

## **Submission to the NSW Department of Education on its draft Behaviour Management Strategy**

I make this submission on behalf of the Children in Care Collective which was formed in 2016 by a group of out-of-home care service providers and leading experts in working with children with complex needs.

The aim of the Collective is to share experience, discuss best practice informed by research, provide advocacy and learn from policy and practitioner experts in out-of-home care. The Collective seeks to address solutions to difficult systemic practice issues faced by the sector and to improve outcomes for children and young people with complex needs living in out-of-home care. The Collective's website is at <http://childrenincarecollective.com.au/>

We note that the draft strategy sets out key reform directions without any details of the implementation or application of the proposed Behaviour Management Strategy.

The Collective is pleased to see the shift towards minimising the use of suspension in order to avoid the cycle of exclusion and school disengagement, this being all too common for children and young people with complex needs living in out-of-home care. We also support the reduced maximum period of suspensions for all years.

We note that the new framework will require that 'principals and school leaders consider a range of factors and alternative approaches before deciding to suspend a student'. We completely support the introduction of additional considerations of student circumstances, and increased flexibility in principal and school leader decision-making on suspension, and note the intention for schools to provide targeted support for vulnerable students. As schools provide important opportunities for social and emotional growth as well as educational opportunities, we hope the targeted support will not only reduce the rate of suspension of children and young people in care but will address all these ongoing needs.

We look forward to more detail about the proposed model of complex behaviour support.

We hope the new strategy will ensure that the individualised learning and behaviour plans for students who are in out-of-home care – and the Personalised Learning Pathway that is developed for every Aboriginal student – will be supported during any periods of suspension.

The Collective supports the approach of building school capacity to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students with a complex, challenging and unsafe behaviours, including the establishment of a dedicated workforce comprising specialist staff, improved access to behaviour specialists in regional and remote locations, and new assessment tools. Improved interagency arrangements and the development of strong and constructive relationships between all those involved in the life of all children and young people in care, including those agencies involved in decision-making, would be a very positive development.



I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Collective's support for this work and to offer our input through ongoing consultation on particular elements of the proposed changes. We are, of course, particularly interested in the nexus between the individualised learning and behaviour plans developed for children and young people in residential out-of-home care and the application of discipline and suspension procedures in schools.

We look forward to further engagement with the department with a view to supporting the engagement of our children and young people in schools.

Roderick Best  
Special Counsel  
Life Without Barriers  
9 October 2020

Co-Chair  
Children in Care Collective

**On behalf of the Children in Care Collective:** Allambi Care, Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT, Anglicare Sydney, CareSouth, Key Assets, Life Without Barriers, Mackillop Family Services, Settlement Services International, Stretch-a-Family and Australian Catholic University - Institute of Child Protection Studies