



Understanding Scotland's policy frameworks and how they contributed to lowering school exclusions ¹

Why does it matter?

In Australia, over 113,000 students were removed from state schools in 2019 either for a set period or permanently, representing 4.3% of all state school enrolments. This figure is based on the limited data released by state and territory education departments, with the true number likely to be substantially more. Other countries, including England, are concerned about their high rates of school exclusions, yet the number of students being excluded in Australia is even higher:

	Australia	England
% of students receiving fixed term exclusions	5.50%	4.76%
% of students receiving permanent exclusions	0.12%	0.10%

In contrast to the rest of the UK where rates of exclusion have been rising since 2010, Scotland has seen a dramatic decline in the use of exclusionary practices, with the proportion of students experiencing non-permanent exclusions dropping from 4% in 2010/11 to less than 3% in 2016/17. This downward trend contrasts sharply with England and Wales, where the use of exclusionary practices increased by around 0.5% over the same time period.

McCluskey et al. (2019) suggest that Scotland's success in reducing exclusions was due to a policy focus on prevention and attending to disadvantage, which included a strategic emphasis on prevention, a collaborative approach to policy and planning, and a continued 'focus on the complexity of some young people's lives and the often deep levels of disadvantage' they experience. Given that each Australian state and territory has its own legislation and policy defining and guiding the use of exclusionary practices, understanding the way in which these legislative policies are framed may be an important step in helping to reduce Australia's high rate of student exclusions.

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Professor Gillean McCluskey, Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity, University of Edinburgh, is an international expert in restorative practices in education and exclusion from schools. Her research aims to contribute to understanding of the impact of inequalities in education by advancing first, an understanding of exclusion from school and, secondly, the role that restorative practices may have to play in this. Professor McCluskey is currently an investigator on a large study, '[Political Economies of School Exclusion in the UK](#)'. She has worked in mainstream schools and alternative settings with young people in trouble and at risk in the past and maintains a close interest in the lived experiences of schooling, and the importance of listening to

young people. More details available [here](#).

What can the research tell us?

In this seminar, Professor Gillean McCluskey will present her research on Scotland's policy frameworks and how they contributed to lowering school exclusions. This research is the first cross-national study of school exclusion in the four jurisdictions of the UK and the first analysis of policy and political frameworks for school exclusion in Scotland. It provides insight into the ways in which national policies and local factors more generally shape schools and their practices.

Professor McCluskey will argue that Scottish policy success in reducing school exclusions is largely due to:

- prioritising 'engagement' ahead of 'exclusion', and 'preventing' ahead of 'managing' exclusions.
- early intervention, stressing that it is 'crucial in reducing the need for exclusion'.
- emphasis on understanding the precursors of challenging behaviour.
- predicated on principles of prevention, positive ethos building and staged intervention.
- maintaining a focus on the complexity of some young people's lives and the often deep levels of disadvantage.
- the need to consider the likely impact of exclusion on a child's life chances, especially for children already facing disadvantage.

Finally, Professor McCluskey will conclude that Scotland's success in reducing school exclusions was due to a policy focus on prevention and attending to deep levels of disadvantage.

Further reading

McCluskey, G., Cole, T., Daniels, H., Thompson, I., & Tawell, A. (2019). Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions. *British Educational Research Journal*, *n/a(n/a)*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3555>

McCluskey, G., Riddell, S. & Weedon, E. (2015) Children's rights, school exclusion and alternative education provision, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, **19**(6), 595– 607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.961677>

McCluskey, G., Riddell, S., Weedon, E. & Fordyce, M. (2016) Exclusion from school and recognition of difference, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, **37**(4), 529– 539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1073015>

McCluskey, G. (2018) Restorative approaches in schools: Current practices, future directions, in: J. Deakin, E. Taylor & A. Kupchik (Eds) *The Palgrave international handbook of school discipline, surveillance and social control* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_29

Sullivan, A., Tippett, N., Manolev, J. & Johnson, B. (2020). NSW wants to change rules on suspending and expelling students. How does it compare to other states? *The Conversation*. Available [here](#).

Sullivan, A., Johnson, B., Tippett, N. & Manolev, J. (2020). Understanding Legislation and School Exclusions in Australia, *School Exclusions Study Key Issues Paper No. 2*. University of South Australia. doi: [10.25954/5f5eff8b4ddf6](https://doi.org/10.25954/5f5eff8b4ddf6)

Sullivan, A., Tippett, N., Johnson, B. & Manolev, J. (2020). Legislation and School Exclusions in Australia – Possibilities for Reform, *School Exclusions Study Key Issues Paper No. 5*. University of South Australia. doi: [10.25954/5f7cfcf6d5a1](https://doi.org/10.25954/5f7cfcf6d5a1)

The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion

The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion (CRESI) is based at the University of South Australia. Educational inclusion is a global issue. The impact of social circumstances on access to education and quality of education is profound. The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion undertakes research to advance an understanding of the barriers and enablers to successful educational inclusion. For further information please see the CRESI [website](#).

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