

KINDY KIDS SUSPENDED

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Four-year-olds are being sent away from preschool because their behaviours are too difficult to manage and primary school children are biting or throwing furniture as they struggle to express emotions.

The state's Children's Commissioner is worried schools are increasingly resorting to suspending or excluding students with such complex behaviours, or who have a history of trauma.

In a new report, Helen Connolly says schools should be required to gain approval from the Department for Child Protection (DCP) before they [suspend or exclude children who are taken into state care](#).

"It is happening younger and younger. You're talking about receptions, grade 1s and grade 2s, which is where we're seeing big increases," Ms Connolly said.

"We're hearing about it in preschool. (Carers are being told) 'We don't know how to deal with this kind of behaviour, we're not equipped to deal with this and we think you should go elsewhere'."

Education Department figures show there were 25 preschool or reception-aged children suspended in 2022, up from 18 in 2021. There were no exclusions in that age group in 2022 and one in 2021.

Across years 1 and 2 there were 782 suspensions in 2022, up from 379. Exclusions in those years rose from 20 to 36.

[Separate data published by the guardian for children in state care](#) shows they are four times more likely to be suspended and seven times more likely to be excluded than other school students.

"These are our really vulnerable kids," Ms Connolly said. "They're coming with trauma backgrounds. These things play out in children's behaviour and they often don't have the words (to express themselves)."

Ms Connolly said requiring DCP approval would create an extra hurdle to suspension or exclusion that would prompt schools to try other options.

DCP interim boss Erma Ranieri said the department was working with training organisations to prepare teachers to respond to children with trauma-related behaviours.

SA Primary Principals Association president Angela Falkenberg said schools used suspension or exclusion as a “last resort” but it was necessary “where other options have been provided but there’s been no change in the behaviour”. Ms Falkenberg agreed that more children were showing signs of “very, very disregulated” behaviour, including biting “to express frustration or get attention” and they often needed external, expert help such as from psychologists or occupational therapists.

The state government [has a four-year, \\$15m strategy to reduce suspensions and exclusions](#). Education Minister Blair Boyer said another \$50m had been allocated to mental health and wellbeing workers in 65 schools. Behaviour support coaches are also being rolled out in preschools.