



**Government of South Australia**

Office of the Guardian  
for Children and Young People

***Children and Young People in State Care  
in South Australian Government Schools  
2008-2016***

**May 2017**

From: Guardian for Children and Young People  
Level 4 east, 50 Grenfell Street, Adelaide  
[www.gcyp.sa.gov.au](http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au)

Ph. 8226 8570

Email: [amanda.shaw@gcyp.sa.gov.au](mailto:amanda.shaw@gcyp.sa.gov.au)

## **NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

The following terms are used in particular ways in this report -

**Aboriginal** – reflecting community preference, the term Aboriginal in this report is inclusive of children and young people of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

**DECD schools** – based on the Department for Education and Child Development acronym, this term describes the public sector schools for which data is available for this report

**'In care' or 'in state care'** – refer to children and young people under guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister for Education and Child Development

**NESB** – we follow DECD usage of the term NESB for students from a non-English speaking background

**School aged** - refers to children and young people aged between 5 and 17 years.

## **Further Information**

For further information about this report, please contact:

**Amanda Shaw**, Guardian for Children and Young People  
phone – 8226 8570, or at [amanda.shaw@gcyp.sa.gov.au](mailto:amanda.shaw@gcyp.sa.gov.au)

**Alan Fairley**, Senior Policy Officer  
Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People  
phone – 8226 8549, or at [alan.fairley@gcyp.sa.gov.au](mailto:alan.fairley@gcyp.sa.gov.au)

# 1. Introduction

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This is the fourth annual report from the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People (GCYP) about the participation in State schools of children and young people under the guardianship of the Minister in South Australia. It draws on data helpfully supplied by the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD).

Comments focus on areas of significant difference between, or changes in, results for the relevant cohorts of students in state care and the equivalent cohorts of all children enrolled in DECD schools.

Equivalent information is not available for the Independent and Catholic school systems, which therefore remain relatively opaque.

Children and young people consulted by the GCYP often recognise that the benefits of school attendance go well beyond their grades. They like school because they can mix with friends and learn new things and there is stability in the same places and faces. They usually want to and are able to do the same things as everyone else their age. School can contribute positively to their social and emotional wellbeing. Young Aboriginal people in care also may stress the importance of culture and identity and its connection to education.

Part 6 of this report considers the NAPLAN performance of children and young people in care (undertaken annually by students in years three, five, seven and nine). Data again shows that children and young people in care on average achieve lower outcomes in relation to performing at or above the *National Minimum Standard* in all test areas than do all enrolled DECD students.

## What information do we present?

Seventeen charts illustrate the situation of children and young people in care in DECD schools in 2016 and over time.

- **CHART 1** - proportion of school aged children in care enrolled in DECD schools, 2008 to 2016
- **CHART 2** - proportion of children in care enrolled in DECD schools compared to the state average, selected demographic categories (Term 3 2016)
- **CHART 3** - age groupings of children in care in DECD schools, Term 3 2016
- **CHART 4** - proportion of Aboriginal children in care compared with all students enrolled in DECD schools, 2008 to 2016

- **CHART 5** - absence rate comparison, Aboriginal children in care compared to all enrolled DECD students (percentages) Semester 1 2016
- **CHART 6** - proportion of children in care with a disability compared with all children with a disability enrolled in DECD schools, 2008-16
- **CHART 7** - primary recognised disability of children in care enrolled in DECD schools in Term 3 2016
- **CHART 8** - rate of suspensions, children in care compared with DECD school population, Semester 1
- **CHART 9** - comparison of main reasons for suspension, students in care and all students, DECD schools 2008 – 2016 (Term 2)
- **CHART 10** - rate of exclusions, children in care compared with DECD school population 2008 – 2016 (Term 2)
- **CHART 11** - absence rates for children in care and all DECD students, Semester 1 2016
- **CHART 12** – comparison of absence rates for DECD schools, children in care and all enrolled students, selected categories, Semester 1 2016
- **CHART 13** – comparative profile for ‘no absences’, children in care and all DECD enrolled students, selected categories, Semester 1 2016
- **CHART 14** - comparative profile for ‘more than 10 absences’, children in care and all DECD enrolled students, selected categories, Semester 1 2016
- **CHART 15** – non-participation in NAPLAN testing, percentage of eligible children in care in DECD schools, 2016
- **CHART 16** – NAPLAN participation rate of children in care in DECD schools by year level and discipline category 2016
- **CHART 17** – results ‘at or above the National Minimum Standard’ for students in care compared with all enrolled DECD students, 2016

## 2 Summary

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In South Australia in 2016, 61.6 per cent of all students in care were enrolled in DECD schools.

The other 38.4 per cent might be in the private school system, not of school age, and a few will be non-identifiable for a number of other reasons.

This report shows that for those in care attending DECD schools -

- the 61.6 per cent figure compares with the 79 per cent reported for 2009 but continues an upward trend that commenced in 2014
- the proportion of children and young people in care enrolled in DECD schools who identify as Aboriginal continues to be significantly higher than Aboriginal children and young people as a proportion of all children in DECD schools (33.8 compared to 6.2 per cent in 2016)
- school absence information shows better outcomes by Aboriginal children in care than the overall DECD student population in significant categories
- a greater proportion have learning disabilities compared to the overall DECD student population, notably in speech and language skills<sup>1</sup>
- the proportion with an intellectual disability is nearly seven times, and with a speech and language related disability over three times, that of these groups within the overall DECD student population
- students in care have higher rates of suspension in their primary school years
- the absence rate for children and young people attending DECD schools is only slightly higher than that for the overall DECD school population<sup>2</sup>
- children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds have over double the absence rate of all DECD enrolled students (14.3 per cent to 7.2 per cent in 2016)
- there are very high NAPLAN non-participation rates for students in care in DECD schools in three categories: absent, exempt and withdrawn. At the higher end, for example, this means that we know little about almost half of all Year 9 DECD enrolled students in care in critical areas such as numeracy and reading.

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<sup>1</sup> The GCYP submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Access to the Education System for Students with Disabilities in September 2015 can be accessed at <http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/2015/10/access-to-the-education-system-for-students-with-disabilities/>

<sup>2</sup> This does not account for students who are absent for part of the day.

Information summarised in this report suggests that the circumstances of students in care attending DECD schools warrants further attention in some particular areas, including with respect to -

- speech and language delays experienced by children before and on commencement of school
- access to appropriate disability support services, for example in relation to intellectual disability (possibly with a focus on whether and how the NDIS will contribute to the necessary support)
- alternative disciplinary measures to school suspension – particularly for younger children
- monitoring hours of attendance at school so that part-day absences and reduced-hours arrangements are reported and minimised
- the particular experience of children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds
- developing a better appreciation of the reasons for the high non-participation rate in NAPLAN testing and the implications this has for properly understanding the educational performance of children and young people in care.

### **Education and youth justice detention**

The Guardian monitors the circumstances of young people in youth justice detention. In the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, there were 865 admissions to youth justice facilities in South Australia. 47.9 per cent were Aboriginal and 21.5 per cent were female, while 20.8 per cent also were subject to guardianship orders.

DECD's *Youth Education Centre* provides education and training to young people detained in the Adelaide Youth Training Centre. It is introduced at <http://www.yec.sa.edu.au>

The Guardian's recent appointment as Training Centre Visitor under the *Youth Justice Administration Act 2016* will generate more focussed consideration of education access for children and young people in detention.

### 3 Profile

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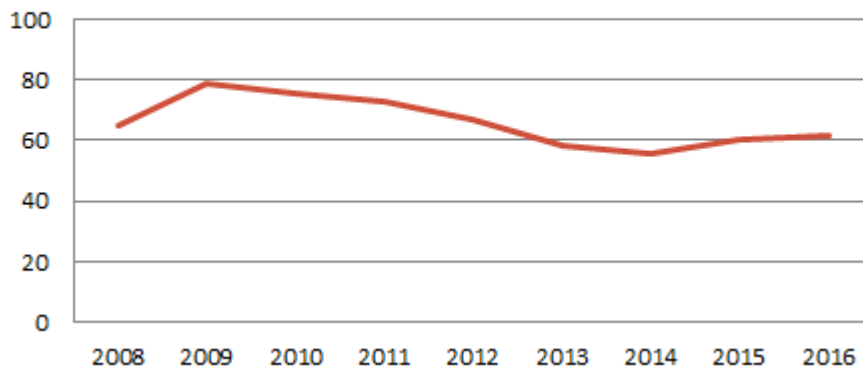
In Term 3 2016, 1,829 children and young people in care were enrolled in SA government schools, an increase from 1,624 at the same time in 2015<sup>3</sup>. This is 61.6 per cent of all those in care.

Of the 1,829 children in care enrolled in DECD schools in 2016 -

- 874 were female (47.8 per cent) and 955 male (52.2 per cent)
- 1,201 were enrolled in primary schools and 628 in secondary (65.7 and 34.3 per cent)
- 694 enrolments were in country schools and 1,135 metropolitan (37.9 and 62.1 per cent).

The proportion of children in care at DECD schools increased as a proportion of all enrolled DECD students from 1.0 per cent in 2015 to 1.1 per cent in 2016 (from total enrolled student numbers respectively of 169,541 and 171,809).<sup>4</sup> Chart 1 shows the annual proportion of children in care attending DECD schools in the period since 2008.

**CHART 1: proportion of school-aged children in care enrolled in DECD schools, 2008 to 2016**



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<sup>3</sup> These figures compare to overall numbers of children and young people in out of home care for these years (as reported at 30 June) of 2837 in 2015 and 3242 in 2016. <http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Children-in-care-and-secure-care-statistics-2015-16-1.pdf?x26381>

<sup>4</sup> The proportion of children in care *not* identified in the DECD school attendance census includes those enrolled in non-government schools, students under the age of compulsion and students over the age of compulsion who have left school. Data quality may be affected by the inability to match records due to the use of alias names.

Although 2016 again showed an annual increase in the number of children in care located in and actively attending a DECD school, the 61.6 per cent proportion remains lower than the high rate of 79 per cent reported in 2009.

Chart 2 compares the ‘in care’ student population with all DECD students in several important demographic areas in Term 3 2016.

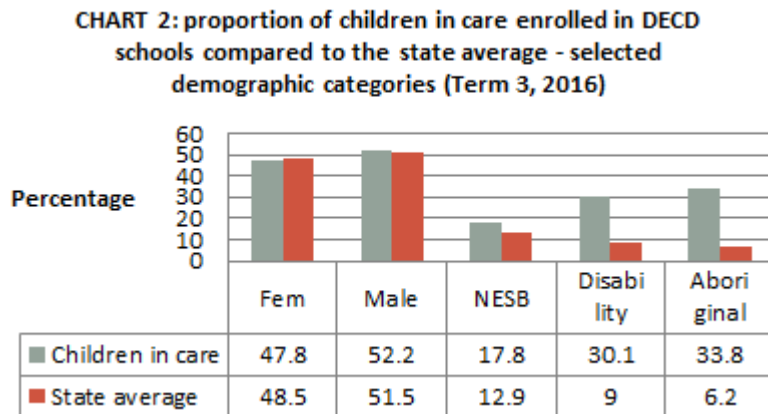
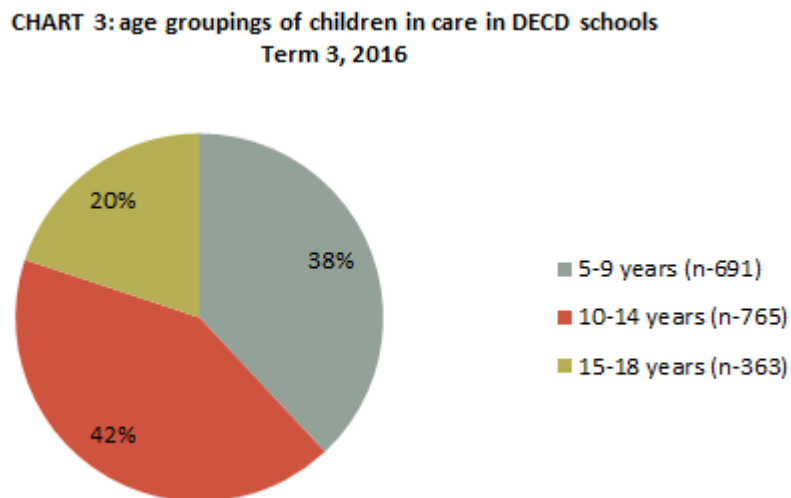


Chart 3 shows the spread of children in care in DECD schools across three age cohorts in Term 3 2016. The equivalent proportions for all DECD enrolled students at that time were 39.6 per cent aged 5-9 years, 35.9 per cent for 10-14 years and 22.8 per cent for 15-18 years.

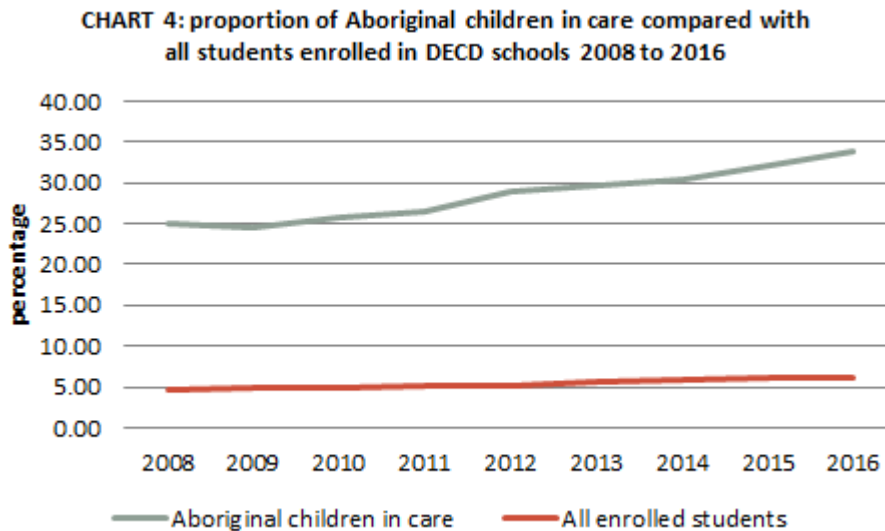




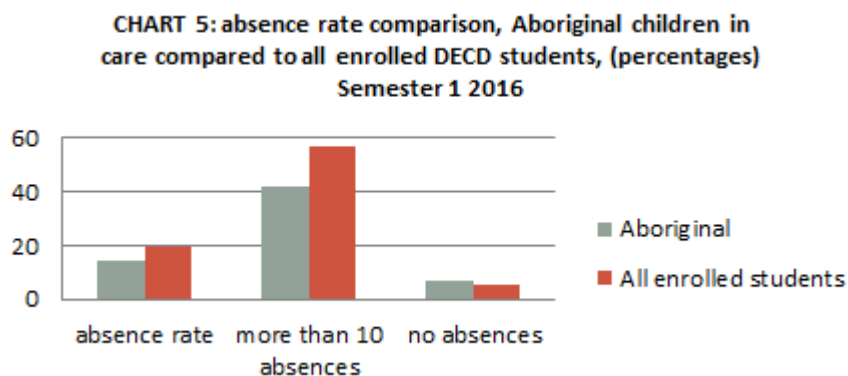
## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The proportion of children and young people in care in government schools who identify as Aboriginal is significantly higher than Aboriginal children and young people as a proportion of all children in DECD schools.

Chart 4 shows that the 619 DECD students in care who identified as Aboriginal in Term 3 2016 comprised 33.8 per cent of all those in care attending DECD schools compared with the overall state figure of 6.2 per cent. This maintains a continuing and widening disparity that can be tracked from 2008 to 2016.



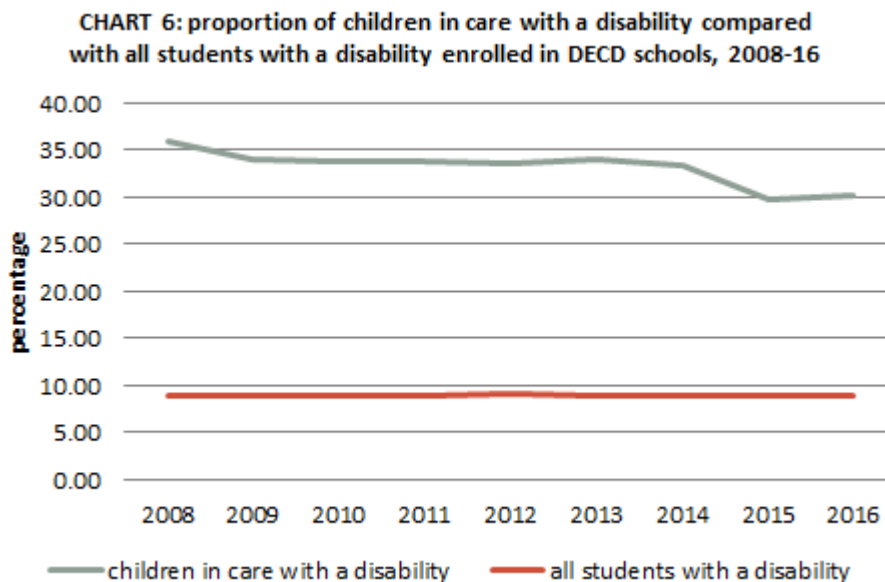
School absence information illustrated in Chart 5 shows better outcomes by Aboriginal children in care than the overall DECD student population in significant categories.



## Students with disabilities

The proportion of children and young people in care enrolled in DECD schools who have an identified disability continues to be significantly higher than the proportion in the DECD school population as a whole.

Chart 6 illustrates the situation for DECD schools in Term 3 2016, showing 550 students with a disability, or 30.1 per cent of all children in care in DECD schools, compared to the state average of 9 per cent of all students. This is an increase from the comparable 2015 figure of 482 students (29.7 per cent) of all enrolled DECD students.



The primary disabilities identified by DECD for children and young people in care enrolled in DECD schools in 2016 are presented in Chart 7.

The numbers are too small in some Chart 7 categories to compare children in care with state totals with much purpose. However, it can be noted where there are larger samples that children in care feature much more in the categories of *Language and Communication*<sup>5</sup>, *Autistic/Asperger's Disorder*, *Intellectual Disability*, *Global Developmental Delay* and *Speech and/or Language*.

<sup>5</sup> In 2007 the disability categories were revised and 'Language and Communication' was replaced with 'Autistic/Asperger's Disorder', 'Global Development Delay', and 'Speech and/or Language'. As assessments of children are done, the new categories replace the old.

Examples are that –

- the proportion of children in care attending DECD schools in 2016 with an **intellectual disability** was about seven times the proportion of this group within the overall DECD student population
- the proportion for those recorded in relation to **speech and language related disability** is over three times that of this group within the overall DECD student population, and
- those with a **global developmental delay** are almost five times that of this group within the overall DECD student population.

<b>Chart 7 – primary recognised disability of children in care enrolled in DECD schools in Term 3 2016</b>			
	<b>Number of children in care in DECD schools</b>	<b>As a % of children in care in DECD schools</b>	<b>As a % of all students enrolled in DECD schools</b>
<b>Language and Communication</b>	44	2.4	0.9
<b>Intellectual Disability</b>	194	10.6	1.5
<b>Speech and/or Language</b>	192	10.5	3.0
<b>Global Developmental Delay</b>	42	2.3	0.5
<b>Autistic / Asperger’s Disorder</b>	58	3.2	2.5
<b>Physical Disability</b>	9	0.5	0.3
<b>Sensory Disability (Hearing)</b>	8	0.4	0.4
<b>Sensory Disability (Vision)</b>	3	0.2	0.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>9.3</b>

## 4 Suspensions and exclusions

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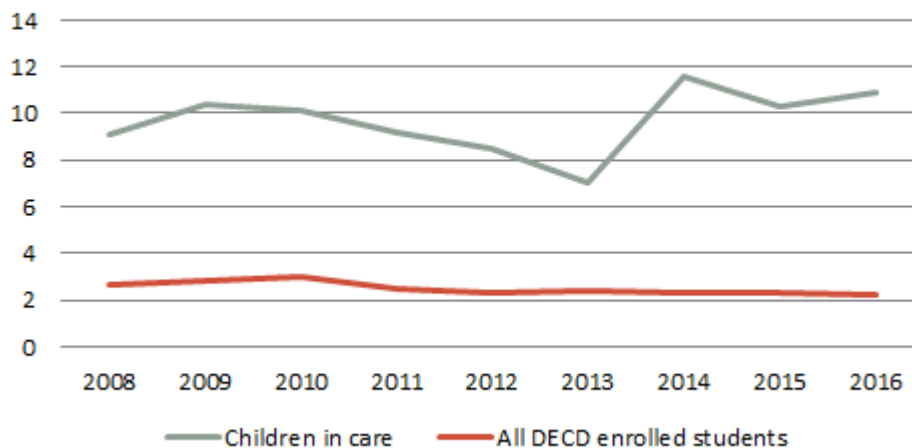
DECD defines suspension and exclusion as follows<sup>6</sup> –

- **Suspension** - means that the student does not attend school for a period of time ranging from one to five school days.
- **Exclusion** - means that the student does not attend that school for either a set period of time ranging from four to ten weeks or for the remainder of a term or, for students over 16, the remainder of the semester.

### Suspensions

The rate of suspension of students in care fell steadily from 2009 to 2013 and rose sharply in 2014 (with 2016 at a similar level) while the lower rate for the DECD school population as a whole has remained relatively constant.

**CHART 8: rate of suspensions, children in care compared with DECD school population, 2008-2016 (Term 2)**



Term 2 data for 2016 shows 267 incidents for which students in care were suspended compared to 4,120 DECD school students overall (some individuals were suspended more than once). Chart 9 shows the main reasons.

<sup>6</sup> see <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/parent-information-suspension-exclusion.pdf?v=1459299567>

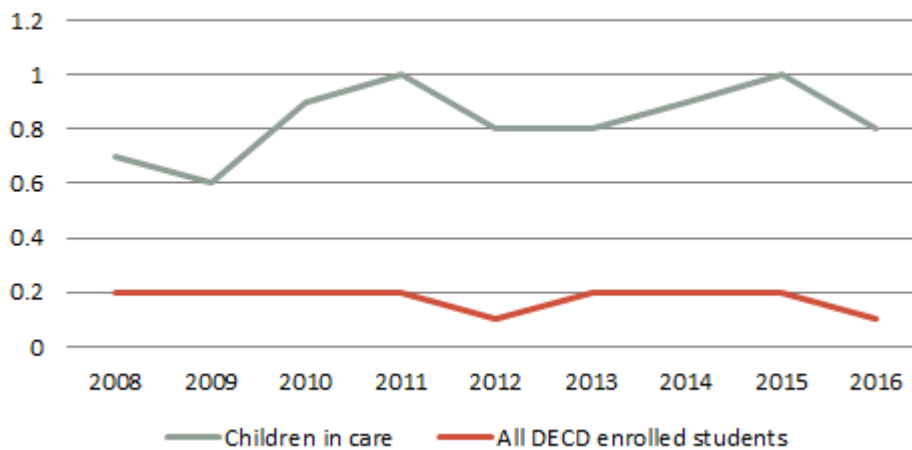
<b>Chart 9 – comparison of main reasons for suspension, students in care and all students, DECD schools, Term 2 2016</b>		
	<b>Children in care %</b>	<b>All students %</b>
<b>Violence – threatened or actual</b>	44.9	40.4
<b>Threatened good order</b>	21.8	24.9
<b>Threatened safety or wellbeing</b>	17.7	16.7

## **Exclusions**

Children in care enrolled in DECD schools appear more likely to be excluded than their peers, although the relatively small numbers involved make it difficult to draw strong conclusions.

In Term 2 2016, for example, there were 15 exclusions of students in care compared to 236 DECD school students overall, giving a comparative rate of 0.8 to 0.1 per cent.

**CHART 10: rate of exclusions, children in care compared with DECD school population, 2008-2016 (Term 2)**



## 5 Absence / attendance

Reported absence rates for children and young people in care enrolled in DECD schools<sup>7</sup> in 2016 again showed only a slightly more elevated rate than for the overall school population (2.4 per cent). Results for particular groups are worth noting -

- students in care with a disability have a slightly lower absence rate than that reported for children with a disability within the overall DECD school population, that is, they are more likely to be attending than those who have a disability but are not in care
- this more markedly is the case for Aboriginal children and young people (with comparative figures of 14.3 per cent compared to 19.5 per cent)
- students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds, however, have about twice the absence rate than that reported for those students from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not in care, a similar result to the previous year
- the absentee rate for children and young people in care appears to be more of an issue when they are enrolled in secondary rather than primary school.

These relativities have been fairly consistent since GCYP commenced monitoring.

<b>Chart 11 - Absence rates for children in care and all DECD students, Semester 1 2016</b>			
	<b>number children in care</b>	<b>absence rate % children in care</b>	<b>State absence rate</b>
<b>total</b>	1829	11.7%	9.3%
<b>males</b>	955	12.5%	9.4%
<b>females</b>	874	10.9%	9.1%
<b>from non-English speaking backgrounds</b>	326	14.3%	7.2%
<b>disability</b>	550	13.5%	12.9%
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</b>	619	14.6%	19.5%
<b>country schools</b>	694	12.6%	10.2%
<b>metro schools</b>	1135	11.2%	8.8%
<b>primary schools</b>	1201	9.6%	8.2%
<b>secondary schools</b>	628	16.0%	11.3%

<sup>7</sup> Small but significant numbers of students in care attend school for periods of as little as one hour per week by negotiated arrangement. These do not record as absences.

## Students in care from non-English speaking backgrounds

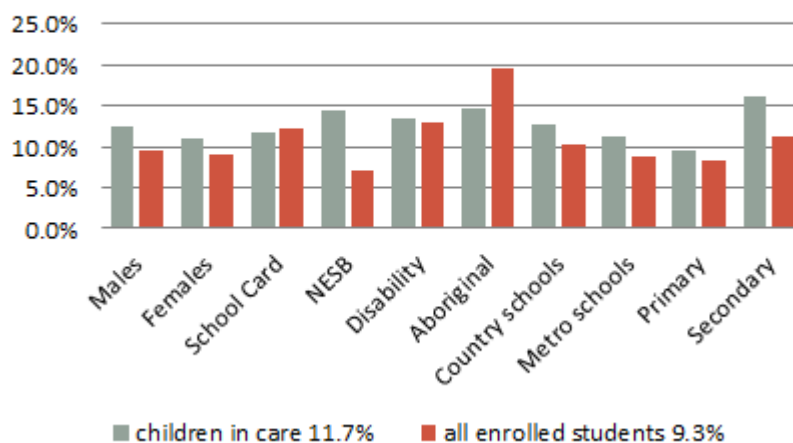
These three charts show a consistent contrast between the applicable rate for children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds and all DECD enrolled students with respect to overall absence rates, those with 'no absences' and those with 'more than 10' absences. There were 326 'NESB' students in care in this reporting period.

Simply stated –

- Chart 12 shows that children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds have over double the absence rate of all DECD enrolled students (14.3 per cent to 7.2 per cent)<sup>8</sup>
- Chart 13 shows that children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds show about half of the 'no absence' rate of all DECD enrolled students (5.8 per cent to 11.7 per cent)
- Chart 14 shows that children and young people in care from non-English speaking backgrounds have about double the rate of 'more than 10 absences' of all DECD enrolled students (42.3 per cent to 20.8 per cent).

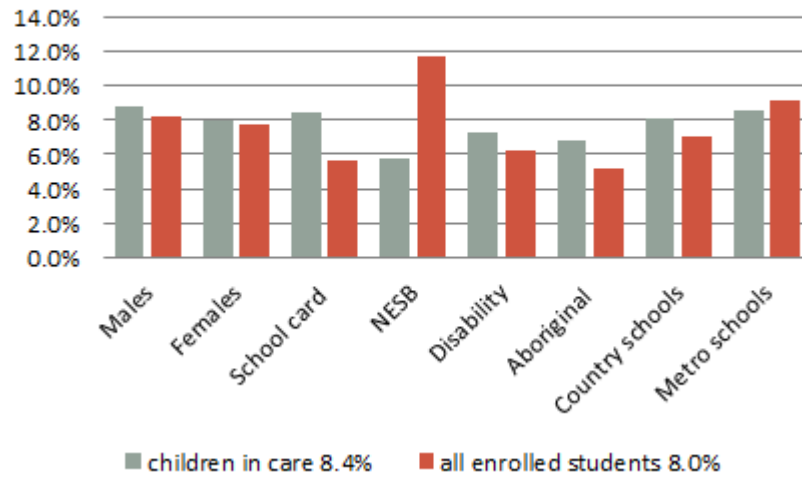
These disparities and their potentially negative implications for the affected children and young people need further consideration.

**CHART 12: comparison of absence rates for DECD schools, children in care and all enrolled students, selected categories, Semester 1 2016**

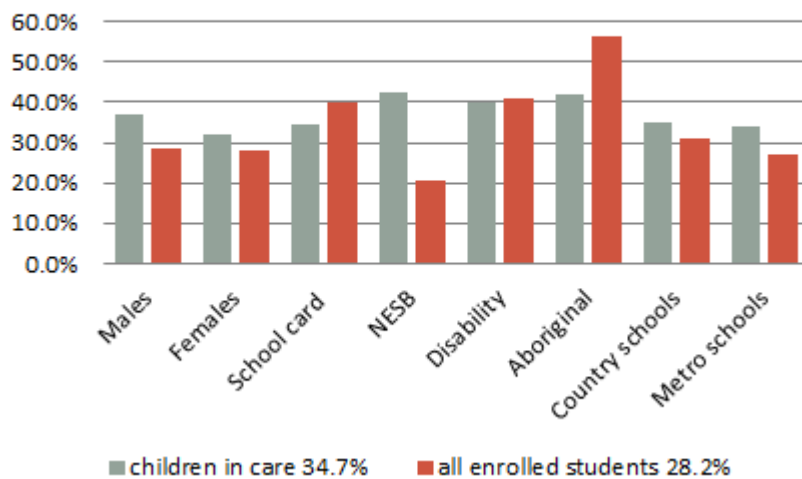


<sup>8</sup> Not shown in these charts is that the 'unauthorised absence rate' for NESB students in care at DECD schools was 6.2 per cent, well over the all of DECD student rate of 1.7 per cent.

**CHART 13: comparative profile for 'no absences', children in care and all DECD enrolled students, selected categories Semester 1 2016**



**CHART 14: comparative profile for 'more than 10 absences', children in care and all enrolled DECD students, selected categories, Semester 1 2016**





## 6 Literacy and numeracy

National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing occurs each year for children in years three, five, seven and nine. Data shows consistently that children and young people in care on average achieve lower outcomes in relation to performing *at or above the National Minimum Standard* in test areas than do all enrolled DECD students in the relevant categories.

The National Minimum Standard represents the “agreed minimum acceptable standard of knowledge and skills without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school”, with students not reaching this minimum standard “likely to need focused intervention and additional support to help them achieve the skills they require to progress in schooling”.<sup>9</sup> Chart 17 below demonstrates that children and young people in care should continue to be a focus for such intervention.

### 2016 participation and non-participation rates

Six hundred and three (603) children in care enrolled in DECD schools were eligible to sit for NAPLAN tests in 2016: 155 in Year 3, 157 in Year 5, 155 in Year 7 and 136 in Year 9. These groups all have very high non-participation rates as shown in Chart 15 below for 2016.

While acknowledging that some students have valid reasons not to participate in testing, the very high non-participation rates for children in care suggest that only limited conclusions can be drawn about their NAPLAN performance relative to all DECD enrolled students in that classification.

Further analysis would be helpful to establish why there are such high rates in the three non-participation categories counted by DECD: absent, exempt and withdrawn. Data shows these rates as being much higher than for all DECD enrolled students in that category.

We must note the caution sounded in the NAPLAN ‘commentary on participation’ publication in this context –

*“It is important to note, however, that the relationship between non-participation and achievement has not been established, so it is not possible to comment explicitly on the effect that differences in participation rates might have on achievement.”<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2016, *NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2016*, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney, (page v) viewed 11 April 2017. <http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2016-naplan-national-report.pdf>

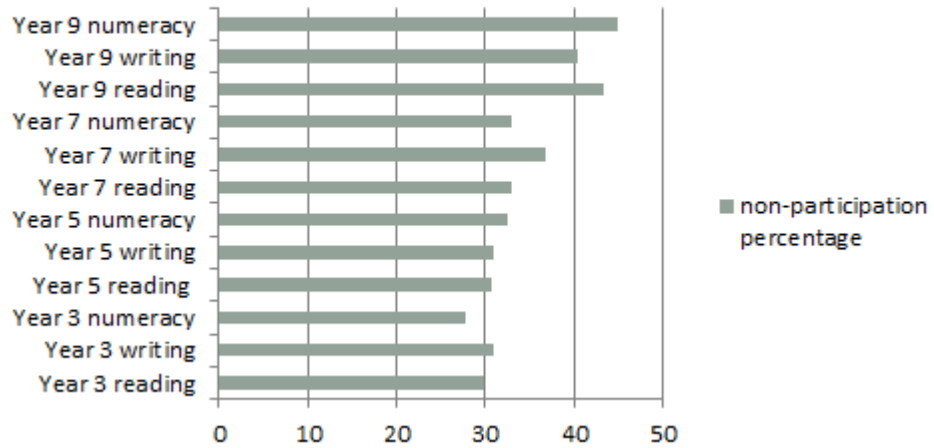
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, page 324

For children and young people in care attending DECD schools the critical concern may relate to the answer to a prior question – why are so many not participating due to being absent, exempt or withdrawn?

<b>CHART 15 – NAPLAN participation rate of children in care in DECD schools by year level and discipline category 2016</b>			
<b>Year and category</b>	<b>Number of enrolled children in care</b>	<b>Number actually tested</b>	<b>Participation rate (%) as a proportion of children in care</b>
Year 3 reading	155	109	70.3%
Year 3 writing	155	107	69%
Year 3 numeracy	155	112	72.2%
Year 5 reading	157	109	70%
Year 5 writing	157	108	69%
Year 5 numeracy	157	106	68%
Year 7 reading	155	104	67%
Year 7 writing	155	98	63%
Year 7 numeracy	155	104	67%
Year 9 reading	136	77	56%
Year 9 writing	136	81	60%
Year 9 numeracy	136	75	55%

The non-participation rate for each of the nine reporting categories shown in Chart 16 below, for example, illustrate that we know very little about almost half of all DECD enrolled students in care in critical areas such as Year 9 numeracy and reading.

**CHART 16: non-participation in NAPLAN testing, percentage of eligible children in care in DECD schools 2016**



Noting that the participation rate is very low for children in care in all categories, achievement levels for those who do participate consistently show performance below all DECD enrolled students in all areas. Chart 17 illustrates this for 2016 in relation to performance 'at or above the National Minimum Standard' for relevant competency areas.

**CHART 17: results 'at or above the National Minimum Standard' for students in care compared with all enrolled DECD students, 2016**

