned once, while other respondents specified the damage needed to be deliberate, serious, or extensive.

10.2.2. Illegal Substances or Weapons

Only one response for the theme Illegal substances/weapons was from an educator; drugs and weapons did not appear to be a high concern for teachers. Respondents' emphasis was on weapons or dangerous objects rather than illicit substances. Some implied the act of having weapons at school, regardless of whether they used the weapon, was ample cause for suspension. For example, an educator stated, "threat with a weapon" should result in immediate suspension. Others mentioned knifes or dangerous objects. Drugs were mentioned once, although the respondent specified the offense as drug dealing rather than personal possession and use.

10.2.3. Theft

The final theme for this category, theft, only elicited one response. This was from an insurance administrator, so their profession may have influenced this response. Due to heavy supervision on school grounds, theft by students is generally contained to small, pocketable items with low monetary value, so the lack of responses from educators for this theme is understandable.

10.3. Category 3: Non-Violent Behaviours

The response rate for *Non-violent behaviours* was much lower than Category 1, *Violent behaviours*. From nine responses, two themes emerged: Disruptive behaviours and Non-compliance. Response rates are presented in Table 10.3, followed by contextual explanations.

Table 10.3

Responses Aligned to Immediate Suspensions for Non-Violent Behaviours

Theme	Educator		Non-educator		Total	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Disruptive	3	60.0	3	75.0	6	66.7
Non-compliance	2	40.0	1	25.0	3	33.3
Total	5	100.0	4	100.0	9	100.0

10.3.1. Disruptive

Disruptive behaviours are those which disrupt teaching and learning. Respondents described them as repetitive, low-grade actions, such as "repeatedly stopping others from learning" and "repeating lower classed actions over a course of several days." As a neuro practitioner explained, they are "childhood proclivities which are more innocent and inappropriate, but not wilful towards harming, with lack of cooperation." A vet nurse believes "negative behaviour towards teachers" should warrant immediate suspension, although she did not establish what behaviours should be considered negative.

10.3.2. Non-Compliance

Non-compliance in educational settings are behaviours where a student refuses to follow a school rule or teachers' instruction. Examples include refusal to participate in a lesson, cooperate with others or transition from one area to another. An air traffic controller gave the example of "running away," which has been included here as a form of resisting a teacher's direct instruction or avoiding an undesirable activity. An educator's comment of a "student displaying dangerous, unsafe behaviour" is another example of non-compliance of school safety rules.

10.4. Discussion

From the total of 100 responses describing behaviours that warrant immediate suspension, 78 responses aligned to the theme Violent behaviours. This suggests survey respondents have considerable concerns regarding violence in schools. The HFSE document analysis (see Chapter 5) similarly addressed violence, where troubling statistics regarding school principals' experiences of acts of physical violence in 2019 were reported, usually at the hands of students (Riley et al., 2020). These findings also reflect DoE statistical suspension data, where physical misconduct is the most common reason for student suspensions over the past eight years (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j).

School violence is highly topical in school communities and the media, with concerns that it is increasing in both frequency and intensity. The Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) noted that there has been "an increase in incidents of physical violence against teachers and school leaders reported in the past financial year …" (Ruttiman, 2018). A rise of almost 80% in DoE WorkCover occupational

violence or assault claims between 2014-15 to 2018-19 supports the QTU claim that violent incidences in schools are escalating in number; however, the rise in workplace insurance claims intimates they are also increasing in harmful force (Queensland Parliament, 2019).

The evidence cited above indicates that violence in schools, and particularly against teachers (Lowe et al., 2020), is certainly increasing. The dilemma is why: what has led to contemporary students demonstrating lack of respect, increased aggression, and violent behaviours? One avenue of investigation is to ask students directly. While student voices are largely absent from suspension studies, their justifications provide insight into potential motivations behind school violence.

Taiwanese students indicated the three main reasons they engaged in violence against teachers was due to perceived unreasonableness, unfairness, or disagreement (Chen & Astor, 2008, p. 10). This study of approximately 14,000 students did not include children in the early years of schooling, however over 30% of students from Grade 4 to Grade 12 indicated they have been aggressive towards their teachers (2008, p. 8).

Focus groups of K-12 school students revealed that the perceived authority of school figureheads is undermined if the disciplinary measures enforced are considered unfair by students (Brasof & Peterson, 2018). Lack of consistency, inequality, and limited opportunities to explain or defend actions were elaborations provided by students in the study. It was also observed that disciplinary actions are sometimes issued for minor infractions due to "a power struggle between teacher and student" (Brasoff & Peterson, 2018, p. 838).

Other studies report "antecedents [to physical aggression] were discipline (25%), directives (19%), breaking up a fight (16%) and de-escalation (13%) …" (McMahon et al., 2020, p. 119); as well as "harassment (64.3%), property offences (33.9%) and physical offences (33.9%)" (Lowe et al., 2020, p. 193). Lowe et al. (2020) described harassment as including verbal taunts, offensive gestures, and intimidation, while physical offences included personal assaults and weaponised threats.

The association of learned behaviours through media imitation may also be contributing to the observed increase in young children's aggressive behaviour and violent acts. For instance, a study noted the different effects violent media had on aggression across two groups: children and adults

(Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). They observed that while adults experienced short-term aggression arousal, children experienced long-term effects. The authors suggest this is due to 'scripting', or neurological imprints that are "partially activated, or primed, by stimuli that they are associated with" 2006, p. 349). Young children's neurological networks are still developing; thus, their scripts are still in an emergent state (Bushman & Heusmann, 2006).

Children can frequently be observed re-enacting media scripts in school playgrounds; if the media they engage with glamorises violence or frames it as justice, they are more likely to find aggressive traits more admirable to mimic (Coyne et al., 2018). Aggression imitation may be moderated by deliberate censoring of violent content. A study that retained screen time doses for preschool-aged children but substituted violent content with prosocial or educational content observed improved social competence and reduced externalising behaviours (Christakis et al., 2013). However, evidence suggests that media containing both violent and prosocial content does not moderate children's likelihood of imitating aggressive behaviour (Coyne et al., 2018). This supports findings that supervision of screened device content, combined with co-viewing with an adult can moderate negative media effects through explanatory discussion (Council on Communications and Media, 2016; DET, 2015; Ponti et al., 2017).

While the theme sexual abuse returned a low response rate, recent media and political debate regarding issues around rape and consent (Badham, 2021; Durham, 2021) brings perspective to connotations of sexual exploitation of students. The role of digital technology is also implicit in discussions concerning school children, sexual abuse, and consent. Instant, easy access to social and digital media presents the very real risk of children being exposed to inappropriate content (Narayanan et al., 2018). Matters such as online exposure (Joleby et al., 2021), grooming of minors via social media and unmoderated gaming platforms (Kloess et al., 2019), and non-consensual sharing of intimate images (Dodge & Spencer, 2018) make even young children potential targets of inappropriate actions. The DoE do not include sexual abuse in their list of eight formal reasons for student suspensions. This may imply that, historically, there have been minimal incidences requiring it, or there is low reporting due to shame or self-blame (Winters et al., 2020). The changing social and

digital media environment indicates the DoE's initiatives to educate students and parents about internet safety and cyberbullying issues (DoE, 2021l) is well-timed.

These descriptions of violence, aggression and abuse align with themes associated with the HFSE study's findings for Category 1: physical harm, violence, and verbal abuse (see Table 10.1), as well as the DoE's suspension reasons of *verbal and non-verbal misconduct*, and *physical misconduct* both *involving an object* and *not involving an object* (see Table 1.1).

Category 2, *Unlawful behaviours*, had the second highest number of survey responses, mostly regarding property damage. Unlawful acts are addressed by the DoE as *property misconduct* and substance misconduct (see Table 1.1). Suspensions regarding substance misconduct suspensions generally involve high school students, therefore this suspension category was not included in HFSE survey questions. However, small numbers of primary school students from Grades 3–6 have received suspensions for substance misconduct, with the highest number of suspensions concerning tobacco (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). While records from the DoE indicate that historically, Prep students have not been suspended for substance infractions, a minority of Prep students have been suspended annually for property misconduct (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). Theft and property damage are addressed by the DoE's suspension label, *property misconduct* (see Table 1.1).

The category *Non-violent behaviours* had the lowest number of responses. These behaviours correlate with the Department's persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others and refusal to participate in the program of instruction descriptors (see Table 1.1). Collectively, these account for the second highest number of annual suspensions after those falling into the Violent behaviours category, according to the Department's suspension data (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). This reveals a disparity between community perceptions (see Table 10.3) of the rate of suspensions for these low-level behaviours and the annual number of suspensions issued by the department (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j) for this category.

Disruptive behaviours are known as the 'drip-drip effect' (Munn et al., 2000, as cited in Daly, 2013, p.25). These are minor or low-level behaviours that escalate through repetition rather than intensity. Examples of these behaviours include persistent calling out or chatting, tapping on desks or

general fidgeting. The repetition of these behaviours become distracting to other students and the teacher, constantly interrupting lessons (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). Non-compliance on the other hand, is a form of resisting a teacher's direct instruction, often to avoid an undesirable activity. This is explicitly addressed by the Education Department within their list of formal suspension reasons as *refusal to participate in the program of instruction*, while suspensions for disruptive behaviours are issued under *persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others* (see Table 1.1).

Several researchers have noted that low-level or non-aggressive behaviours are amongst the most common reasons for suspensions (Cole et al., 2019; Hemphill et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2018), with one study reporting that between 55–70% of suspension referrals in an American urban high school were due to defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The study noted the percentage rate variability exposed a racial element, with White students receiving lower numbers of referrals than African American students. It is more difficult to determine the distribution of defiance in Queensland suspensions. However, collectively, *refusal to participate in the program of instruction* and *persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others* have the highest number of student suspensions after physical misconduct and verbal misconduct (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j).

There are several reasons students engage in disruptive behaviours. The most obvious is boredom or disengagement. This may occur when lessons are repetitive or poorly delivered by teachers (Goldberg et al., 2021; Jati et al., 2019), or delivered above the students' capability (Goldberg et al., 2021). Friction within relationships, both teacher-student (Mahvar et al., 2018) and discord at home (Thomas et al., 2008; Tyler et al., 2018) or with peers (Johnson et al., 2019), can also contribute to problematic behaviour in classrooms. However, behaviours of children with atypical neurodevelopment, such as ADHD and ASD, are commonly misinterpreted as poor behaviour, rather than a function of the disorder (Reddy et al., 2014). This may account for the over-representation of students with special needs in suspension rates (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017). Recent associations between screened media dosage and increased ADHD symptoms (Lee et al., 2019; Ra et al., 2018) is also worth mentioning as a contributing factor, particularly as COVID-19 continues to disrupt face-to-face education and force learning online to compensate (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021).

The similarities between disruptive behaviours exhibited by students with additional needs and those demonstrated by disengaged students strengthens the need to integrate functional behaviour assessments into the suspension process. Disordered behaviours, poor instruction delivery, and inadequate differentiation are outside the students' control and thus, do not adhere to DoE Student Code of Conduct guidelines that suspension from school is "a last resort option for addressing serious behaviour issues" (DoE, 2021h, p. 11).

10.5. Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter indicate survey respondents consider violent, unlawful, and non-violent behaviours should attract an immediate suspension. Violent behaviours had the strongest support, with more than three-quarters of responses ascribed to this category. This aligns to DoE statistics, where longitudinal suspension data identifies that annually, physical misconduct accounts for the highest rate of suspensions. It also reflects evidence of rising school violence in recent years, as reported in independent studies (Riley et al., 2020; Ruttiman, 2018). Violent incidents eventuating in WorkCover claims provide further supportive evidence (Queensland Parliament, 2019). These descriptions of violence and aggression align with themes associated with the HFSE study's findings for Category 1: physical harm, violence, and verbal abuse (see Table 10.1), as well as the DoE's suspension reasons of *verbal and non-verbal misconduct*, and *physical misconduct* both *involving an object* and *not involving an object* (see Table 1.1.).

Unlawful behaviours had the second highest response rate. Property damage received the majority of these, followed by student possession of weapons or drugs on school sites. In contrast, few survey respondents indicated non-violent behaviours, such as disruptive behaviour or non-compliance, as serious enough to warrant immediate suspensions. This does not reflect DoE statistics, where the department's suspension reasons *persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others* and *refusal to participate in program of instruction* collectively have the second highest rates of suspension for the years 2012-2018. Contrary to respondent opinions, suspensions for *property misconduct involving own property; property misconduct involving others' property;* and *substance*

misconduct involving an illicit substance account for the second-lowest number of historical

suspensions (DET 2017; DoE, 2020j).

The following chapter addresses the final stage of the suspension procedure, the re-entry

process. Respondents' suggestions regarding methods for reinstating students returning from

suspension are collated and analysed. Findings are presented, followed by discussion of their benefits

and/or disadvantages.

Chapter 11: A New Start for Some but a Cycle for Others: Recommended Re-Entry Process

Chapter 10 addressed the issue of immediate suspensions, analysing survey respondents' opinions on what behaviours justify an immediate suspension. Three distinct categories emerged: violent behaviours, unlawful behaviours, and non-violent behaviours. School violence arose as a considerable concern, with more than three quarters of responses for this survey question suggesting physical misconduct should not be tolerated.

Chapter 11 presents the final phase of the suspension process, the return of the suspended student. Survey participants were asked to respond to the question: "What process would you suggest for a student returning to school after completing a suspension?" From 100 responses, two clear categories surfaced: *Inclusive reinforcement* and *Non-inclusive reinforcement*. Suggestions such as providing psychological support for the returning student were considered inclusive recommendations. Non-inclusive suggestions were those that presumed a position of further retribution, such as parent involved in supervising their child at school. A total of fourteen themes were identified and distributed across the two categories. These are presented in frequency tables below, beginning with Category 1 (see Table 11.1).

11.1. Category 1: Inclusive Reinforcement

The majority of responses received for this survey question were associated with re-entry processes that focused on *Inclusive reinforcement*. Nine themes emerged from these: Formalised re-entry process; Contract/behaviour plan; Return to class after meeting with student; Frequent check-ins/monitoring after return; Supportive classroom/behaviour programs; Psychological support; Restorative justice/apologies; Return straight to class – no further process; and Mentorship. Table 11.1 reports these in descending frequency. Respondent comments are quoted in the elaborations below the table.

Home From School Early: School Suspensions

Table 11.1

Inclusive Respondent Suggestions for Re-Entry Process

Theme	Educators		Non-educator		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Formalised re-entry process	16	29.2	1	4.0	17	21.3
Contract/behaviour plan	14	25.5	2	8.0	16	20.0
Return to class after meeting with student	3	5.5	8	32.0	11	13.8
Frequent check-ins	6	10.9	3	12.0	9	11.2
Supportive programs	4	7.2	3	12.0	7	8.8
Psychological support	4	7.2	3	12.0	1	8.8
Restorative justice	3	5.5	2	8.0	5	6.2
Return straight to class	1	1.8	2	8.0	3	3.7
Mentorship	4	7.2	1	4.0	5	6.2
Total	55	100.0	25	100.0	80	100.0

11.1.1. Formalised Re-Entry Process

This process is already in place in most schools, where the returning student and their parents are encouraged to attend a meeting with the class teacher and school heads of administration, usually the principal or deputy principal. The majority of responses for this theme were from educators, with a single response from the non-educator sector.

The term 're-entry' was frequently used by educators, with suggestions such as, "[The] re-entry meeting occurs at least one day prior to child's re-entry to school. Set child up for success" and "[A] re-entry meeting setting out clear goals." The only non-educator response provided a detailed observation, possibly the result of a personal experience with the suspension process. This is a valuable account of the suspension experience from the offending student or family's perspective:

> In some regards, I wish schools would not hold a grudge against children who have been suspended. In [the] majority of cases, families are actively trying to encourage their child to return to school, have positive behaviour and to follow the re-entry agreement the school may put in place, but I find the child is still categorised as a "problem" and is being scrutinised for every move they make. (Café Manager, age 30).

Several educators recommended meetings involving parents and school staff without referring to it as re-entry. A number of respondents stated the student should be included in this process. As one

pointed out, including the student in the meeting not only assists with clear communication between home and school, but also provides the student with an opportunity to have a voice:

> Meeting with school admin, teacher, parent [and] student to discuss what is expected on return to class. Everyone to have a say in what is to happen so student feels some value and so student knows that everyone knows what is agreed upon. (Teacher, age 39).

11.1.2. Contract or Behaviour Plan

The majority of recommendations for a contract/behaviour plan were again from educators, with only two responses from non-educators. The term "contract" was used explicitly in almost one third of responses for this theme. The goal of establishing a behaviour contract is to include the student in identifying the behaviour that led to the suspension before devising a plan to prevent it being repeated:

> I think the child should be asked to reflect on why they were suspended and to come up with a different way to deal with the situation. A contract written by the child, school management, teacher and parent should be written and signed with daily feedback on how the child is working within the contract. (Early year's teacher, age 51).

The term 'plan' was used in the recommendations of four educators. One phrased this from a position of zero tolerance: "Behaviour plan. It would need to be followed to the letter – no lenience given," while others mentioned it in more collaborative terms, such as "agreed plan to move forward, e.g., agreed behaviour."

Several respondents indicated that universal approaches are undesirable and instead recommend an individualised approach, where the way forward is "different for each situation and child .... [they] may need further monitoring or slow resumption of privileges." Another suggested a method based on functional behaviour, where "the school needs to be aware of where the behaviours are coming - if it is anxiety, poor self-regulation, home stress, hormones, disability, mental health etc, each should be approached differently." The remaining respondents used variations of agreement or goals, although only one explicitly mentioned behaviour.

11.1.3. Return to Class After Meeting With Student

Responses for this theme, both from non-educators, simply suggested an interview with the student. Others recommended a review of the offence on return of the student, although three respondents noted the incident should be framed as a tool for understanding, rather than further chastisement. As a stay-at-home parent suggested, "A brief chat about the incidence and then moving straight onto a fresh beginning allow[s] the child to move forward rather than backwards and dwelling." Some propose the meeting takes place as a forum for addressing expectations of the student on return, such as, "a meeting with [the] principal and teacher. Clear outline of expectations."

11.1.4. Frequent Check-Ins

This process was suggested by four educators as a way of monitoring behaviour after the student returns. A video conference coordinator also used the term 'check in/up.' A social worker recommended the use of a "positive reinforcement behaviour card." This was the only response that clearly identified a positive, inclusive approach. Other respondents were not so specific, and it is not clear whether their concept of checking in is for student wellbeing or surveillance.

11.1.5. Supportive Programs

Almost half of the responses aligning to this theme were worded in terms of creating an environment of acceptance and support from peers, such as this response from a neuro practitioner:

Prepare the class to not antagonize or harass the student; [support] integration with the class using a group activity that doesn't isolate any student; have an open discussion … to help students understand what happened and allow them all to move on. (Neuro practitioner, age 44).

The suggestion to train staff to be conscious of their own biases as a measure to guide students towards a successful re-entry was forwarded by an educator: "A safe environment for them to return, instead of going back in to be known as the naughty kid with teachers or a badge of honour with peers, help them to continue on with a fresh start." Others suggested a range of supportive programs including meditation and social-emotional skills. One respondent shared: "my son's school runs a 'play-positive' program for students who have been physically violent ..." Another advocated the use of evidence-based approaches such as mindfulness with their response:

The child needs someone who understands these things to help him or her learn about the

brain, emotions and how to manage them. The adult would have a personal

mindfulness/meditation practice and would teach the child how to do this. Mindfulness and

meditation rewire the human brain to be calmer, less reactive, and happier. This has been

proven by many studies. (Primary school teacher, age 54).

11.1.6. Psychological Support

Several respondents mentioned psychological counselling, such as "counselling sessions with

a decent GC [guidance counsellor]." Another recommended a functional behaviour assessment.

Functional behaviour assessments were also raised in Chapter 9 as a strategy for reducing behaviours

that lead to suspensions. They can be useful for assisting school staff to become more proactive and

less reactive when dealing with undesirable behaviours.

11.1.7. Restorative Justice

Respondents who mentioned restorative justice referred to variations of apology, such as an

"apology to adults and children involved in incident that caused suspension." Others included the

words "restorative" and "reparations," two terms that embody the essence of restorative justice.

11.1.8. Return Straight to Class – No Further Process

While this theme contained fewer responses, educators particularly advocated for an inclusive

process:

Immediate inclusion as normal. I think it would be important not to make them stand out or it

may make them feel more ostracised and want to act out again. As long as they had taken

steps towards already having apologised for/made amends for/taken responsibility for the

action that caused them to be suspended etc." (Director, age 40).

In comparison, non-educators tended to endorse a no-nonsense, no-fuss return to routine. As a

stay-at-home parent stated: "Return to school and get on with your education!"

11.1.9. Mentorship

The final theme for Category 1 also had fewer responses, mostly from educators. Notably, the

teacher-student relationship was mentioned, with an educator recommending "access to staff where

stronger relationships exist." Another educator also advocated for strong teacher-student relationships, saying,

> No child or young person should ever be suspended. If they are, the return to school should be followed by a teacher investing time to be with the young person and to grow a warm, respectful relationship with them. After trust is built, this adult should focus on empathetic and respectful listening so that the child feels truly heard and seen. This is very powerful. (Primary school teacher, age 54).

11.2. Category 2: Non-Inclusive Reinforcement

Category 2 had considerably fewer responses than the previous category. Five themes were identified from twenty responses: Gradual return to class; Further detention/behaviour class; Public apology; Parent supervision at school; and Restriction of privileges. Results are set out in Table 11.2.

Table 11.2

Non-Inclusive Respondent Suggestions for Re-Entry Process

Theme	Educators		Non-educators		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gradual return to class	7	58.3	2	25.0	9	45.0
Further detention	2	16.7	4	50.0	6	30.0
Public apology	0	0.0	2	25.0	2	10.0
Parent supervision at school	2	16.7	0	0.0	2	10.0
Restriction of privileges	1	8.3	0	0.0	1	5.0
Total	12	100.0	8	100.0	20	100.0

11.2.1. Gradual Return to Class

This theme had the majority of responses for this category. Most respondents used terms such as 'easing in' and 'slow return' to infer gradual return to the students' regular classroom. Only one suggested the student needed to meet caveats before returning to class fulltime, stating, "a gradual return to the classroom, conditional on improved behaviour." Similarly, only one respondent expressed where the student would be located for the rest of the school day, suggesting "gradually add time in classrooms, the rest in office or learning support areas."

11.2.2. Further Detention

Responses for this theme called for the particularly harsh penalty of serving an additional exclusionary period on return. These were justified by several respondents as a measure to ensure the student had "learnt their lesson." For example, a teacher aide recommended, "a day of in-house suspension reminding them of what they did wrong and the importance of not repeating the action." A carer, whose response has been divided into two themes, endorsed a public apology at the school assembly explaining what they had learnt from the suspension. Her comment continued: "If they haven't learnt, suspend them again." A homemaker also provided a comment that bridged two themes, suggesting an interview before returning to class "and if not satisfied, then a period of in-school suspension."

11.2.3. Restriction of Privileges

The theme restriction of privileges also emerged in Chapter 8, where respondents were asked to offer alternatives to external suspensions. In the context here, as a response to re-entry process suggestions, two teachers mentioned variations on restricting play. One recommended, "restricted play areas and monitoring," while the second suggested, "playtime privileges [are] reintroduced gradually when classroom behaviour improves."

11.2.4. Public Apology

Expecting a returning student to issue a public apology also contained two responses, this time exclusively from non-educators. A public servant simply stated, "Apology, public." The second response, from the carer noted above in the theme Further detention, suggested, "student to explain at assembly to entire student body why they were suspended and what they've learnt from it."

11.2.5. Parent Presence at School

This final theme had a single response. However, this recommendation also appeared in Chapter 8, so it has been included here. This response, "Parental supervision and involvement in classes" suggested parents be present not only at school, but within the students' classroom. The response in Chapter 8 was almost identical: "more parent involvement and sitting in with children in class."

The re-entry recommendations presented above have offered some new concepts as well as revisiting suggestions made in previous chapters that expressed elements of school suspension. These are addressed in the discussion below, measuring recommendations against existing evidence. A chapter summary follows the discussion.

11. 3. Discussion

Several themes identified in this chapter also arose in previous chapters. These included psychological support, school/family collaboration, restorative justice, meditation, parental presence at school and loss of privileges. Notably, several of these themes are centred around relationship building, concepts that were discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 8. In particular, the teacher-student relationship was again cited, on this occasion as key to successful re-entry after suspension.

Relationships are patently beneficial to a successful re-entry (DoE, 2020h, p. 47). While not mandated, the DoE recommends this collaborative strategy to support students' return from suspension (DoE, 2020h). Collaboration involving the student, parents, and school staff aids the goal of relationship building by welcoming the student back to school and discussing supports available to facilitate a successful return. Parental attendance at the re-entry meeting establishes clear communication and joint commitment for future success. It also enables transparent input from support personnel, such as guidance officers (GO), in addition to the class teacher. Psychologists and GOs employed by DoE are able to offer psychological support as well as conduct psychoeducational tests. These may include evaluations of executive functioning, mental health, and behaviour assessments (DoE, 2020e).

There is considerable stigma attached to suspensions, with returning students often feeling ostracised by both peers and teachers (Quin & Hemphill, 2014). While services such as GO support are certainly valuable for the returning student, the class teacher has an equally critical role. Fostering a positive environment, encouraging peer support, and balancing social-emotional requirements with positive behaviour management (Osher et al., 2010) can help reduce risky behaviours while building social-emotional capacity (Gregory et al., 2021).

Relationships are at the core of another theme raised previously: restorative justice. Restorative justice focuses on repairing relationships between individuals involved in an incident through "restitution, resolution, and reconciliation" (Morrison & Vaanderlig, 2012, p.140), rather than retribution or punishment. There are claims that restorative justice ideologies date as far back as ancient civilisation (Braithwaite, 2002). The contemporary model recognised today was originally designed as a process within youth criminal justice contexts (Carruthers, 2012). However, the principles of contemporary restorative justice are well suited to the needs of school communities, particularly as it may be helpful for improving the climate of the school (Schiff, 2018). School climate relates to the feel or tone of a school. It reflects the school's sense of community, established through interpersonal relationships and the level of social, academic and emotional support provided to staff and students (Bear, 2020). Evidence suggests restorative justice may reduce suspension rates and aid anti-bullying programs (Morrison & Vaanderlig, 2012). It has also demonstrated an improvement to school attendance, graduation rates and academic achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Supportive classroom behaviour programs were also suggested by several survey respondents. Many Queensland state schools already subscribe to a school-wide behaviour framework known as PBL, or Positive Behaviour for Learning (DoE, 2021c). PBL identifies three tiers, or levels, of support. Tier 1 provides universal, or whole-school preventative behaviour support through explicit teaching of behaviour expectations. Tier 2 provides support targeted towards at-risk students. The model assumes approximately 15% of students will require Tier 2 support. The final level, Tier 3, is described as intensive support. It is directed at students with complex and challenging behaviours. Approximately 5% of students require Tier 3 interventions (DoE, 2021c). This cohort is the most likely to engage in behaviours that lead to suspension.

Essential components of PBL include data collection and evidence-informed decision making, tiered levels of differentiated support, whole-school explicit teaching of behaviour expectations, and positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviours (Horner et al., 2010). The philosophy behind PBL is a proactive approach that uses social learning and behavioural theory to teach explicit behaviour expectations across the whole school (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Behaviour infractions are considered

errors, desired behaviour is retaught, and intensive support is provided to correct behaviours for students who require it (DoE, 2021c). Evidence indicates PBL programs reduce problematic behaviours, decrease suspensions, and improve school climate (Lee & Gage, 2020).

Behaviour contracts or plans were also endorsed by respondents. These are already utilized in schools, integrated as a support resource for PBL (DoE, 2021c). Templates for individual behaviour support plans (IBSP) guide teachers and support staff in developing behaviour goals for students with complex behaviours (DoE, n.d.-c). The plan outlines steps from problematic behaviour to desired behaviour, using functional behaviour assessment elements to identify the antecedents that trigger the undesired behaviour. A task and goal timeline are integral features of the plan, as is a review date to determine its efficacy. Notably, the DoE link PBL to "student wellbeing, trauma-informed practices, restorative practices [and] bullying prevention" (DoE, 2021c).

In contrast to disciplinary actions such as PBL and restorative justice that promote self-learning and conflict resolution, actions such as loss of privileges or further exclusion from peers serve as reinforcement of authority, or the "culture of control …" (Perry & Morris, 2014, p. 1067). This can be counter-productive and lead to hostility and opposition, undermining any attempts to improve school climate (Perry & Morris, 2014). Similarly, while a number of respondents suggested gradual return following suspension, the department discourages it, although a rationale is not provided (DoE, 2020h). The DoE also cautions against penalising the student if their family fails to participate in the re-entry process. This acknowledges complex circumstances such as family conflict, which has been shown to impact negatively on parental involvement (Ucus et al., 2019).

Many of the suggestions made to facilitate a student's return after suspension are options that schools already access. However, it is important to apply these measures to build relationships with students, rather than undermine them. For example, initiating a check-in or monitoring process can be valuable for reducing problematic behaviours while improving self-management and problem-solving skills (Gregory et al., 2021). However, if not structured correctly and poorly implemented, it can be perceived as surveillance by the student and an addition to workload by the teacher if not structured correctly.

11.4. Chapter Summary

It is encouraging to observe that most educators and non-educators advocate for positive reinforcement for returning students. Survey respondents participating in the HFSE study have provided valuable suggestions for inclusive re-entry measures. These suggestions included school/family collaboration, restorative justice, capitalising on existing teacher-student mentor relationships, and utilising check-in/check-out slips or behaviour contracts to improve self-accountability. Provision of psychological support and positive behaviour programs were also mentioned. Recommendations directed at teachers included advice to discourage judgmental labels such as troublemaker, foster a supportive environment for the returning student, and collaborate with the whole class in preparing an inclusive group activity upon the student's return. The concluding chapter, Chapter 12, reflects on previous chapters and considers suggestions forwarded by survey respondents, particularly in relation to alternatives to external suspensions.

Chapter 12: Recommendations and Conclusions

The previous chapter addressed the final step in the suspension process: the re-entry procedure. Survey respondents suggested a range of methods for reintegrating the suspended student back to school. In Chapter 12, 'Patrick' is revisited. His needs, and those of children like him, are considered alongside suggestions made by respondents. These are compiled to create a resource bank of recommended alternatives to external suspension. Limitations of the study are also acknowledged and opportunities for further research are suggested. Prior to this, the chapter begins below by situating the findings. Research questions are aligned to findings, followed by a summary to draw together current evidence and make final conclusions.

12.1. Situating the Findings

The HFSE study emerged as a result of a considerable increase in Preparatory (Prep) student suspensions in the year 2014. The overarching aim was to explore potential sociocultural events and policy directions that may have contributed to the concerning increases in suspension rates of Queensland's youngest students. The first two research questions were developed from these early explorations:

a. Over the past decade, what sociocultural changes have occurred that may be contributing to the negative behaviours leading to increased school suspensions of young students?

b. What are the documented reasons, policies, and processes of Early Years suspensions across Queensland schools?

A central goal of the study was to recommend alternatives aimed towards reducing the number of suspensions, particularly for young students in their first years of formal schooling. Further goals of the HFSE study were to address the gap of studies that examine the Australian context of Preparatory student suspensions, and to present the human stories behind the stark statistics on suspensions. To achieve this, the experiences and opinions of school community members, such as families and educators, needed to be obtained. This led to the development of a third research question:

c. Are the experiences and opinions of community members supportive of the observed increases in Education Queensland suspension rate data and sociocultural changes?

The reality of Prep student suspension statistics is confronting; despite suspensions being classified as a last-resort disciplinary action, suspensions continue to increase. Further, the characteristics and history of children reported as suspended in the HFSE study indicate multiple suspensions are not uncommon. It is also evident that suspensions are no longer successful at curbing undesirable student behaviours. While the first three questions aim to probe beyond raw statistics, tapping into the complex antecedents leading up to suspension events, the desire to drive change led to a fourth question:

  d. What are possible alternative solutions for avoiding suspensions in the early years of schooling?

Two collections of data sources were devised to achieve these goals and address the research questions. An anonymous online survey was designed to collect the experiences and opinions of school community members regarding suspensions. In addition, documents relevant to student discipline and school suspensions were identified and collected. These sources provided rich qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. Below, findings are aligned with research questions and data sources to reveal the HFSE story, beginning with the first research question.

12.1.1. Research Question 1: Over the Past Decade, What Sociocultural Changes Have Occurred That may be Contributing to the Negative Behaviours Leading to Increased School Suspensions of Young Students?

This question was posed in response to the marked increase of over 52% in Prep student suspensions in 2014 (see Table 5.1). The purpose of the question was to identify sociocultural events that occurred around this timeframe and investigate their potential impact on children's behaviour. The timing of innovations in technology, coupled with peak electronic tablet sales in 2013/2014 (Vailshery, 2021) led to an examination of increased screened device use by young children.

Existing studies supported this concern, as evidenced in the literature review (Chapter 3). Described as problematic interactive media use (PIMU), technological advances have led to smaller-sized, mobile devices with ever-increasing capabilities. A review of existing research revealed three main domains of potential behavioural impact on young children: the effect of PIMU on young

children's developing brains; the relationship emerging between PIMU and ADHD symptoms; and distractive effects of PIMU on parents whilst parenting young children.

In addition to the literature review, opinions of survey respondents regarding Prep suspension increases were also sought. Thematic analysis of survey responses intimated poor parenting, children's lack of respect and discipline, social skills, school readiness, and lack of educator knowledge of children with special needs accounted for poor Prep student behaviour. While screened devices and PIMU were not directly implicated, these five thematic respondent opinions aligned with symptoms and effects of PIMU.

Poor parenting had the highest response rate as a reason for declining Prep student behaviours. Respondent comments indicated lack of or decreased parental involvement was an issue, which reflects observations made in cited studies regarding distracted parenting. One study example, observing families at a fast-food outlet, noted that when parents were distracted by their mobile device, their child engaged in escalating externalised and internalised behaviours in bids for attention (McDaniel, 2019; Radesky et al., 2014). In other studies, parents admitted they sometimes resort to providing children with screened devices to divert the child's attention-seeking endeavours (Caylan et al., 2021). Others use it as a reward for good behaviour (Rhodes, 2017). Advances in neuroimaging have also observed some alarming results regarding PIMU. For instance, neuroscience research has revealed that participants with internet gaming disorders (IGD) exhibit changes in brain development (Lee et al., 2019) and dopamine sensitivity (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015).

As noted in Chapter 3, reward sensitivity is also associated with ADHD (Yen et al., 2007). Other similarities between ADHD and PIMU symptoms have also been identified, such as inattentiveness, distractibility (Ra et al., 2018), and lowered self-regulation (George et al., 2018). While directionality is unknown, some research suggests there is potential for misdiagnosis between the two disorders (Lissak, 2018; Pluhar et al., 2019; Ra et al., 2018). It may also partly account for considerable increases in ADHD diagnoses in recent years (Danielson et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2016). Viewed in tandem with respondents' opinions that educators lack knowledge of children with special

needs, criticism of teachers' capacity to accommodate special needs in their classrooms could be due to greater numbers of children with special needs such as ADHD and undiagnosed PIMU.

Concerns raised by respondents regarding young children's perceived lack of respect, discipline, social skills, and school readiness may also reveal aspects of PIMU and distracted parenting. Well-meaning busy parents often provide youngsters with devices loaded with educational apps to keep them occupied while they attend to tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Whilst the app may focus on educational content, it only engages children in one-way social interactions. This can interfere with "attachment security, children's social and emotional development, and infants' developmental stages …" (Beamish et al., 2019): the areas of concern as raised by respondents. The HFSE study findings elicited from this research question indicate further research into the effects of excessive screen time on young children needs to be a priority.

12.1.2. Research Question 2: What are the Documented Reasons, Policies, and Processes of Early Years Suspensions Across Queensland Schools?

Official suspension processes needed to be unpacked to establish why so many young learners have experienced school suspensions. Observing the most and least common reasons for suspensions across all year levels allowed for comparison across grade levels and child development stages, as well as determining whether school consequences were appropriate for age groups. This was achieved by an online search for documents associated with student discipline and school suspension. In addition to DoE statistics, policy, procedure, and associated documents (see Table 5.4), the search generated a number of independently authored documents (see Table 5.6) on the topics of student discipline and school suspension. Together, document content analysis disclosed the dilemma of rising suspension numbers and increasing school violence in Queensland schools.

A change to the *Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013* was identified as a potential catalyst for increased suspensions. Introduced in November 2013, its intention was to expand disciplinary powers to school principals (Explanatory Notes, 2013). The goal was to reduce suspensions by providing more appropriate consequences for students with complex

behaviours. Instead, the following year, 2014, saw the highest rate of Prep suspension increases in a calendar year (based on 2012–2019 data – see Table 5.1).

It was found that eight key behaviour infractions may result in a student being suspended: refusal to participate in a program of instruction, persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others, physical misconduct – involving an object, physical misconduct – not involving an object, other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school (including serious misconduct), verbal or non-verbal misconduct, property misconduct, and absences (DoE, 2020j). The same eight reasons apply to all students: from five-year-old Prep students who have just commenced school to 18-year-old Grade 12 students who are preparing to vote.

Physical misconduct without an object is the most common reason students of all grade levels are suspended (DET, 2017; DoE, 2020j). Australian school principals concur physical violence is increasing in schools (Riley et al., 2020). Results from these author's 2019 survey show a steep rise in threats of violence and acts of physical violence in 2015, with both continuing to increase annually (Riley et al., 2020, p. 159). This is supported by significant increases in occupational violence and assault claims made to DoE WorkCover between the 2014-15 and 2018-19 financial years (Queensland Parliament, 2019). What is alarming about this statistic is that it suggests that not only are school violence events on the rise, but the intensity of the violence towards school personnel is also causing harm serious enough to warrant an insurance claim.

These findings revealed two observations: Prep students are engaging in increasingly violent physical behaviours, and suspensions are proving to be unsuccessful in curbing or managing these behaviours. Firstly, it is vital to identify why young children are resorting to violent behaviours. Secondly, there is an urgent need to address suspension policy to implement age-appropriate disciplinary processes.

12.1.3. Research Question 3: Are the Experiences and Opinions of Community Members Supportive of the Observed Increases in DoE Queensland's Suspension Rate Data and Sociocultural Changes?

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to provide for comparison between survey respondents' opinions and DoE suspension statistics. To achieve this, a range of rating scale questions were posed, seeking the opinions of respondents regarding the most and least likely reason for suspension. Respondents were asked to rate their responses against three grade level categories: P–2; G3–G6; and G7–G12, using the DoE's suspension categories. In addition, responses to a multiple-choice survey question indicated which grade or grades (from Prep through to Grade 12) respondents believed were appropriate for suspensions to be issued. An open-ended question was also posed, while statistical evidence on suspension rates was obtained and collated from the DoE's website (DETE, 2017; DoE, 2020j). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to report results.

Results for the rating scale question indicated the majority of respondents selected physical misconduct not involving an object as the most likely reason to warrant a suspension. This applied to all grade levels (see Tables 6.3. and 6.4.). Absences were nominated by most respondents as the least likely reason for suspension. This was also across all grade levels (see Tables 6.3. and 6.4.).

Responses for the most appropriate grade/s for issuing suspensions had a more diverse distribution. This question allowed respondents to select more than one grade level if they desired. This resulted in the highest response distributions for Grade 7 and Grade 10 (see Figure 6.5). The high school years, G7–G12 with the most nominations, while the primary years, Prep to Grade 6, had the lowest distributions. The Prep year had the lowest number of responses across the whole data set.

The two suspension categories nominated as most and least likely reasons for suspensions, physical misconduct and absences, corresponded with DoE longitudinal suspension statistics. This indicates community members are in concordance with what is occurring in Queensland schools. However, respondent opinions regarding the most appropriate grade or grades for issuing suspensions was less consistent with DoE statistics. The Prep year was selected by respondents as the least appropriate grade to issue suspensions. This is not reflective of Queensland DoE suspension policies and procedures, where all grades are equally subject to the same grounds for suspension (DET, 2017). This infers that community members' opinions do not align with the department's suspension processes for young learners.

The HFSE study posited that young children's increased access to, and use of, mobile screened devices could be impacting on young children's behaviour. To address this sociocultural change, respondents with children were asked to report on their child's screen habits and duration. An open-ended question was also posed, asking what they thought may be contributing to Prep student suspension increases.

Data from respondents regarding their child's screened device duration, or dose size, was insufficient to provide evidence of higher screened device use by suspended students, and by association, impact on children's behaviour. However, data regarding children's access to screened devices did indicate that the majority of the respondents' children have access to television, iPad-type devices, and electronic games (see Chapter 6). This suggests contemporary children are indeed accessing or owning mobile screened devices at the rates reported in previous studies (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021; Rideout, 2017; Rideout & Robb, 2020).

Responses to the open-ended question expressed a concern that changes in parenting styles have impacted on young children's behaviours (see Table 8.1). Respondent's opinions revealed that poor parenting skills, including lack of respect or discipline, were considered the most common issues relating to parenting. These opinions align with literature that suggests permissive parenting is at the root of disrespectful children, claiming contemporary parents negotiate with their children, rather than discipline them (Sax, 2016).

Screened devices were also named as a reason for higher Prep suspension rates by several survey respondents. Evidence is growing to suggest problematic interactive media use (PIMU) may be altering children's behaviour (Rich et al., 2017; Tamana et al., 2019) through changes in brain development (Lee et al., 2019; Takeuchi et al., 2016). Similarities between substance addiction symptoms and PIMU have been observed, particularly dopamine disorders (Takeuchi et al., 2016; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2015). Long-held directional associations between ADHD and PIMU, which suggest individuals with ADHD are pre-disposed to PIMU due to reward-stimulus features and rapid pace (Beyens et al., 2018; Engelhard & Kollins, 2019; Park et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2007), have recently been queried. Some studies claim symptom similarities between PIMU and ADHD-type

symptoms, such as attention problems and low impulse-control (Nikkelen et al., 2014), are bidirectional (Gentile et al., 2012; Tamana et al., 2019). Others propose that these symptomatic similarities may be leading to misdiagnosis of PIMU as ADHD (Lissak, 2018; Pluhar, 2019). The increasing rates of ADHD diagnoses may support this (Danielson et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2016; Zablotsky et al., 2019).

Survey respondents also suggested poor parenting and lack of discipline have contributed to increases in Prep suspensions. It is possible that parents' own use of screened devices may be a factor impacting on children's behaviour. *Distracted parenting* is a term coined to describe parents who are so distracted by their mobile device, they often do not react to their child's efforts to gain their attention (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018; Radesky et al., 2014). This resulted in children displaying escalating undesirable behaviours as they bid for their parents' attention (Elias et al., 2021). Distracted parents responded to this through more abrasive interaction with the child, demonstrating "greater parenting laxness and overreactivity" (McDaniel, 2019, p. 74).

An important finding emerged from data regarding survey participants' children. This arose through analysis of their responses to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). While suspended children scored higher than non-suspended children for all four problematic scales (emotional, hyperactivity, peer, and conduct), hyperactivity and peer problems scores revealed considerable differences between the two groups. Results for hyperactivity identified the scores of suspended children were almost triple those of unsuspended children (see Table 7.5). Similarly, peer problem scores for suspended children were also almost three times higher than non-suspended children's scores (see Table 7.3). Peer problems can evolve into bullying, threatening behaviour, and physical assault (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018). These behaviours threaten the wellbeing and safety of others and therefore commonly result in suspension. Probing the reasons behind escalating violent student behaviours offers opportunities to provide proactive interventions and reduce the risk of suspension. These findings suggest psychometric testing may be useful for profiling children on enrolment, providing opportunities to deliver support prior to, and potentially preventing, behaviours leading to suspension.

Increased access to mobile screened devices by young children may also provide a link to suspension rates. The literature suggests PIMU and ADHD share some symptomatic similarities (Lissak, 2018; Pluhar, 2019; Tamana et al., 2019). If evidence of the association between screen time and disordered behaviour continues to emerge, diagnostic criteria for PIMU will need to be developed.

The culmination of these results support the need for a review of suspension policy and procedures. This is particularly relevant to young learners, who are navigating the routines and regulations of formal school for the first time. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this is an area the state of New South Wales (NSW) has formally identified as necessary in their public consultation paper regarding student behaviour (Education NSW, 2021) and thus may need to be considered by Queensland.

12.1.4. Research Question 4: What are Possible Alternative Solutions for Avoiding Suspension in the Early Years of Schooling?

Open-ended survey questions asked respondents to provide suggestions for alternatives to school suspensions. Two main entities emerged from thematic analysis as having culpability for implementing suspension alternatives: families/society and schools/teachers. Alternatives were categorised as either *soft* or non-punitive options, and *hard* or punitive alternatives.

Punitive suggestions directed at families consisted of parental presence at school and police intervention. School-family collaboration was the most common non-punitive recommendation for families to action, followed by parenting programs and psychological support. Different styles of parental support were examined, identifying that some parental involvement, such as the surveillance-style classroom supervision proposed by some respondents, are less successful (Hattie, 2008) than more inclusive models of parental involvement.

Collaborative, supportive relationships between school, home and student were identified as having a positive effect on behaviour (Cornelius-White, 2007; DoE, n.d.-a; Goodall, 2018). Screen time was considered a potential tool for enhancing school-home collaboration, especially during enforced transition to online learning due to COVID-19 impacts. This new, digital space was

suggested as a strategy for reaching out to connect and collaborate with parents to support student needs.

Punitive actions for schools were broader than those proposed for families. Internal suspensions had the highest number for this category. While this is a softer option than external suspensions, it still contains exclusionary elements, such as removing the student from their classroom and peers. Other punitive suggestions consisted of alternative programs, loss of privileges, undesirable tasks, outside school-hours detentions, individualised consequences, and corporal punishment. One staunch respondent believes there are no alternatives and endorsed that suspensions remain a behaviour management procedure.

Schools were associated with the responsibility of seven non-punitive actions. Trauma-informed practice had the highest response rate. As noted in Chapter 8, this is an emerging area in the education sector, upskilling teachers about the effects trauma has on young children's brains (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014; Voineskos, 2020). Social skill development, meditation, more staffing and/or resources, counselling, restorative justice, and policy changes were also mentioned.

In addition to suspension alternatives, respondents were asked to recommend methods schools could consider to reduce undesirable student behaviours. These would provide proactive, rather than reactive, behaviour management strategies. The aim was to potentially avoid suspensions by preventing the occurrence of problematic behaviours.

Responses revealed an element in common with the first question regarding alternatives to suspensions: locus of responsibility. However, rather than a family-versus-school culpability, the accountability here reflected the top-down structure of the education department, with measures of support trickling down from departmental heads to school executives; school executives to teachers; and teachers to parents and students.

The majority of responses referred to elements of policies or procedures, which require the support of departmental authorities. These included curriculum changes, offering more disciplinary options, reducing class sizes, or providing additional funding. Most were non-punitive, although some were quite retributive: reinstate corporal punishment, withdraw welfare payment to parents of children

with poor conduct, and remove students from their regular school to provide interventions at a specialised behaviour school.

Parent involvement and school–home collaboration were again mentioned, this time from the perspective of parental accountability. Provision of support to parents through access to outside agencies or parent courses was also recommended. Some claimed teachers needed more training, especially regarding special needs support, while others suggested providing additional support personnel would be helpful for keeping on top of behaviour issues.

Student wellbeing was at the centre of school-to-student interventions to curb behaviour. These included psychological and welfare support and meditation classes. Teacher-to-student supports included social-emotional education and anti-bullying programs.

Some suggestions require top-level departmental action, such as reviewing policies and procedures. However, a clear message emerged that to maintain expectations around behaviour, school–home relationships are fundamental. There is scope to blend several of these suggestions into the curriculum or daily routines. These will be elaborated on in the next section, where these options are developed into achievable recommendations.

12.2. Recommended Alternatives to External Suspension

Recommendations are organised across two categories in this section: proactive behaviour management, and alternatives to external suspension. Proactive strategies are mostly child-centric and aim to prevent behaviour from escalating to levels requiring the suspension of students. While most evolved from qualitative analysis of respondent comments, some, such as psychometric screening to identify at-risk students before behaviour becomes problematic, were derived from quantitative analysis.

The second category provides alternatives to external suspensions. These options may be required when behaviour is beyond proactive manageability. These recommendations acknowledge there are occasions when external suspension is the only option, such as when behaviour poses safety risks to the student or others. The options suggested here are to help return suspensions back into their intended role: as a last-resort disciplinary action. Additionally, although the HFSE study was primarily

interested in Prep student suspensions, most of the recommendations in this section could also be applied to older students.

12.2.1. Responsive, not Regulatory – Proactive Behaviour Management

To establish a child-centric approach to student behaviour management strategies, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) will again be adopted to organise recommendations according to the tiers of contextual relationships. This section begins by providing supports that can be implemented in the student's home, followed by classroom interventions put in place by the teacher. School-based options for support are then described. The section closes with potential improvements at departmental level, with particular focus on policy.

12.2.1.1. Microsystem to Individual: Digitally Aware Parenting. Prior to school, a child's first teacher is their parent. However, in recent years, screened devices have become embedded in everyday life and are often assigned the role of convenient babysitter, potentially reducing opportunities for participatory language development (Zimmerman et al., 2007). The following recommendations are centred around managing screened device use while providing opportunities to develop expressive language and social skills. These suggestions are particularly valuable for children with ASD and ADHD diagnoses, as evidence cautions this demographic is at heightened risk of PIMU (Pluhar et al., 2019). Individual schools may be able to provide parent information nights and unpack the suggestions below.

a.   Monitor screen time, applying age-appropriate screen time recommendations provided by government and health agencies (DET, 2015; World Health Organisation, 2019).

b.   Encourage traditional models of play in place of virtual environments. Schedule in engaging screen-free activities (for children *and* parents). Suggestions include nature walks, home baking, shopping expeditions, construction block challenges, reading, and board games. These activities provide social opportunities with family and peers and are also suitable during periods of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, doubling, for example, as curriculum links to measurement, money or the environment.

c.   Model courteous screen etiquette by setting boundaries around mealtimes and social

gatherings.

d.   Encourage good sleep hygiene by removing screened devices from bedrooms.

e.   Avoid reliance on screened devices to occupy children during busy times such as meal

preparation or other household tasks. Involve them in age-appropriate tasks, such as washing

vegetables or dusting. Alternatively, prepare a *creativity box* of high engagement activities,

such as play-dough, puzzles, drawing supplies or manipulatives.

f.   Immerse your child in language: sing a song when changing nappies; verbally label clothing

items when dressing; introduce environmental sounds, such as "toot, toot". Engage older

children in reciprocal language: name and count items such as mealtime ingredients; play

'colour I-spy'; take turns counting toys. Encourage conversation with school-aged children by

modelling turn-taking and asking open-ended questions.

12.2.1.2. Microsystem to Individual: Positive Teacher-Student Relationships. Once at

school, positive teacher-student relationships are the first line of support when dealing with student

behaviours. Although it can be challenging for class teachers to carve out time for one-on-one

connection while responsible for the academic and social-emotional needs of 20-30 students, there are

simple actions that can have big impact. Below are a number of strategies that require little investment

in time or resources.

a.   ***The Two-By-Ten Intervention.*** By investing two minutes per day over ten days with a

targeted student, this strategy may improve student behaviour as well as connection (Gragg &

Collet, 2021). Key to its success is consistently seeking a daily connection, even if fleeting:

"half a minute a day for 10 days is better than one 20-minute conversation because [the

student] needs that ongoing connection to relax" (McKibben, 2014, p. 3). It is also essential to

engage the student in non-school based topics (Gutierrez & Buckley, 2019).

b.   ***Reach to Teach.*** This model of delivering in-class support reverses the roles of the class

teacher and the intensive support teacher. Specialist teachers adopt flexibility and deliver the

whole-class session, rather than supporting individual students one-on-one. This releases the

class teacher to support the student in need, providing opportunity for the class teacher and student to form a positive bond (Harman & Mole, 2019).

c. *Yarning Circles.* Embrace Indigenous culture by beginning each day with a yarning circle. Encourage children to tune into their emotions by checking in with them and validating their feelings. Focus on individual and group strengths as offerings of support, rather than attempting to problem-solve (Dunleavy, 2013).

d. *Functional Behaviour Assessment.* Once reserved for students with disabilities, functional behaviour assessments have been found effective for establishing interventions for students with complex and challenging behaviours (Beamish & Bryer, 2019). An online tool simplifies this process for teachers, using the data entered to suggest strategies (DoE, 2020f). While this tool is provided by the DoE, it can be accessed and implemented by the class teacher, further strengthening the connection between teacher and student.

12.2.1.3. Mesosystem: Teacher to Parent. Fostering a positive relationship with students' parents, particularly students with challenging behaviours or special needs, is beneficial on multiple levels. It can help establish consistency of expectations, routines and strategies across both home and school settings, while authentic involvement provides a sense of agency (DoE, n.d.-a). Below are evidence-based recommendations for building a positive, collaborative relationship.

a. Be approachable and foster collaboration with families (Ellis et al., 2015). Smile warmly, know the parents' names, and work together to support the student's needs.

b. Foster two-way communication: send a welcome letter or getting-to-know-you survey at the beginning of the year; invite them to share their culture or expertise with the class; have an 'open door' policy (Aguilar, 2011).

c. Foster a culture of honesty and trust. Encourage parents to advise of family situations that may impact the child's behaviour (Walden University, n.d.).

d. Acknowledge the value of parental involvement and provide opportunities for them to be genuinely involved in the school's decision-making processes. Formally recognise volunteers and their contribution to the school (DoE, n.d.-a).

12.2.1.4. Exosystem to Individual: School to Student. A number of recommendations involve classroom teacher implementation but also require whole-school support for success. These include schoolwide initiatives such as social-emotional learning and positive behaviour programs. Some suggestions, such as meditation and social skill development, can be integrated into whole-school programs to promote consistency of delivery. Others involve delivering professional development to teachers, such as social and academic accommodations to support children with special needs or trauma. Recommendations are listed below, followed by a number of evidence-based resources.

a. *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).* While the Australian Curriculum includes personal and social capability, it situates it in General Capabilities (Australian Curriculum, n.d.-b). The number of HFSE respondents who recommended SEL as a strategy to reduce problematic behaviours indicates it is currently not visible enough. The list of resources below begins with those already provided by the department, followed by outsourced programs.

b. *The Wellbeing Activities for Students' Booklet.* This resource (DoE, 2020m) is in response to COVID-19 and concerns around the effect it is having on students' mental health and wellbeing. There is a focus on mindfulness and meditation in the booklet, strategies also suggested by HFSE respondents.

c. *Student Wellbeing Hub.* This national initiative is delivered online, with some resources specifically developed with COVID-19 protective factors in mind (DoE, 2020l). Based on a national framework underpinned by inclusive and supportive elements, it provides professional development for educators, resources for parents, and games and videos for students.

d. *Resource List of 25 SEL Programs.* There are a vast number of SEL programs available, making selection for individual schools overwhelming. Harvard University analysed 25 leading SEL programs, summarising their key components and features (Jones et al., 2017). Providing profiles of each program such as its skills emphasis, mode of delivery, and

provision of curriculum elements allows schools to identify programs most suited to their needs.

e. *Meditation/Mindfulness.* The inclusion of mindfulness programs in schools has reported benefits such as improved attention, self-regulation and wellbeing, which can assist in lowering disruptive behaviour. It is particularly beneficial for students most at risk of dysregulated emotions and behaviour (Smiling Mind, 2017). It is suggested it may also help alleviate stress and ADHD symptoms (Gabriely et al., 2020). Training parents in mindful parenting may enhance emotional awareness, self-regulation and connection with their child while promoting these attributes through modelling (Townshend & Caltabiano, 2019).

2. **Schoolwide Positive Behaviour for Learning (SWPBL) Programs.** Establishing a whole-school behaviour program such as Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) requires an investment of time and energy. However, through consistency and follow-through, this approach can lead to improved "school climate, staff perceptions, and/or student behaviors" (Mitchell et al., 2018, p. 239). While each school setting has differing needs and cohorts, PBL is designed to accommodate for this by encouraging the school to identify their own custom set of behaviour expectations. Below are key findings for ensuring success.

a. Gain teacher buy-in and provide comprehensive training. Lack of staff commitment, capacity and understanding are identified as potential barriers to successful implementation of SWPBL programs (Feuerborn et al., 2019; Hepburn, 2019). Assure teachers that their workload will not be significantly increased by providing preprepared resources, simple instructions, and systems for capturing data collection.

b. A differentiated approach is vital for school-wide programs (Hepburn, 2019). Adopt inclusionary processes by considering the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds, special needs, and family situations when devising behaviour management programs.

c. Situate pedagogy within the SWPBL outline. Teachers frequently cite disruptive and disengaged behaviours as problematic in the classroom (Angus et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2014). However, disengagement is not a behaviour issue situated within the child, but within

the classroom (Ganim & Evely, n.d.). Increase motivation and engagement in the classroom by building teacher capacity and student agency through differentiated tasks (Ganim & Evely, n.d.). For example, overcome reluctance to read through the Story Dogs reading program (Henderson et al., 2020); link learning to student interests and vary instructional delivery (Korb et al., 2012), or develop a 'Wonder Wall' for deeper engagement (Daniels, 2017). Adapt existing curriculum by incorporating the Arts in other subject areas or integrate STEAM projects across Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Maths units of work.

3. **Psychological Services.** This is a growing need, particularly with increasing identification of students with additional needs (Zablotsky et al., 2019) and the effects of COVID-19 on children's and families' wellbeing. The main obstacle for this intervention is funding, as these services are distributed according to enrolment numbers and provided on a pro-rata basis (DoE, 2020-d).

4. **Student Mentoring.** Some of the stressors mentioned above can be mitigated by the employment of a school chaplain or student welfare officer (DoE, 2020a). Peer-to-peer mentoring can occur between upper and lower grade levels, often labelled the *buddy* system.

12.2.1.4. Exosystem to Microsystem: School to Teacher. Educators and non-educators involved in the HFSE study suggested that teachers would benefit from more training and support in the areas of special needs and trauma. This can be achieved in several ways.

a. Professional development opportunities can take place on or off-site, within staff meetings, or online.

b. Tap into existing resources: teachers in specialist roles, such as special education or guidance officers, can provide coaching to teachers by visiting classrooms and modelling strategies or techniques.

c. Training and promotion of functional behaviour assessments.

12.2.1.5. Exosystem to Microsystem: School to Parent. One recommendation, parenting programs, could be facilitated by school administrators or specialists. COVID-19 is likely to impact parents directly through the pressures of home learning, working from home, and the mental strain felt

by insecurities incited by the pandemic (Lau & Lee, 2021). There are also indirect impacts: health and wellbeing concerns regarding family, anxiety over their child's interrupted schooling and social distance from peers, and financial stress if their industry has been affected through COVID-19 restrictions. Schools can help parents shoulder these burdens in many ways. Recommendations are listed below.

    a.   Schools can inform or refer families in need to external support agencies. This may include counselling services, financial assistance, or parenting programs.

    b.   Guidance officers can also offer support, particularly regarding student behaviour issues or psychological wellbeing.

    c.   Schools affected by lockdown restrictions can utilise technology to offer online workshops or forums to families, covering topics of concern. These could include academic or homework assistance, alternative modes of learning that incorporate daily routines, or simple ideas for extending high achievers.

12.2.1.6. Macrosystem to Exosystem: Department to School. Some suggestions are outside individual school authority, requiring departmental policy or procedural implementation. Two recommendations, curriculum incorporation and policy development regarding authentic use of screened devices at school, are unpacked below.

    1.   **Curriculum Incorporation.** Several survey respondents recommended incorporating more Art and Sport into the curriculum. This rationale was to provide higher engagement and cater for wider strengths-based skill development. The Australian Curriculum (n.d.-a) currently situates the five Arts subjects, Music, Dance, Drama, Visual Art, and Media Art across year level bands (Australian Curriculum, n.d.-f). The primary years are grouped across three bands: Prep, Grade 1 and Grade 2; Grade 3–Grade 4; and Grade 5–Grade 6. This means that if Visual Art is taught and reported on in the Preparatory year, these students may not explore Visual Art again until Grade 3 or Grade 4.

Sport, or Physical Education (PE) is taught and reported bi-annually each school year.

However, PE curriculum also shares the domain of Health, which has three elements for

learning: functional, interactive, and critical dimensions (Australian Curriculum, n.d.-c).

Evidence supports that both sport (Dyson et al., 2021; Luna et al., 2019; Vazou et al., 2017)

and The Arts (Eisner, 2002; Frydenberg et al., 2012; Lee & Lee, 2021; Richerme, 2021) are

ideal content areas for social-emotional learning (SEL). Despite this, it is suggested that SEL

is not adequately embedded into curriculum accountability (Bailey et al., 2009; Eddy et al.,

2021; Edgar & Morrison, 2021; Hermens et al., 2017). While the Australian Curriculum (AC)

identifies personal and social capabilities in subject content descriptions (AC, n.d.-d), there is

no formal assessment. Instead, "Teachers are expected to teach and assess general capabilities

to the extent that they are incorporated within each learning area. State and territory school

authorities will determine whether and how student learning of the general capabilities will be

further assessed and reported" (ACARA, 2015). Notably, this general capabilities information

sheet is the most current version available from either the AC or ACARA websites. However,

a detailed learning continuum has been developed (AC, n.d.-e). These learning statements

would only require simple modifications to develop them into achievement statements. This

recommendation would not only provide explicit criteria for teachers and students to work

towards, but it may also help identify students who require additional support. Key elements

such as "express emotions appropriately" and "negotiate and resolve conflict" (AC, n.d.-e, p.

4) align with the DoE suspension reasons, verbal and non-verbal misconduct, and physical

misconduct (see Table 5.6). Personal and social capability elements could then be utilised to

provide extra support for students at risk of suspension.

2. **School-Site Screen Time Policy**. A second recommendation, emerging from findings in the

   literature review, concerns screened devices. Current screen time recommendations

   provided by government and health agencies do not specify whether screen time for

   educational use has similar health and wellbeing impacts as entertainment or social use (The

   Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, 2021). Until further research emerges regarding

potential harm of total combined screen time, education providers have an obligation to err on the side of caution. This is particularly relevant as COVID-19 continues to impact society and schools, requiring delivery of education off-site, usually provided by online materials (Lau & Lee, 2021). Steps for mitigating excessive screen time on school sites are set out below.

a. Provide professional development for teachers regarding selective, authentic use of technology and screened devices in place of repetitious fluency practice that frequently incorporates auditory and visual stimulus and in-game rewards (Rapp, 2017). Focusing on digital applications such as word processing, research and presentation competences, coding, digital product development (e.g., 'apps', websites, animations, video, etc), and digital printing and publishing skills align with the AC general capabilities of information and communication technology (ICT) competencies and critical and creative thinking (Australian Curriculum, n.d.-b).

b. Avoid using screened device time as a reward for *good*, or desired, behaviour. This is particularly relevant for students diagnosed with ASD or ADHD, as evidence suggests there may be associations between these disorders and excessive screened device use (Beyens et al., 2018; Tamana et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2017).

c. Provide ergonomic chairs and screen heights in locations where screens are used for extended periods. This may entail adjustable hardware to cater for multiple age groups and sizes.

d. Use student's unique log-in accounts to electronically monitor screen time use at school. Make this transparent to parents.

e. Develop evidence-based policy regarding screen time accessed on school sites. Research suggests potential screen time issues involve dose-size, which has been associated with increased problematic behaviour in children (Beyens et al., 2017; Tamana et al., 2019), impaired psychological wellbeing (Zhao et al., 2018), musculoskeletal problems (Toh et al., 2017), vision (Straker et al., 2018) and hearing issues (le Clercq et al., 2018), mood

disorders (Twenge & Campbell, 2018), problematic interactive media use, or PIMU (Pluhar

et al., 2019; Rich et al., 2017) and language delay (van den Heuvel et al., 2019; Varadarajan

et al., 2021).

Throuvala et al. (2021) have included expanding "media literacy awareness … beyond e-

safety to address psychological harms, create insight and awareness of personal engagement, and

encourage agency" (2021, p. 14) in their policy recommendations regarding PIMU in schools.

Providing teacher training and parent information to increase awareness of potential PIMU symptoms

was also advised. Learning to discern between beneficial and potentially harmful effects of screened

device use and PIMU symptom identification has been suggested in a number of studies and meta-

analyses (Bozzola et al., 2018; Lopez-Fernandez & Kuss, 2020; Sahu et al., 2019; Vondráčková &

Gabrhelík, 2016). As the body of evidence regarding the impact and potentially harmful effects of

increased screen time on children's wellbeing continues to grow, so too does the urgency for schools

to develop policy ensuring responsible and informed use of screened devices at school (DiMartino &

Schultz, 2020). There are also calls to provide policy or guidelines around the delivery of COVID-19

enforced online learning (Lau & Lee, 2021).

12.2.2. Consequences as Learning, not Leaving – Alternatives to External Suspension

The previous section presented a number of recommended proactive strategies to prevent

undesirable behaviours that frequently lead to suspension events. This section introduces suspension

alternatives for times when proactive strategies are insufficient and reactive measures are required.

School suspension remains a necessary last-resort disciplinary option to maintain the safety of staff

and students, should a student's behaviour threaten the wellbeing of themselves or others. As

suspensions are a departmental policy implemented at school level, these recommendations are

directed towards exosystem and macrosystem influences.

12.2.2.1. Exosystem to Individual: School to Student. The original intention of the

Education (Strengthening Discipline in State Schools) Amendment Act 2013 was to provide school

principals with greater flexibility to enact differentiated disciplinary consequences tailored to

individual students, and potentially reduce the number of school suspensions. While the following

suggestions are alternatives to external suspension, some retain an unavoidable element of exclusion. They are offered as flexible options to cater for individual student needs.

Internal Suspension This option ensures a supervised environment where curriculum delivery can continue with little interruption. It could also incorporate the following suggestion, alternative program.

Alternative Program Intensive behaviour management skills, such as anger management and aggression, calming strategies, social-emotional learning, social skills, and identification of escalating emotions can be offered in tandem with an internal suspension. Encouraging parents to attend these sessions may also be valuable, building their capacity by providing consistency between home and school.

Restorative Justice Involving more than an apology, restorative justice aims to repair and build relationships, develop mutual understanding, and move "beyond the punishment paradigm" (Sandwick et al., 2019, p. 18). Evidence suggests that incorporating restorative justice as a complimentary element of SWPBL programs may improve teacher-student relationships and develop mutual respect (Cruz et al., 2021), enhancing school climate.

12.2.2.2. Macrosystem to Exosystem: Suspension Policy Changes. A concern emerging from the HFSE study is the lack of explicit differentiation of suspension policy criteria, dependent on the age and maturity of the student. The recommendations below suggest steps for remedying the risk of blanket policy application.

a) Restrict external suspension criteria for students under eight years of age to behaviours that risk harm to themselves or others, such as physical misconduct.

b) Incorporate psychometric testing, such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Youth in Mind, n.d.) into the enrolment process. Particular focus on hyperactivity and conduct traits is recommended.

c) Mandate functional behaviour assessments for students at risk of a second suspension.

d) Provide psychologist or guidance officer ratios on a needs basis, rather than enrolment number pro-rata.

This section has set out suggestions for reducing student problematic behaviours, framing solutions around child-centric supports. Alternatives to external suspensions have also been proposed. Further, recommendations for policy amendments or implementation have been described. The following section identifies limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.

12.3. Limitations and Further Research

Much of this study has broken new ground: focusing on Preparatory student suspensions; contributing to the much-needed Australian context regarding both school suspensions and PIMU; identifying the increase of young students involved in school violence; detecting the potential for student profiling to put supports in place prior to behavioural incidents occurring; and presenting a novel approach by investigating whether young children's excessive screened device use may be associated with problematic behaviours leading to suspensions.

However, these elements are of themselves a limitation. Most research involving young children's digital media use and exposure is correlational as it is unknown whether screen time causes negative effects, therefore randomised control trials – rightly – do not pass human ethics criteria. Similarly, protocols regarding the ethics of research involving young children are necessarily restrictive; children are unable to apply concepts of informed consent (Kousholt & Juhl, 2021) or guard against misappropriation of their voice (Mayes, 2019).

This may explain why efforts to gain authority from the DoE to conduct cluster sampling of stakeholder participants on-site (Morris, 2002) were fruitless. With school site access denied, a number of challenges arose, such as methods for collecting data from target participants without approaching DoE staff. Additionally, the decision to use social media networks to recruit volunteer participants, while useful for targeting teacher and parent groups, meant dependence on a volunteer sample, rather than a probability sample, negating generalisability to the larger population (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016). Factors that may have introduced bias into the volunteer sampling of the HFSE study include whether the respondent is known to the researcher or referee and thus, feel compelled to participate, and the sensitive nature of information being requested (Wallin, 1949).

A further limitation of this study concerns the sample size. While the data drawn from the 70 survey respondents' experiences and opinions was rich and insightful, the small number of qualitative responses within specific categories restricted statistical analysis to simplistic methods, such as frequency tables and some cross tabulations. A larger sample size would have facilitated more sophisticated analyses such as regression analyses for the quantitative aspect of the study. These tests may have provided opportunities to examine predictors of suspensions. A more diverse sample would also have expanded analysis options, such as comparing gender and age or generation-based comparisons of respondents' opinions.

Attempting to obtain interviews was a further challenge. To maintain survey anonymity, participants needed to leave the online survey and access a dedicated website containing informed consent and contact forms. It was discovered part-way through the study that the website had failed to capture contact details. This was quickly remedied; however, it is unknown whether interviews had been requested during this period of failure. The multi-step complexity of requesting an interview may have also deterred participants, accounting for the low numbers reported in the methodology chapter.

The modest number of suspended children in respondents' families was also limiting, although the SDQ results, particularly in regard to hyperactivity and peer problems scores of suspended students, do provide promising direction for future research. Additionally, published DoE suspension statistics do not disclose the number of repeat suspensions. Analysis of quantitative survey data revealed the majority of suspended students in the HFSE study experienced multiple suspensions. While this partially supported the DoE's claims that a considerable percentage of suspensions consist of repeat offenders (DETE, 2014b), access to more detailed suspension data would have provided greater clarity.

Efforts were made to mitigate the sample size and interview participant limitations soon after they were identified. In June 2018, approval to extend the data collection period was sought from and approved by the JCU Ethics Committee in an attempt to encourage further survey participants. This generated minimal additional responses. Given the looming thesis completion date and loss of almost 12 months initial enrolment time to seeking DoE & Ethics approvals, there was no time to consider

and implement further alternative mitigation options other than the aforementioned reinstatement of the dedicated interviewee website and extension of the data collection period.

A secondary issue arose through relying on external access of DoE suspension statistics and documentation. The department began upgrading their website during the course of the HFSE study and some documentation was replaced by updated versions. This created gaps in the suspension documentation trail. Further complications encountered were the considerable number of undated DoE publications, and the archiving of older DoE online suspension datasets, limiting external access to the previous five years.

There is ample scope for further study regarding the two dimensions of the HFSE study. Firstly, investigation of Preparatory student suspensions still has much to discover: whether other Australian state schools or independent schools experience similar suspension rate increases to Queensland; why school violence in Queensland state schools is escalating; whether there are gendered differences in how male and female principals manage problematic behaviours. Cross-sectional studies of different age-cohorts may help identify factors that differentiate between suspended and non-suspended students. A longitudinal case study following a sample of suspended students throughout their schooling may reveal why factors that have been helpful in reducing suspensions for some students have not been successful for others. The development of a short-form psychometric test, suitable for use in schools during the enrolment process, would also be valuable.

Secondly, further research on the effects of excessive screen time on young children is vital. While it is unethical to submit children to digital media studies that increase their exposure to screened devices, collaborating with digital detox centres or bootcamps may provide opportunity to observe whether less screen time improves children's wellbeing. Greater understanding of the association of neurodevelopmental disorders and PIMU, particularly in children under 8 years of age, would also be a valuable contribution to existing literature. Additionally, a precise, clinical definition for disorders associated with screened devices would assist researchers and clinicians in providing consistency in language and treatment.

12.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter restated the aims of the HFSE study: to investigate rising Preparatory student suspensions in Queensland state schools. Findings were aligned with research questions, measuring the success of this study in terms of not only how soundly questions have been answered, but also the contributions made through recommendations to improve wellbeing outcomes for young students.

 To recap, the first research question sought to understand what was contributing to increases in young children's undesirable behaviours that lead to suspensions. Two sociocultural changes were identified: a change to education policy associated with student discipline, and the rapid technological advancements in the mobile screened device market. These informed the literature review, the document analysis and the online survey designed to collect data from school community members.

The aim of the second question was to understand the documented process of suspensions in Queensland schools, particularly suspensions involving young children. The most significant finding was the observation that a change to student disciplinary legislation implemented in November 2013 coincided with the alarming rise in Preparatory student suspensions observed in 2014. The document analysis also revealed disturbing statistics concerning the increasing rate of school violence in Australian schools. In addition, it was found the suspension process itself used the same universal criteria and descriptors applied across all ages, from Preparatory students to Grade 12 students.

School community members were surveyed in efforts to address the third research question. They were asked to demonstrate their understanding of suspension rate data by rating the most and least common suspension reasons. They also advised which grade level they thought was appropriate for suspensions to apply. In addition, respondents were invited to express their opinions about reasons for the annual increases in Prep suspension rates. Respondents' opinions regarding most (physical misconduct) and least (absences) common reasons for suspensions aligned with real-world suspension data. However, the majority of respondents considered the Prep year to be the least appropriate grade to apply suspensions to, while the high school years were deemed the most appropriate cohort. This is contrary to current suspension policy, where identical suspension reason descriptors are applied to all grade levels.

The survey responses also revealed considerable trait attribute differences between the suspended and non-suspended children in the HFSE study. Parent respondents rated their child's strengths and difficulties on a psychometric test, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The finding that scores for hyperactivity and peer problems were almost three times higher for suspended children compared to non-suspended children was of particular interest. Psychometric testing on school enrolment was the resultant recommendation from this finding. This could be helpful in identifying children who may be at risk of suspension, enabling implementation of proactive measures to reduce the likelihood of these traits leading to suspension events and thus reducing suspension rates.

The final research question was influenced by the overarching goal of the HFSE study: to reduce student behaviours that lead to suspensions. Suggestions were gathered from survey respondents and existing literature. Recommendations that emerged included:

- development of strong relationships between home and school,
- collection of student data through the application of psychometric testing and functional behaviour assessments to enhance delivery of proactive measures,
- monitoring children's screen time and screen habits while investing in further PIMU research,
- increasing access to psychological and support services,
- incorporating elements of positive behaviour management philosophies,
- enhancing teacher knowledge and understanding of children with special or additional needs,
- supporting explicit teaching of social-emotional skills through curriculum incorporation and evidence-based assessment,
- endorsing policy implementation or changes around age-appropriate suspension processes and school site screened device access.

The HFSE study recognises that reducing suspension rates to zero is improbable. There remain instances where student behaviour risks the wellbeing and safety of themselves and others. A range of recommendations such as internal suspension, programs to address the unique needs of

students, and restorative justice were suggested to accommodate those students who require additional support.

Limitations of the study consisted of lack of access to school sites, which contributed to a modest sample size; reliance on a volunteer rather than probability sample, which prevented the generalisability of findings; the difficulty in securing interviews via the social media strategy; and documentation retrieval challenges presented when the DoE upgraded their website.

Suggestions for further research included two main topics: further examination of school suspensions in Australia and a more honed approach to PIMU, particularly in relation to young, developing brains. The development of a clinical definition and symptom criteria of PIMU was also recommended.

This final chapter signals the end of the HFSE study. The goal to tell the story of the children and families behind suspension statistics has certainly been achieved; parents generously shared their opinions and experiences. While this provided an alternative perspective for observing suspension processes, it also led to important insights into the traits and behaviours of children who are frequently suspended. The identification of hyperactivity as a considerable suspension risk, combined with the overrepresentation of children with special or additional needs in suspension data, presents a new path to be considered. Does PIMU mimic ADHD? Are children being misdiagnosed? Is excessive use of screened devices, especially in relation to interactive media access, changing young children's brains? The work has only just begun. Small changes have the potential for enormous impact. Just ask Patrick's mother, Emily:

> She entered the school reception area, Sarah cradled in her arms. The guidance officer walked down the hall and greeted her warmly. "I'm so glad you could make it, Emily. Let's go in together."
>
> She stepped ahead and opened the principal's office door. The principal and Patrick's class teacher were already seated. As they turned and smiled at her, Emily felt herself relax. She took the seat the guidance officer offered her and faced the principal expectantly.
>
> "It's good to see you, Emily. How have things been at home since our last meeting?"

Emily thought back to the incident when Patrick had last been suspended. Things were so different then. "He is a different boy, so much calmer. I can't thank you enough for what you have done to help us. All of you."

The principal smiled. "We've noticed amazing changes at school, too. Let's review what we've put in place since then, look at what's working and what might need to be changed. One of the first things we did was replace his screen time rewards. It's been great to channel his passion for technology into Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths projects. He is absolutely loving the STEAM sessions!"

"I know, he comes home and raves about it!" Emily laughed. "Limiting his screen time at home has made a huge difference to his mood, too. A few other parents commented on how much calmer he seems. I've shared our story with them. None of them had heard about PIMU; they knew about screen time recommendations but thought these were about kids not being active. Some were shocked enough to set limits in their own families, which makes it easier for Patrick when his friends aren't on their screens."

"That's so encouraging. He's been having one-on-one sessions with me twice a week," the guidance officer said. "I can't tell you how pleased I am that the department have created the new personal and social competencies documents – Patrick gets such a buzz when he achieves one of the goals in the booklet! I've also spent some time doing functional behaviour assessment training with Patrick's teacher, Mary." She nodded toward the class teacher.

"It's made such a difference not only for me to identify triggers, but also for Patrick's self-regulation," Mary interjected. "He's now able to tell me when he needs to go to the Chill-Out room. It's really helped me connect with him too. We have little jokes together; he is such a sweet boy."

The principal spoke up. "Is there anything we need to change, Emily?"

Emily gazed out the window. Their eyes followed hers and settled on Patrick building a bridge in the sandpit with two friends. "No," she said gently. "Let's keep doing what we're doing."

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Appendices

Appendix A

Published Article https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7939/CGP/v28i01/1-13

Pram to Playground: Why are Five- and Six-Year-Old Students Being Suspended?

Yvonne Harman,[1] James Cook University, Australia
Nerina Caltabiano, James Cook University, Australia
Reesa Sorin, James Cook University, Australia

Abstract: This article reviews current literature, exploring the possibility that increased access to digital media and mobile screened devices may negatively impact the cognitive, emotional, and physical development of young children. Furthermore, it argues that the overuse of digital technology devices may be responsible for the rise in undesirable behaviors, leading to school suspensions. The review identified a growing body of research that suggests possible links between screen time and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), addiction to screened devices, lower development of social skills, and poor sleep duration. These are all disorders or conditions that can lead to negative behaviors such as inattention, aggression, depression, and irritation. Therefore, by having a better understanding of the role that digital media and mobile screened devices may have on the expression of behaviors leading to suspensions, it may be possible to make specific usage recommendations to decrease suspension rates in preparatory students.

Keywords: School Suspension, Young Children, Screen Time, Screen Addiction, ADHD, Dopamine, Behavior

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COMMON GROUND

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Appendix B

Home From School Early Online Survey

HOME FROM SCHOOL EARLY - SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

2. All respondents:

2. Please answer the following about yourself:

Gender	Marital status	Annual household income:	Ethnicity
My:			

If ethicity is "Non-indigenous Australian" or "Other", please specify here:

3. My:

Age

Occupation

4. Which of the following terms best describes you?

○ Parent/Carer   ○ Counsellor

○ Teacher   ○ Other (please specify below)

○ School Guidance Officer

Other (please specify)

5. Using the following scale where 1 refers to not at all likely, 2 probably likely, 3 Likely and 4 Very Likely, please indicate how likely is each of the reasons to lead to a suspension in the **Early Years (P – 2)**?

	Not at all likely	Probably likely	Likely	Very likely
1. Refusal to participate in program of instruction	○	○	○	○
2. Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others	○	○	○	○
3. Physical misconduct – involving an object	○	○	○	○
4. Physical misconduct – not involving an object	○	○	○	○
5. Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school (including serious conduct)	○	○	○	○
6. Verbal or non-verbal misconduct	○	○	○	○
7. Property misconduct	○	○	○	○
8. Absences	○	○	○	○

9. Other (please specify)

6. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **most** common cause of an Early Years Suspension (P-2)?

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7. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **least** common cause of an Early Years Suspension (P-2)?

[ ]

8. Using the following scale where 1 refers to not at all likely, 2 probably likely, 3 Likely and 4 Very Likely, please indicate how likely is each of the reasons to lead to a suspension in the **Upper Primary years (Y3 - 6)**?

	Not at all likely	Probably likely	Likely	Very likely
1. Refusal to participate in program of instruction	○	○	○	○
2. Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others	○	○	○	○
3. Physical misconduct – involving an object	○	○	○	○
4. Physical misconduct – not involving an object	○	○	○	○
5. Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school (including serious conduct)	○	○	○	○
6. Verbal or non-verbal misconduct	○	○	○	○
7. Property misconduct	○	○	○	○
8. Absences	○	○	○	○

9. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **most** common cause of an Upper Primary Years Suspension (Y3-6)?

[ ]

10. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **least** common cause of an Upper Primary Years Suspension (Y3-6)?

[ ]

11. Using the following scale where 1 refers to not at all likely, 2 probably likely, 3 Likely and 4 Very Likely; please indicate how likely is each of the reasons to lead to a suspension in **High School (Y7 - 12)**?

	Not at all likely	Probably likely	Likely	Very likely
1. Refusal to participate in program of instruction	○	○	○	○
2. Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others	○	○	○	○
3. Physical misconduct – involving an object	○	○	○	○
4. Physical misconduct – not involving an object	○	○	○	○
5. Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school (including serious conduct)	○	○	○	○
6. Verbal or non-verbal misconduct	○	○	○	○
7. Property misconduct	○	○	○	○
8. Absences	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

12. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **most** common cause of a High School Suspension (Y7-12)?

[   ]

13. From the list provided above what reason do you believe is the **least** common cause of a High School Suspension (Y7-12)?

[   ]

14. What Grade levels do you believe it is appropriate to issue suspensions to students? Check as many as required.

☐ Preparatory year   ☐ Grade 7

☐ Grade 1   ☐ Grade 8

☐ Grade 2   ☐ Grade 9

☐ Grade 3   ☐ Grade 10

☐ Grade 4   ☐ Grade 11

☐ Grade 5   ☐ Grade 12

☐ Grade 6

15. **The following questions require worded responses regarding your views. If you have further information you would like to add, you may also request an interview with the researcher by responding to Question 46.**

Prep suspensions have increased by **76% in five years (2012-2016)**. In your opinion, what is contributing to an increase in Prep suspensions?

[   ]

16. What student behaviours do you believe attract an immediate suspension?

17. In your opinion, what alternatives could you suggest in place of school suspensions, and why?

18. What suggestions would you like schools to consider to help reduce student actions/behaviours causing suspensions?

19. What process would you suggest for a student returning to school after completing a suspension?

The next set of questions on Page 3 are for parents of school-aged children. If this doesn't apply to you, please continue straight to Page 4 to finalise the survey.

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3. Parents only questions

20. PARENT ONLY QUESTIONS:
Please answer the following questions about your school-aged child/ren:
CHILD 1

	Type of school child attends	State/Territory of school	Gender
Child 1			

Date of Birth

21. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire © Robert Goodman, 2005
For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.
CHILD 1:

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	○	○	○
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	○	○	○
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	○	○	○
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	○	○	○

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	○	○	○
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	○	○	○
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	○	○	○
Many worries, often seems worried	○	○	○
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	○	○	○
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	○	○	○
Has at least one good friend	○	○	○
Often fights with other children or bullies them	○	○	○
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	○	○	○
Generally liked by other children	○	○	○
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	○	○	○
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	○	○	○
Kind to younger children	○	○	○
Often lies or cheats	○	○	○
Picked on or bullied by other children	○	○	○
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	○	○	○
Thinks things out before acting	○	○	○
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	○	○	○
Gets on better with adults than with other children	○	○	○
Many fears, easily scared	○	○	○
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	○	○	○

22. Does your child attend any of the following extra-curricular activities? Check all that apply.

	Sport	Instrumental classes	Visual Art classes	Dance classes	Drama classes
Child 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

[   ]

23. Does your child have access to any of the following devices? Check all that apply. (Hours used = daily average)

	Television	Hours used:	iPad, laptop, computer or similar	Hours used for study:	Hours used for leisure:	Mobile phone	Hours used:	Electronic game (Playstation, Xbox, etc)	Hour
Child 1									

24. PARENT ONLY QUESTIONS:

Please answer the following questions about your school-aged child/ren:

CHILD 2

	Type of school child attends	State/Territory of school	Gender
Child 2			

Date of Birth

25. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire © Robert Goodman, 2005

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months. .

CHILD 2:

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	○	○	○
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	○	○	○
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	○	○	○
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	○	○	○
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	○	○	○
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	○	○	○
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	○	○	○
Many worries, often seems worried	○	○	○
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	○	○	○
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	○	○	○
Has at least one good friend	○	○	○
Often fights with other children or bullies them	○	○	○
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	○	○	○
Generally liked by other children	○	○	○
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	○	○	○
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	○	○	○

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	○	○	○
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	○	○	○
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	○	○	○
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	○	○	○
Many worries, often seems worried	○	○	○
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	○	○	○
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	○	○	○
Has at least one good friend	○	○	○
Often fights with other children or bullies them	○	○	○
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	○	○	○
Generally liked by other children	○	○	○
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	○	○	○
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	○	○	○
Kind to younger children	○	○	○
Often lies or cheats	○	○	○
Picked on or bullied by other children	○	○	○
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	○	○	○
Thinks things out before acting	○	○	○
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	○	○	○
Gets on better with adults than with other children	○	○	○
Many fears, easily scared	○	○	○
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	○	○	○

30. Does your child attend any of the following extra-curricular activities? Check all that apply.

	Sport	Instrumental classes	Visual Art classes	Dance classes	Drama classes
Child 3	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

[ ]

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	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Kind to younger children	○	○	○
Often lies or cheats	○	○	○
Picked on or bullied by other children	○	○	○
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	○	○	○
Thinks things out before acting	○	○	○
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	○	○	○
Gets on better with adults than with other children	○	○	○
Many fears, easily scared	○	○	○
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	○	○	○

26. Does your child attend any of the following extra-curricular activities? Check all that apply.

	Sport	Instrumental classes	Visual Art classes	Dance classes	Drama classes
Child 2					

Other (please specify)

27. Does your child have access to any of the following devices? Check all that apply. (Hours used = daily average)

	Television	Hours used:	iPad, laptop, computer or similar	Hours used for study:	Hours used for leisure:	Mobile phone	Hours used:	Electronic game (Playstation, Xbox, etc)	Hour
Child 2									

28. **PARENT ONLY QUESTIONS:**
Please answer the following questions about your school-aged child/ren:
CHILD 3

	Type of school child attends	State/Territory of school	Gender
Child 3			

Date of Birth

29. **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire © Robert Goodman, 2005**
For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.
CHILD 3:

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	○	○	○
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	○	○	○
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	○	○	○

31. Does your child have access to any of the following devices? Check all that apply. (Hours used = daily average)

	Television	Hours used:	iPad, laptop, computer or similar	Hours used for study:	Hours used for leisure:	Mobile phone	Hours used:	Electronic game (Playstation, Xbox, etc)	Hour
Child 3									

32. PARENT ONLY QUESTIONS:

Please answer the following questions about your school-aged child/ren:

CHILD 4

	Type of school child attends	State/Territory of school	Gender
Child 4			

Date of Birth

33. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire © Robert Goodman, 2005

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.

CHILD 4:

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	○	○	○
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	○	○	○
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	○	○	○
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	○	○	○
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	○	○	○
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	○	○	○
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	○	○	○
Many worries, often seems worried	○	○	○
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	○	○	○
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	○	○	○
Has at least one good friend	○	○	○
Often fights with other children or bullies them	○	○	○
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	○	○	○
Generally liked by other children	○	○	○
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	○	○	○
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	○	○	○

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	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Kind to younger children	○	○	○
Often lies or cheats	○	○	○
Picked on or bullied by other children	○	○	○
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	○	○	○
Thinks things out before acting	○	○	○
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	○	○	○
Gets on better with adults than with other children	○	○	○
Many fears, easily scared	○	○	○
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	○	○	○

34. Does your child attend any of the following extra-curricular activities? Check all that apply.

	Sport	Instrumental classes	Visual Art classes	Dance classes	Drama classes
Child 4					

Other (please specify)

35. Does your child have access to any of the following devices? Check all that apply. (Hours used = daily average)

	Television	Hours used:	iPad, laptop, computer or similar	Hours used for study:	Hours used for leisure:	Mobile phone	Hours used:	Electronic game (Playstation, Xbox, etc)	Hour
Child 4									

36. PARENT ONLY QUESTIONS:
Please answer the following questions about your school-aged child/ren:
CHILD 5

	Type of school child attends	State/Territory of school	Gender
Child 5			

Date of Birth

37. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire © Robert Goodman, 2005
For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.
CHILD 5:

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	○	○	○
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	○	○	○

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	○	○	○
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	○	○	○
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	○	○	○
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	○	○	○
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	○	○	○
Many worries, often seems worried	○	○	○
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	○	○	○
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	○	○	○
Has at least one good friend	○	○	○
Often fights with other children or bullies them	○	○	○
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	○	○	○
Generally liked by other children	○	○	○
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	○	○	○
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	○	○	○
Kind to younger children	○	○	○
Often lies or cheats	○	○	○
Picked on or bullied by other children	○	○	○
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	○	○	○
Thinks things out before acting	○	○	○
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	○	○	○
Gets on better with adults than with other children	○	○	○
Many fears, easily scared	○	○	○
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	○	○	○

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38. Does your child attend any of the following extra-curricular activities? Check all that apply.

	Sport	Instrumental classes	Visual Art classes	Dance classes	Drama classes
Child 4					

Other (please specify)

39. Does your child have access to any of the following devices? Check all that apply. (Hours used = daily average)

	Television	Hours used:	iPad, laptop, computer or similar	Hours used for study:	Hours used for leisure:	Mobile phone	Hours used:	Electronic game (Playstation, Xbox, etc)	Hour
Child 4									

40. Has your child ever been suspended from school?

	No	Yes, once	Yes, more than once
Child 1	○	○	○
Child 2	○	○	○
Child 3	○	○	○
Child 4	○	○	○
Child 5	○	○	○

41. If you answered 'yes' to question 40, what was the reason given?

Child 1	
Child 2	
Child 3	
Child 4	
Child 5	

42. If you answered 'yes' to question 40, what grade was your child in when they were suspended?

	Preparatory Year	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	High school
Child 1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child 2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child 3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child 4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child 5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

43. If you answered 'yes' to question 40, has your child been verified as Special Needs?

	Yes	No	Undergoing verification process
Child 1	○	○	○
Child 2	○	○	○
Child 3	○	○	○
Child 4	○	○	○
Child 5	○	○	○

44. If you answered 'yes' to question 40, did you agree with the decision to suspend your child?

	Yes	No	See comment box
Child 1	○	○	○
Child 2	○	○	○
Child 3	○	○	○
Child 4	○	○	○
Child 5	○	○	○

Comment

[   ]

45. **I answered "Yes" to Question 40.** I would like to arrange a Skype/phone/private chat room interview with the researcher to provide further information about our family's experience of my child's suspension.

○ Yes

○ No

If you responded 'YES' to Q45, please click the following link https://yvonneharman.com/ which will redirect you to a separate website where you can request an interview and leave contact details.

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4. All respondents

46. I would like to arrange a Skype/phone/private chat room interview with the researcher to provide further information about my opinions and/or experience of school suspensions.

○ Yes   ○ No

If you responded 'YES' to Q46, please click the following link https://survey.yvonneharman.com/ which will redirect you to a separate website where you can request an interview and leave contact details.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will provide the researcher with rich, valuable information about suspensions for this study.

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Appendix C

Social Media Recruitment Advertisement

I am a James Cook University PhD student conducting research about school suspensions, particularly those in the Early Years (P-2), as these suspensions have increased in recent years.

I would be grateful if you could contribute to the study by completing an anonymous, online survey about school suspensions. All members of the community over 18 are encouraged to participate, regardless of their experience with suspensions – parents/carers, teachers, guidance officers, counsellors, etc. The survey is totally anonymous and does not require any identifying information.

If you, or anyone you know, have experienced school suspension processes, there is also an opportunity for those wishing to provide more in-depth information regarding their experience to arrange an interview with the researcher. Details are included in the survey information form found at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58 .

Your participation is greatly appreciated, and your opinions and experience are invaluable in understanding community perceptions, knowledge and experiences of school suspensions.

Should you wish to verify the validity and authenticity of this survey invitation and research, please contact my JCU supervisor, Associate Professor Nerina Caltabiano, at nerina.caltabiano@jcu.edu.au

The survey website address is https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58 . Simply click the link, read the information sheet and consent form directions, and complete the survey – it should only take between 15-30 minutes.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SHARE THIS LINK TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CIRCLE – THE HIGHER THE PARTICIPANT RATE, THE MORE RIGOROUS THIS STUDY WILL BE.

Appendix D

Community Bulletin Recruitment Advertisement

My name is Yvonne Harman. I am a James Cook University PhD student conducting research about school suspensions, with a particular focus on the Early Years (P-2).

I would be grateful if you could contribute to the study by completing an anonymous, online survey. All members of the community over 18 are encouraged to participate, regardless of their experience with suspensions – parents/carers, teachers, guidance officers, counsellors, etc. The survey is totally anonymous and does not require any identifying information.

If you, or anyone you know, have experienced school suspension processes, there is also an opportunity for those wishing to provide more in-depth information regarding their experience to arrange an interview with the researcher. Details are included in the survey information from https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58.

Your participation is greatly appreciated, and your opinions and experience are invaluable in understanding community perceptions, knowledge and experiences of school suspensions.

Should you wish to verify the validity and authenticity of this survey invitation and research, please contact my JCU supervisor, Associate Professor Nerina Caltabiano, at nerina.caltabiano@jcu.edu.au.

The survey website address is https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58. Simply click the link, read the information sheet and consent form directions, and complete the survey – it should only take between 15-30 minutes.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO TEAR AND SHARE THE SURVEY WEBSITE ADDRESS BELOW – THE HIGHER THE PARTICIPANT RATE, THE MORE RIGOROUS THIS STUDY WILL BE.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58	https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T3NHL58

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Appendix E

JCU Human Ethics Approval

This administrative form
has been removed

Appendix F

JCU Ethics Extension

This administrative form
has been removed

This administrative form
has been removed

Appendix G

Online Survey Consent Form

This administrative form
has been removed

Appendix H

Interview Information Page

Access link: https://yvonneharman.com/

Home From School Early – School Suspensions
Share your experience and opinions

Interview Information Page

PROJECT TITLE: HOME FROM SCHOOL EARLY: SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS IN QUEENSLAND

You are invited to take part in a research project investigating the increase in Queensland school suspension rates over the past five years. The main aim of this research is to explore community perceptions, understanding and experiences of school suspensions; identify whether any specific student groups are over-represented in suspension data; and recommend practices for managing and reducing suspensions. The study is being conducted by Yvonne Harman and will contribute to the PhD project in Education at James Cook University.

If you agree to be interviewed for the study, you will be invited to access a separate website to request an interview. It is anticipated that each interview will take approximately 10-15 minutes and will be via your preferred mode of communication: Skype, phone or private electronic 'chat room' on the dedicated website. All identifying information will be de-identified to ensure confidentiality.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you may cease participating in the interview at any time without explanation or prejudice.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in academic research publications and thesis. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

Proceed to Consent Form

Appendix I

Interview Informed Consent Form

This administrative form
has been removed

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Appendix J

Terms of SDQ licence from Youthinmind

This administrative form
has been removed

Appendix K

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Scoring Notes

Scoring the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire for age 4-17 or 18+

The 25 items in the SDQ comprise 5 scales of 5 items each. It is usually easiest to score all 5 scales first before working out the total difficulties score. *Somewhat True* is always scored as 1, but the scoring of *Not True* and *Certainly True* varies with the item, as shown below scale by scale. For each of the 5 scales the score can range from 0 to 10 if all items were completed. These scores can be scaled up pro-rata if at least 3 items were completed, e.g., a score of 4 based on 3 completed items can be scaled up to a score of 7 (6.67 rounded up) for 5 items.

Note that the items listed below are for 4-17-year-olds, but the scoring instructions are identical for the similarly-worded '18+' SDQ

Table 1: Scoring symptom scores on the SDQ for 4-17 year olds

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Emotional problems scale			
ITEM 3: Often complains of headaches… *(I get a lot of headaches…)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 8: Many worries… (*I worry a lot*)	0	1	**2**
ITEM 13: Often unhappy, downhearted… *(I am often unhappy….)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 16: Nervous or clingy in new situations… (*I am nervous in new situations…*)	0	1	**2**
ITEM 24: Many fears, easily scared *(I have many fears…)*	0	1	**2**
Conduct problems Scale			
ITEM 5: Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers (*I get very angry*)	0	1	**2**
ITEM 7: Generally obedient… *(I usually do as I am told)*	**2**	1	0
ITEM 12: Often fights with other children… (*I fight a lot*)	0	1	**2**
ITEM 18: Often lies or cheats *(I am often accused of lying or cheating)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 22: Steals from home, school or elsewhere *(I take things that are not mine)*	0	1	**2**
Hyperactivity scale			**2**
ITEM 2: Restless, overactive… *(I am restless…)*	0	1	
ITEM 10: Constantly fidgeting or squirming *(I am constantly fidgeting….)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 15: Easily distracted, concentration wanders *(I am easily distracted)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 21: Thinks things out before acting *(I think before I do things)*	**2**	1	0
ITEM 25: Sees tasks through to the end… *(I finish the work I am doing)*	**2**	1	0
Peer problems scale			
ITEM 6: Rather solitary, tends to play alone *(I am usually on my own)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 11: Has at least one good friend *(I have one goof friend or more)*	**2**	1	0

ITEM 14: Generally liked by other children *(Other people my age generally like me)*	**2**	1	0
ITEM 19: Picked on or bullied by other children… *(Other children or young people pick on me)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 23: Gets on better with adults than with other children *(I get on better with adults than with people my age)*	0	1	**2**
Prosocial scale			**2**
ITEM 1: Considerate of other people's feelings *(I try to be nice to other people)*	0	1	
ITEM 4: Shares readily with other children… *(I usually share with others)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 9: Helpful if someone is hurt… *(I am helpful is someone is hurt…)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 17: Kind to younger children *(I am kind to younger children)*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 20: Often volunteers to help others… *(I often volunteer to help others)*	0	1	**2**

Total difficulties score: This is generated by summing scores from all the scales except the prosocial scale. The resultant score ranges from 0 to 40, and is counted as missing of one of the 4 component scores is missing.

'Externalising' and 'internalising' scores: The externalising score ranges from 0 to 20 and is the sum of the conduct and hyperactivity scales. The internalising score ranges from 0 to 20 and is the sum of the emotional and peer problems scales. Using these two amalgamated scales may be preferable to using the four separate scales in community samples, whereas using the four separate scales may add more value in high-risk samples *(see Goodman & Goodman. 2009 Strengths and difficulties questionnaire as a dimensional measure of child mental health. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry 48(4), 400-403).*

Generating impact scores

When using a version of the SDQ that includes an 'impact supplement', the items on overall distress and impairment can be summed to generate an impact score that ranges from 0 to 10 for parent- and self-report, and from 0 to 6 for teacher-report.

Table 2: Scoring the SDQ impact supplement

	Not at all	Only a little	A medium amount	A great deal
Parent report:				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with HOME LIFE	0	0	1	2
Interfere with FRIENDSHIPS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2

Interfere with LEISURE ACTIVITIES	0	0	1	2
Teacher report:				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with PEER RELATIONS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2
Self-report report:				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with HOME LIFE	0	0	1	2
Interfere with FRIENDSHIPS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2
Interfere with LEISURE ACTIVITIES	0	0	1	2

Responses to the questions on chronicity and burden to others are not included in the impact score. When respondents have answered 'no' to the first question on the impact supplement (i.e. when they do not perceive themselves as having any emotional or behavioural difficulties), they are not asked to complete the questions on resultant distress or impairment; the impact score is automatically scored zero in these circumstances.

Cut-points for SDQ scores for age 4-17: original 3-band solution & newer 4-band solution

Although SDQ scores can be used as continuous variables, it is sometimes convenient to categorise scores. The initial bandings presented for the SDQ scores were 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal'. These bandings were defined based on a population-based UK survey, attempting to choose cutpoints such that 80% of children scored 'normal', 10% 'borderline' and 10% 'abnormal'.

More recently a four-fold classification has been created based on an even larger UK community sample. This four-fold classification differs from the original in that it (1) divided the top 'abnormal' category into two groups, each containing around 5% of the population, (2) renamed the four categories (80% 'close to average', 10% 'slightly raised, 5% 'high' and 5% 'very high' for all scales except prosocial, which is 80% 'close to average', 10% 'slightly lowered', 5% 'low' and 5% 'very low'), and (3) changed the cut-points for some scales, to better reflect the proportion of children in each category in the larger dataset.

Note that these cut points have not been validated for use with the 18+ SDQ, so we suggest that it is safest to use continuous scores rather than categories for this measure

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Table 3: Categorising SDQ scores for 4-17 year olds (not validated for 18+)

	Original 3-band categorisation			Newer 4-band categorisation			
	Normal	Borderline	Abnormal	Close to average	Slightly raised (/slightly lowered)	High (/Low)	Very high (very low)
Parent completed SDQ							
Total difficulties score	0-13	14-16	17-40	0-13	14-16	17-19	20-40
Emotional problems score	0-3	4	5-10	0-3	4	5-6	7-10
Conduct problems score	0-2	3	4-10	0-2	3	4-5	6-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6	7-10	0-5	6-7	8	9-10
Peer problems score	0-2	3	4-10	0-2	3	4	5-10
Prosocial score	6-10	5	0-4	8-10	7	6	0-5
Impact score	0	1	2-10	0	1	2	3-10
Teacher completed SDQ							
Total difficulties score	0-11	12-15	16-40	0-11	12-15	16-18	19-40
Emotional problems score	0-4	5	6-10	0-3	4	5	6-10
Conduct problems score	0-2	3	4-10	0-2	3	4	5-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6	7-10	0-5	6-7	8	9-10
Peer problems score	0-3	4	5-10	0-2	3-4	5	6-10
Prosocial score	6-10	5	0-4	6-10	5	4	0-3
Impact score	0	1	2-6	0	1	2	3-6
Self-completed SDQ							
Total difficulties score	0-15	16-19	20-40	0-14	15-17	18-19	20-40
Emotional problems score	0-5	6	7-10	0-4	5	6	7-10
Conduct problems score	0-3	4	5-10	0-3	4	5	6-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6	7-10	0-5	6	7	8-10
Peer problems score	0-3	4-5	6-10	0-2	3	4	5-10
Prosocial score	6-10	5	0-4	7-10	6	5	0-4
Impact score	0	1	2-10	0	1	2	3-10

Note that both these systems only provide a rough-and-ready way of screening for disorders; combining information from SDQ symptom and impact scores from multiple informants is better, but still far from perfect.

Appendix L

Table of SDQ Results for all Children (*n* = 55)

Birth order	ID number	Year level of suspension	Emotional problems score	Conduct problems score	Hyper-activity score	Peer problems score	Prosocial score	Total difficulties score	Externalising score	Internalising score	Suspended? N = no 1 = once M = multi	Gender M/F	Special needs? Y/N/V*
First	3		8	1	1	3	1	13	2	11	N	N	
	4	High School	1	0	0	2	10	3	0	3	1	M	N
	5		0	0	1	0	10	1	1	0	N	N	
	6		1	0	0	2	10	3	0	3	N	N	
	8	G1	7	1	9	3	7	20	10	10	M	M	Y
	10		0	0	2	0	10	2	2	0	N	N	
	11		0	0	1	0	10	1	1	0	N	N	
	14		6	0	1	4	8	11	1	10	N	N	
	16		7	2	2	2	9	13	4	9	N	N	
	17		4	0	2	0	10	6	2	4	N	N	
	18		3	1	3	1	9	8	4	4	N	N	
	19		2	1	2	2	10	7	3	4	N	N	
	21	High School	4	7	10	7	9	28	17	11	M	M	Y
	22		4	0	2	0	8	6	2	4	N	N	
	25		3	0	3	2	10	8	3	5	N	N	
	32		3	0	3	2	10	8	3	5	N	N	
	38		1	0	0	2	-	3	0	3	N	N	
	40		1	1	2	2	6	6	3	3	N	N	
	42		1	1	2	1	10	5	3	2	N	N	
	43	G5	5	3	10	10	9	28	13	15	M	M	Y
	44		1	0	2	0	7	3	2	1	N	0	
	45		8	3	5	5	8	21	8	13	N	N	N
	46	G2	2	3	4	3	5	12	7	5	M	M	N
	47	Prep	5	5	10	7	9	27	15	12	M	M	Y
	49		0	1	1	0	5	2	2	0	N	N	
	50	G1	1	5	10	8	6	24	15	9	1	1	Y
	52	G4	8	3	10	9	7	30	13	17	M	M	Y
	54		5	8	7	4	5	24	15	9	N	N	N
	55		4	2	6	2	10	14	8	6	N	N	
	60		0	0	5	3	8	8	5	3	N	N	
	61		9	2	2	5	9	18	4	14	N	N	
	64	G4	2	6	9	4	9	21	15	6	M	M	V
	69	Prep	10	4	10	6	9	30	14	16	M	M	V
Second	3		1	0	0	0	10	1	0	1	N	N	
	4	G5	0	1	6	1	6	8	7	1	1	1	N
	6		2	0	10	4	9	16	10	6	N	N	
	8		3	2	3	0	10	8	5	3	N	N	
	10		1	1	4	0	10	6	5	1	N	N	
	11		3	2	2	1	6	8	4	4	N	N	
	14		0	0	2	0	8	2	2	0	N	N	
	17		1	2	4	1	7	8	6	2	N	N	
	21		2	3	1	3	10	9	4	5	N	N	
	25	G5	6	5	10	2	5	23	15	8	M	M	N
	40		0	5	0	0	10	6	6	0	N	N	
	42		1	1	0	0	10	2	1	1	N	N	
	46		1	1	1	2	7	5	3	2	N	N	
	49		4	3	1	3	8	11	4	7	N	N	
	51		2	2	4	3	6	11	6	5	N	N	
	52		9	7	9	3	9	28	16	12	N	N	
	60		0	3	4	0	10	7	7	0	N	N	
	61		3	0	3	4	7	10	3	7	N	N	
	64		3	4	1	1	10	9	5	4	N	N	
	69		6	1	10	2	9	19	11	8	N	N	
Third	25	Prep	2	2	7	4	9	15	9	6	1	1	N
	42		1	0	0	1	9	2	0	2	N	N	

Note: V* indicates awaiting verification of special needs.