



Media Release

Hon Sarah Game MLC

Thursday 22nd December 2022

One Nation urgently renews push for a Select Committee investigating causes and solutions to student absenteeism, school refusal and the perpetuation of inequity in the education system.

Documents obtained by the Honourable Sarah Game MLC through *Freedom of Information* paint a shocking picture. Between 2018 and 2021:

- **Up to 75% of suspended students were boys**
- **Up to 82% of excluded students were boys**

The education system is failing our boys.

- **25%-33% of suspended students had a recognised disability, despite representing just 10% of the school population**
- **30%-50% of excluded students had a recognised disability**

The education system is failing students with disabilities.

- **Over 50% of children suspended were on school cards, despite representing less than 30% of the school population**
- **Up to 60% of students excluded were on school cards**

The education system is failing children from families already at a socio-economic disadvantage.

In 2021, **Category 1 disadvantaged schools had an absenteeism rate of 24.7%**. This is compared with only a 6.7% rate at Category 7 school, where there is no recognised socio-economic disadvantage.

"I have met with Minister Boyer and directly asked to increase effective resourcing to deal with truancy in schools as well as raising the subject in Parliament" Ms Game notes.

In Term 3, 2021, the Department noted:

"A total of 1,968 (43.8%) children and young people in care identified by DCP were not identified in the Department's schooling system."

This means, **almost half of all children in state care were not recorded as attending school.**

Ms Game says: *"I am alarmed about the welfare of these missing children. This is a child protection and welfare issue at its most fundamental level."*

Of the children under DCP that are attending, **almost half (up to 48.5%) enrolled in secondary school had over 10 absences within a single semester.** Ms Game is concerned that the education systems is not setting any kind of aspirations or expectations for students in state care.

"I have advocated on many occasions that children in state residential care should have the opportunity be housed close to our best state schools" says Ms Game.

That same year, NAPLAN results for children in state care were abysmal. **Only 27.4% of children in State care met the Standard of Educational Achievement for Numeracy**, this is in comparison to 77.1% of all Year 9 students across all state schools.

In 2019, **only 23.5% of children in state care met the Standard of Educational Achievement for Numeracy.**



The Department also noted:

“Performance of children and young people in care is consistently well below the performance... against all three measures [literacy, numeracy and writing] and across all year levels.”
The education system is failing our most vulnerable children; those in state care.

The One Nation representative has spoken out previously about the inadequacy of current Education Department processes for recording and actioning alerts about truancy and school refusal. She also tabled legislation after speaking with both the previous Guardian for Children and Young People Penny Wright and the Commissioner for Children and Young People Helen Connolly to resource the Child and Young Person Visitor role for those living in state residential care. This legislation received full cross-bench support, but was shot-down by both major parties.

Ms Game’s office applied under Freedom of Information regulations to understand the exact picture of student absenteeism. The data clearly shows we are failing our most vulnerable, especially those with disabilities and those under state care.

Ms Game believes that a Select Committee Inquiry, covering Education, Child Protection and the Department of Human Services is essential to stopping the cycle of educational poverty.

Quotes from Ms Game:

“Minister Boyer has publicly stated that my concerns on student absenteeism are wrong, that I am being disingenuous. Now, his Department’s own documentation prove me, and all the frustrated Principals, school leaders and parents I have spoken with, correct.”

“I have asked the Minister face to face, I have written to him multiple times, I have asked questions in Parliament and I have introduced a Motion to the Upper House. When will the Government acknowledge it has a crisis on its hands?”

*“I renew my call for an urgent Select Committee, as I also **renew my call for legislation to correct resourcing of the Child and Young Person Visitor role.** We must ensure children in state residential care have consistent, adequate supports. My initial legislation was shot down by both of the major parties; it was absolutely scandalous.”*

Previous statements on the subject of student absenteeism:

“The number one issue raised when I visit disadvantaged schools is student absenteeism and the link to child welfare. I hear repeatedly about the stress this causes teachers.”

“Six-year-old Charli, seven-year-old Makaj; both children had multiple absenteeism alerts against their names. The schools tried their best, yet there was no support to check if these children were okay. We know they were clearly not okay.”

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