Chapter One: Introduction

The overarching question for this research is: “What are the differences between ‘espoused educational policy' and ‘policy in use’ in relation to suspension centres?” (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). This research to discover the differences between what was occurring in practice from stakeholders’ perspectives (policy in use) and the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres (educational policy).

Families and education systems play significant roles in shaping the values, attitudes and beliefs of young people. The ways in which this is best achieved is a source of interest and debate for political parties; government agencies; community groups; parents and teachers who often have different beliefs on how to equip young people with the skills to fulfil positive roles in society.

I have been working as a senior education officer in the area of student welfare for ten years within the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (*the Department*) which provides an opportunity to “reflect on and analyse current personal, workplace and organisational practice” (Lee, Green, & Brennan, 2000, p. 127). This research aimed to contribute new knowledge and improve practice relating to a new model of support for students with disruptive behaviour within my professional context (Maxwell & Kupczuk-Romanczuk, 2009, p.136).

While the majority of students engage in learning and school life quite happily, a small number of students, for various reasons, do not. Of this small number, some students are described as having “disruptive behaviour” which poses a significant problem not only within the education system, but often within the broader society.

The Department's Behaviour Services Guidelines (2007)[1] defines students with *disruptive behaviour* as "students whose behaviour interferes with individual learning and disrupts the learning of others" and "who display disruptive behaviour of high intensity, frequency and duration" (p. 3). Disruptive student behaviour has been and continues to be a serious issue in schools. Researchers have identified the negative impact disruptive student behaviour has on student learning outcomes and teacher wellbeing. As Mooney et al. (2008) state:

> The implications of student behaviour for learning are becoming an increasingly major concern of teachers, parents and policy makers in Australia. Disruptive student behaviour not only impedes learning outcomes for students but also impacts negatively on teacher efficacy and wellbeing (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Lewis, 1999). (p. 1)

The importance of supporting schools in addressing disruptive student behaviour is highlighted by the work of Australian researchers such as Rogers (2000); De Jong and Griffiths (2006); Porter (2007); and Richmond (2007) who cite a range of theories on how disruptive student behaviour is best addressed. Significant government funding has also been directed towards a range of initiatives to help address disruptive student behaviour over the past 15 to 20 years. As recently as June 2011, for example, Sullivan outlined the University of South Australia's involvement in a $500,000 Australian Research Council project over the next three years to "obtain a new understanding of student behaviour in South Australian schools" (para. 3). An initial survey of over 20,000 teachers in government and non-government schools aims to "provide quantitative data on the state of student behaviour in our schools and help

[1] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (2007, online). Behaviour services: Guidelines for resource utilisation. (Intranet only)

support policy development and the kind of teaching theory and practice that will deliver better student outcomes and encourage teachers to remain in the profession …" (para. 3).

In New South Wales, Fields (2005) identified one of the "most significant educational decisions made by a state government" as the "introduction of separate educational facilities for chronically misbehaving students" (p. 6). In 2003, Dr Andrew Refshauge, the then Minister for Education reported the following to the General Purpose Standing Committee.

> We have provided $48.4 million in the 2003-04 State budget, and over the next four years for a range of placement and support options for students with disruptive behaviour…. There is also a further $8 million in this year's budget over four years … to establish 20 new suspension centres to implement behaviour modification plans for students…. By 2007, we would have established 20 new suspension centres and more than 5,000 students we expect to have benefited from that initiative over that time. (p. 26)

Suspension centres are one of the more recent government initiatives implemented to help address disruptive student behaviour in NSW government schools. The Department's *Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres*[2] defines suspension centres in the following way.

> The suspension centre is an intervention for students who are on long suspension and have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible. (para. 1)

[2] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (2006, online). Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres. (Intranet only)

Of interest to this research was that initiatives such as suspension centres have been implemented with little or no evaluation as to whether they promote positive outcomes for students with disruptive behaviour or school communities in general. Schön (1995) reflects that "a gap often exists between the policies advanced in formal policy documents versus how those policy documents are actually implemented" (p. 33). Schön makes the case for those people who design policy to "get interested" in what the policy means to practitioners in the field, as the ways in which the policy is used can be very different from the "policy intention" (p. 33). This research aimed to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres from the perspectives of "people on the ground" (*stakeholders*) and to compare suspension centre practices to the suspension centre policy to reveal whether practice reflected policy. Revealing stakeholders' perspectives on the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres and comparing practice to policy is important to generate new and useful knowledge on how suspension centres can work most effectively to support students with disruptive behaviour.

Research aims

This research aimed to discover "What are the differences between 'espoused educational policy' and 'policy in use' in relation to suspension centres?" by exploring the operation of the centres (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). As descriptive research, the aim was to discover the differences between what was occurring in practice from stakeholders' perspectives (policy in use) and the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres* (educational policy). To answer the research question, a variety of stakeholders associated with the centres were asked their opinions on the following sub-questions.

- Research sub-question one: What are the best things happening with suspension centres or what should be maintained with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question two: What needs to be improved with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question three: What evidence is there that suspension centres are meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines?

Asking stakeholders questions based on the sub-questions and analysing their responses helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres from stakeholders' perspectives. Comparing the responses to the suspension centre Guidelines enabled an understanding of the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995) and provided new and useful knowledge to help inform policy and practice relating to suspension centres.

As this research encompassed a large state government organisation with different stakeholders at different levels within the organisation, the ways in which descriptive data was gathered was instrumental in providing rich and meaningful information. To best address the research questions this research was conducted in two phases. These phases will be outlined in Chapter Three: Contextual Framework and Methodology.

Significance of this research

This research is important because, as school change expert Michael Fullan (2007) argues, until initial use of practices begins there is no experience base from which to make well-informed decisions about what is needed to advance the work. Suspension centres, in supporting students on long suspension from school, are unique world-wide. They are positioned as an alternative from the traditional model of

suspension where students are excluded from attending school and left to the supervision of their parents, or the community. Exploring the operation of the centres and comparing practice to policy can benefit education systems nationally and internationally in generating new knowledge relating to supporting students who are suspended from school.

The conclusions and recommendations drawn from this research are especially important, given research that cites some of the serious negative consequences associated with school suspension for suspended students. These consequences include academic difficulties (Arcia, 2006); disengagement from school (Butler et al., 2005); student alienation, crime and delinquency, and alcohol and drug use (American Academy of Paediatrics, Committee on School Health, 2003) (as cited in Hemphill and Hargreaves, 2009, p. 5).

This research might also be of benefit to stakeholders who oversee or run suspension centres. Stakeholders might gain knowledge, insight and understanding relating to the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres. There is also the potential for me, as researcher, to gain skill or expertise that could be imparted at a policy level within the workplace.

Description of key terms

The remainder of this chapter describes key terms that are used throughout this research to assist the reader to conceptualise how suspension centres relate to school suspension and the range of “people on the ground” who are associated with suspension centres.

Suspension centres

Since term four, 2004, 22 suspension centres have been progressively established by the Department to support students on long suspension from school across New South Wales (NSW). The 22 suspension centres include the 20 new suspension centres announced by the Government in 2003 and two programs that were operating prior to the announcement that were subsequently recognised by the Department as suspension centres.

It is important to outline the definition and purpose of suspension centres and how they relate to school suspension. The Department's policy framework titled *Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres* (*2006)* (the Guidelines) defines the centres as "an intervention for students who are on long suspension and have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (para. 1). The *Purpose* of suspension centres is described in the following way.

> The new suspension centres will:
>
> – form part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs);
> – increase the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students; and
> – assist students to make a successful re-entry to schooling. (para. 2)

See Appendix A for Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres 2006).

Suspension from school

The Department's *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures (2011)*[3] defines *Suspension* as "only one strategy for managing inappropriate behaviour within a school's student welfare and discipline policies" (p. 3). The Purpose of suspension is described, in part, as follows.

> There will be cases of unacceptable behaviour where it will be in the best interests of the school community and/or the student involved, for the student to be removed from the school for a period of time or completely. (p. 2)
>
> Suspension is not intended as a punishment…. It is most effective when it highlights the parents' responsibility for taking an active role, in partnership with the school, to modify the inappropriate behaviour of their child. The school and the government school system will work with parents with a view to assisting a suspended student to rejoin the school community as quickly as possible…. Suspension also allows time for school personnel to plan appropriate support for the student to assist with successful re-entry. (p. 3)

The Department implements two types of suspension from school: short suspension and long suspension. The procedures state that *short suspension* is a strategy available to the school principal in "resolving inappropriate behaviour" and is of duration of "up to and including four school days" (see Footnote 3, p. 7). However, it is important to highlight that suspension centres are for students who are on long suspension from school. Therefore, it is important to define *long suspension* and the

[3] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (2011). Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures 2011.

relationship between short and long suspension. The Department's Procedures (see Footnote 3) state:

> If short suspensions have not resolved the issue of inappropriate behaviour, or the misbehaviour is so serious as to warrant a long suspension, the principal may impose a long suspension of up to and including 20 school days. (p. 8)

The Procedures outline that subject to certain factors (such as, considering a child's age, developmental ability, disability) principals may impose a long suspension for reasons which include: "physical violence"; "use or possession of a prohibited weapon, firearm or knife"; "possession, supply or use of a suspected illegal substance"; "serious criminal behaviour related to the school"; "use of an implement as a weapon"; and "persistent or serious misbehaviour" (see Footnote 3, pp. 8-9). The definitions of reasons for long suspension are included at Appendix B.

Number of students suspended from school

It is useful to consider how many students are long suspended from NSW government schools. According to the Department's Long Suspension and Expulsion Summary[4], in 2009 a total of 10,878 students were long suspended from school which represented 1.5 % of enrolments. A summary of long suspensions by suspension category, and by the number of students receiving long suspensions (by year bands) in 2009 is at Tables 1 and 2.

[4] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (2009, online). Long suspension and expulsion summary 2009.

Table 1

A Summary of Long Suspensions by Suspension Category 2009

Suspension category	**Total**	**% of Total long suspensions**
Physical violence	6642	45%
Persistent misbehaviour	6276	42%
Serious criminal behaviour related to the school	948	6%
Possession or use of a suspected illegal substance	390	3%
Use or possession of a prohibited weapon, firearm or knife	416	3%
Use of an implement as a weapon or threatening to use a weapon	215	1%
Total	**14887**	**Rounded to nearest %**

(see Footnote, 4, para. 4).

Table 2

Number of Students Receiving Long Suspensions 2009

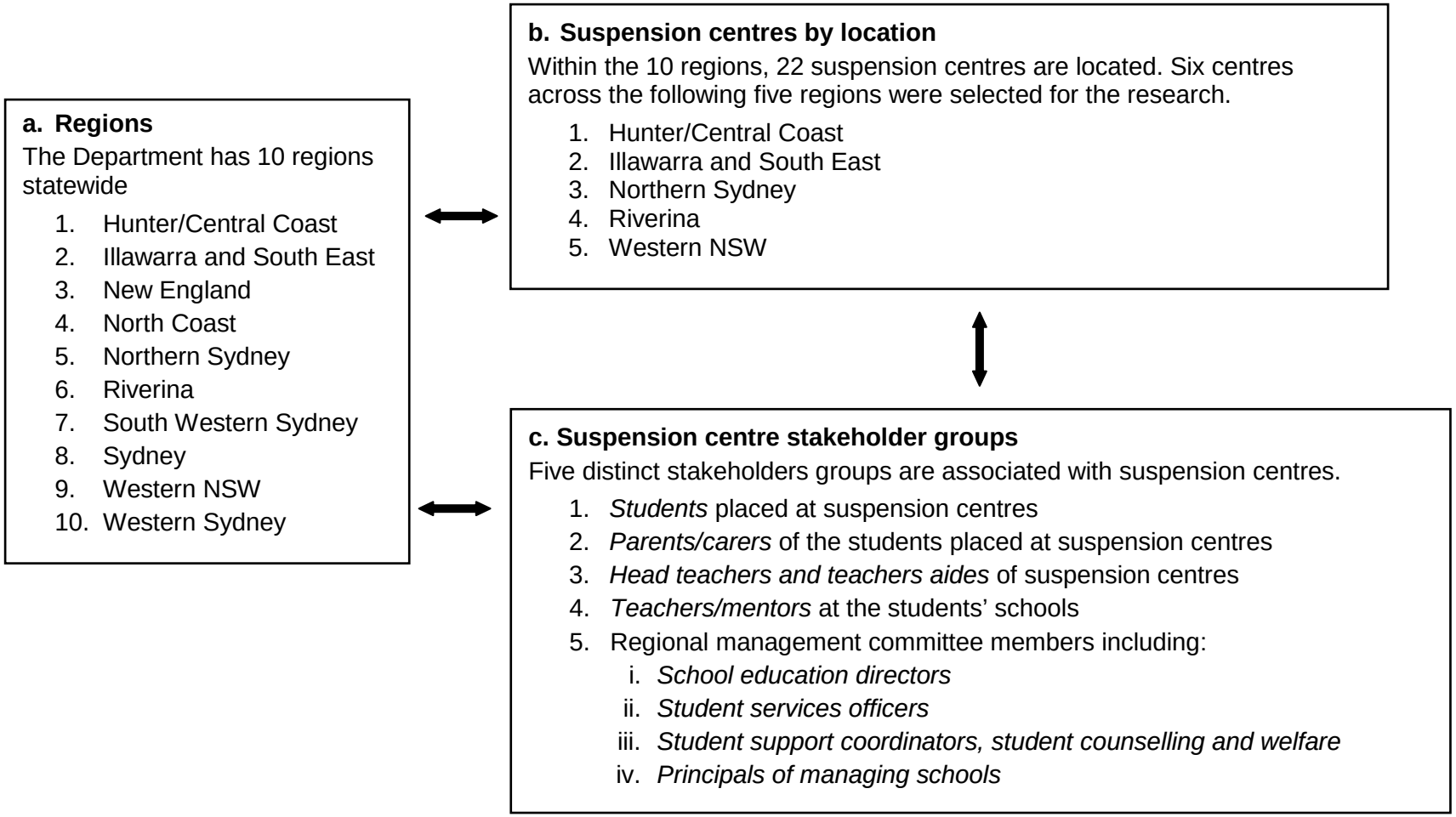
Year	**Number of students suspended**	**Number of students as a % of student enrolments**
K-6	2043	0.5
7-10	8139	3.6
11-12	688	0.8
All Grades	**10878**	**1.5%**

(see Footnote, 4, para. 3).

Regions, suspension centres and stakeholders groups

This research encompasses a large state government organisation with a number of different stakeholders working in different areas within the organisation. Therefore, it is important to describe from the outset the Department's regions, the locations of the suspension centres selected for this research, and suspension centre key stakeholder groups. This is represented diagrammatically as Figure 1. An explanation of the key elements follows Figure 1.

Figure 1 NSW Department of Education and Communities Regions, Suspension Centres and Stakeholder Groups



Explanation of key elements in Figure 1.

a. Regions

The Department consists of 10 regions statewide. The number of suspension centres in each region is reflected in Table 3. This research takes place in five of the regions including Hunter/Central Coast, Illawarra and South East, Northern Sydney, Riverina and Western NSW.

Table 3

Number of Suspension Centres in each Region

Regions		Number of suspension centres
1.	Hunter/Central Coast	3
2.	Illawarra and South East	4
3.	New England	2
4.	North Coast	2
5.	Northern Sydney	1
6.	Riverina	2
7.	South Western Sydney	2
8.	Sydney	2
9.	Western NSW	2
10.	Western Sydney	2
TOTAL 10		TOTAL 22

b. Suspension centres by location

The 22 suspension centres are located across NSW in all 10 regions of the Department in buildings separate to mainstream classrooms in a mixture of metropolitan, non-metropolitan, and rural areas. Six centres across five regions were selected for this research. The method of selecting suspension centres to ensure this research included representation of all of the different types of

centres operating will be further described in Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework and Methodology.

c. Suspension centre stakeholder groups ("people on the ground")

The suspension centre Guidelines refer to five groups of people associated with suspension centres who will be referred to throughout this research as *stakeholder/s*. A brief description of the stakeholder groups as outlined in the Guidelines and other Departmental documents follows.

1. *Students* placed at suspension centres.

The Guidelines (2006) state the following in the Definition. "The suspension centre is an intervention for students who are on long suspension and have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

The Guidelines (2006) outline that the *Goals* of the centre are to:

- assist students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences;
- reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours; and
- build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

2. *Parents/carers* of the students who were placed at suspension centres.

One of the Goals of the suspension centres is to "provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). The suspension centre Guidelines (2006) outline the following under the subheading *Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance*.

- The student's entry into the suspension centre must be preceded by an interview with the student's parents/caregivers.

- The expectations and role of the school, the student and parents/caregivers will be clearly communicated to all parties. (see Footnote 2, para. 7)

In this research, the term *parent* or *parents* included any person or persons having the custody or care of a child.

3. *Head teachers* and *teachers aides* of suspension centres.

The suspension centre Guidelines (2006) refer to staff of suspension centres in the *Operational Guidelines-Staffing*.

- The head teacher appointed to the centre will have experience in teaching students with disruptive behaviours.
- A teachers aide special must be employed at the centre whenever the structured program is operating. (see Footnote 2, para. 10)

4. *Teachers/mentors* at the students' schools.

The suspension centre Guidelines state the following in *Operational Guidelines-Transition*: "The student will be linked to a mentor teacher while in the suspension centre program. The mentor teacher will support the student's return to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 12). Throughout this research, the term *mentor* or *mentors* included any person or persons at the student's school referred to by stakeholders as a "mentor teacher".

5. *Regional management committee members*.

The *General Operating Principles* in the Guidelines state: "The suspension centre will be established under the auspices of the regional student services executive and managed by regional school and student services executive" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). The regional school and student services executive who oversee the operation of suspension centres in each region include school education directors, student services officers and student support coordinators. A brief description of the functions of these positions within the Department follows.

i. *School education directors:*

> The school education director is one of the region's senior educational leaders.
>
> The school education director has clear line management responsibility for schools in their designated, operational area and will lead the implementation of effective, transparent and rigorous accountability and reporting frameworks. The school education director must also develop regional staff under their supervision to ensure the delivery of high quality support to schools in teaching and learning….[5]

ii. *Student services officers*: Provide consultancy support to schools in the implementation of the Department's and regional student services' policies, priorities and programs.

iii. *Student support coordinators (student counselling and welfare)*: "Provide leadership, management and co-ordination of student welfare initiatives and student counselling services across the region".[6]

iv. *Principals of managing schools*: The suspension centre Guidelines (2006) outline the role of *management committees* which are chaired by a principal in the *Operational Guidelines-Management*. The Guidelines state, in part, that a "managing school must be designated by the regional director" and that "the principal of the managing school (if different from the chair) will attend regional management committee meetings" (see Footnote 2, para. 8).

Throughout this research, the term *principal* or *principals* refers to the principal/s of the managing school/s unless stated otherwise.

Scope and limitations of the research

This research covers six suspension centres located across five regions of the Department state-wide and the Guidelines that govern their operation.

[5] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (n.d., online). Position description: School Education Director.

[6] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (2010, online). Jobs@det.

It is important to acknowledge that "institutional epistemology" will influence the ways in which the recommendations in this research might be interpreted and actioned: that is, what counts as "legitimate knowledge" within the Department will influence the ways in which the knowledge resulting from this research will be used (Schön, 1995, pp. 27-28). It is also important to acknowledge that new information or evidence relating to the use of suspension centres is emerging all the time. Therefore, the findings of this research will need to be examined in an ongoing way to ensure that the initial information gathered has ongoing relevance relating to the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres. The differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" will change over time in response to policy amendments and as practices associated with the centres change (Kreitner, 1992; Schein, 1992). Therefore, while this research has the capacity to generate new knowledge relating to the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres, care needs to be taken in extrapolating the results of this research over time.

Some care is also required to ensure that the results of this research are not extrapolated more broadly. This research did not aim, for example, to identify how the centres were being used as "part of a continuum of behaviour services for students who are disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs)" (see Footnote 2, para. 2) or how the centres operated in relation to models of alternative programs such as the Department's behaviour schools or tutorial centres and programs (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006). Some care must also be taken by people reading this research to understand that the aim of this research was to reveal the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" in relation to suspension centres at specific points in time: the beginning of the students stay in the centres and four weeks after their return to their respective schools. This research did not aim to establish impacts on long-term behaviour and learning changes in students after the four week period, or the effects suspension centres had for school communities more broadly.

Organisation of thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two outlines Australian and international research relating to managing disruptive student behaviour in schools; supports available to NSW Government schools to help manage students with disruptive behaviour; and Australian and international supports to help schools manage students who have been suspended or excluded from school.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Chapter Three includes: the rationale; defended position on research paradigm; aim of this research; methodology for Phase One and Phase Two; analytical tools used; and analytical and ethical considerations associated with this research.

Chapter Four: Phase One Results and Discussion

Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion of Phase One of this research. Stakeholders' responses to semi-structured survey interviews are compared to the Guidelines and associated research to help identify enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres.

Chapter Five: Phase Two Results and Discussion

Chapter Five presents the findings and discussion relating to Phase Two of this research. Stakeholders' responses to questionnaire surveys further reveal how the policy framework for suspension centres has been implemented in practice to help identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres.

Chapter Six: Implications and Recommendations

The final chapter of this research discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and outlines associated issues and implications. The limitations of the research are outlined as well as recommendations for research and practice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose and goals of suspension centres, established in NSW, are clearly part of an ongoing focus on the importance governments and education systems place on managing student behaviour.

Some of the issues relating to disruptive student behaviour and the strategies that have been implemented by governments and education systems to address such issues provide the context for this research. This literature review then will focus on three areas relating to student behaviour in schools.

- Australian and international research relating to managing student behaviour in schools over the last 10 to 15 years;
- Supports available to NSW Government schools to help manage students with disruptive behaviour; and
- Australian and international supports to help schools manage students who have been suspended or excluded from school.

Australian and international research relating to managing student behaviour in schools over the last 10 to 15 years

Teachers face the complex task of catering to the socio-cultural and academic curriculum within classrooms to ensure that the needs of all students are met. This is a task researchers describe as more challenging owing to educational reform and curriculum changes during the past 10 to15 years. Wanjura (2000) for example, found the following in relation to the impact of educational change on the roles, responsibilities and resulting work of classroom teachers.

> With the recent Government initiated demand that all students be educated in inclusive classrooms, there has been considerable impact on teachers and their teaching practices. Along with the students who have been diagnosed with various learning, physical, and

> behavioural disabilities, there seems to be an increasing number of those who are undiagnosed in our classrooms. These trends cause considerable concern for teachers and impact on their teaching in many ways. (p. 1)

Similarly, other researchers have reported on the increasingly challenging nature of teachers' roles in catering to students with diverse needs (Rigter & Broadbent, 2002; Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000; Stuart, 1994; Tait & Purdie, 2000:25; Youseff, 2001).

During the past 10 to15 years a range of Australian and International research has been conducted relating to how teachers manage the tasks of teaching. This has included research relating to teacher stress or burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2002; Labone, 2002; Thomas, Clarke, & Lavery, 2003; Thomas, 2009; Williams, 2002); how teachers spend their time in the classroom (Richmond, 2007; Tarricone & Featherston, 2002); beginning teachers' concerns and adjustments to teaching (Goh & Mathews, 2011; Batten, Griffin, & Ainley, 1991; McCormack & Thomas, 2001; White & Moss, 2003); and teachers' attitudes toward integration and mainstreaming of students with special needs and challenging behaviours in mainstream classrooms (Aniftos & McCluskie, 2002; Bender, O'Vail, & Scott, 1995; Center & Ward,1987; Gilmore, Cambell, & Cuskelly, 2003; Konza, 2008; McLeod, 2000; McNally, Cole, & Waugh, 2001; Paterson, 1994; Tait & Purdie, 2000). An overview of the research reveals some of the issues that have been reported relating to the management of student behaviour in schools. The research also reveals some of the types of supports that have been implemented to address such issues.

Australian studies have found, for example, that students with 'behaviour problems' or 'disruptive behaviour' influence teacher stress and teacher attrition (Certo & Fox, 2002; Leete, 2001 in Labone, 2002; Lovegrove & Lewis, 1999; Patterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003; Thomas, 2009; Williams, 2002; Youssef, 2001). Youssef (2001), for example, said the following.

> The most common concern cited by preservice, beginning and experienced teachers as well as being the focus of media reports, professional literature and staffroom

> conversations is students' classroom behavioural problems. Both novice and experienced teachers express concerns and focus on classroom management skills and admit that it is a distinctive factor in causing stress…. Moreover, students' behavioural problems are always referred to be among the key reasons teachers mention when resigning from Government secondary schools in Australia. (p. 6)

Some researchers such as Leete (2001) and Williams and Prestage (2000) say that identifying the determinants of teacher stress and burn out, particularly within the initial years of a teacher's career, is one of the keys to retaining effective, quality teachers in NSW public schools (as cited in Williams, 2002, paras. 14 & 16). Other researchers say that providing effective support for teachers who stay in the profession is also significant because stressed teachers are likely to be increasingly less effective in key areas such as lesson organisation, student behaviour management and responsiveness to students (Biglan, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002; McCormack & Thomas, 2001; Paterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003; White & Moss, 2003; Williams, 2002). One Australian study found that school teachers reported experiences of stress in similar areas to those revealed in studies of school teachers internationally. Thomas, Clarke, and Lavery (2003) found that teachers in New Zealand, America, England, and Australia cited "time and workload pressures (Borg & Riding, 1991; Laughlin, 1984)", "problems with school administration and staff (Borg & Riding, 1991; Smith & Bourke, 1992)", and "student behaviour and student problems (Borg et al., 1991; Chaplain, 1995)" as the main determinants of teacher stress (para. 5). Thomas et al. (2003) undertook a study of 102 teachers across 15 government primary schools in Geelong. These researchers similarly found that common stressors amongst Australian teachers included "time and workload pressures (58%)"; "problems with student behaviour (14%)"; and "problems with school administration and staff (19%)" (paras. 30-32). In another Australian study it was found that for primary and secondary school teachers, student behaviour problems were identified as one of the key themes relating to sources of teacher stress (Howard & Johnson, 2002,

para. 28). In the United States research has found a consistency of teacher concerns about student behaviour over time (Bushaw, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002; Paterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003). Research conducted by American public opinion polls such as the Gallup Organisation, for example, showed that in 1971 discipline ranked third in leading school concerns in public schools. In 1994 and 1998, "lack of discipline" in schools was one of the number one concerns of the public (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994 as cited in Freiberg, Moores, & Moores, 2007, para. 3) and more recently "in 2007 student discipline ranked second in the poll as the biggest problem that public schools face" (Bushaw, 2008, p. 12).

These research findings are of particular significance for classroom teachers because managing student behaviour comprises a significant percentage of teachers' work in classrooms (Vallance, 2001) and research in Australia over the last 10 years, identifies poor student behaviour as one of the top concerns for classroom teachers (Freiberg & Reyes, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2002; McLeod, 2000; Thomas, Clarke, & Lavery, 2003; Vinson, 2002; 2005; Williams, 2002; Youssef, 2001). Australian research has also shown that while disruptive student behaviour is not a widespread problem among large cohorts of students in any one school, the effects are significant. In 2002, for example, the Vinson Report found that, although small in number, "misbehaving students can disrupt learning and demoralise teachers and fellow students" (p. 52). Similarly, other researchers such as (Opuni & Ochoa, 2002) note that disruptive student behaviours within the learning environment have a rippling effect "influencing the disruptive individual, classmates, the school, and subsequently near and far communities". Classroom disruptions impact on teaching and learning time and "school climate and student achievement are casualties of these disruptions" (as cited in Evertson & Weinstein, 2006, p. 735).

Stephenson, Linfoot, and Martin (2000) cite several Australian studies that have reported on student behaviour and teachers' attitudes. The research includes behaviours that teachers have high levels of concern about (Walker & Lamon, 1987); behaviours teachers rate as unacceptable

(Kauffman, Lloyd, & McGee, 1989); the most common type of behaviour problem (Pickering, 1988); and the most commonly reported behaviour problems in secondary schools (Bor et al., 1992). From such research, there does appear, even with differing research methodologies, to be some evidence of the types of student behaviours teachers find most concerning, or with which they experience most difficulties in classrooms. Several studies have attempted, for example, to focus on sets of behaviours that have the potential to cause teachers difficulties. An early study by Pickering (1988) surveyed Catholic primary and secondary schools in Victoria and found that "in broad terms the most common kind of problem behaviour was inattentive-impulsive, followed by disruptive, anxious-low self-esteem, and withdrawn-inattentive" (as cited in Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000, pp. 225-226). A later study by Wheldall and Beaman (1994) found talking out of turn to be the most frequent and troublesome behaviour reported by NSW primary school teachers (as cited in Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin 2000). A study by Rigter and Broadbent (2002) focusing on a small primary school asked teachers what disruptions occurred in their classrooms and to order them from least to most worrying. Teacher responses showed that the least worrying behaviours included day dreaming, name calling and put downs. The most worrying behaviours included baiting, tormenting, tantrums, knocking children out of chairs, physical violence to solve simple problems, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and bizarre behaviour from disturbed students. (para. 44)

The escalating nature of more aggressive behaviours has been reported by several researchers as being of concern to teachers. In 1994 the House of Representatives Standing committee on Employment, Education and Training presented a report on violence in schools and Fitzclarence and Kenway (1998) reported that "there is a perception and concern among teachers that the problems being brought into schools are increasing in both quantity and degree" (as cited in Rigter & Broadbent, 2002, para. 18). However, recent research relating to discipline and suspension in NSW government schools by Gonczi and Riordan (2002, p. 5) has reported that

"serious violence in NSW schools is rare" with schools being among one of the safest places for young people to be. Similarly, in a 1990 survey conducted by Johnson, Oswald, and Adey (1993) of teacher perceptions of discipline problems in South Australian primary schools, 1,100 teachers "were asked to report the occurrence of specific types of discipline problems in their classrooms" (as cited in Fields, 2000, para. 14). "Using data for problems occurring daily or almost daily, it was found that verbal abuse and physical aggression to teachers was very rare" and "about 80% of teachers reported that discipline problems both inside and outside the classroom were not very serious or not a problem at all" (as cited in Fields, 2000, paras. 14 & 16). Such research appears to correlate to British investigations and studies by Fields (1986) and Burke et al. (1994) that found "the problems encountered by most teachers were 'relatively minor' in nature and by and large manageable" (Johnson et al. 1993, p 300 as cited in Fields, 2000, para. 16).

Such research inevitably raises the question as to the types of supports required by teachers, schools and education systems to manage disruptive student behaviour effectively. In Australia, over the past 10 years, some research has been undertaken relating to the types of supports required to have disruptive students engage effectively with education. In 2002, for example, Rigter and Broadbent asked teachers what would be most supportive in terms of helping them manage aggressive students. Teachers indicated that "increased human resources, quiet rooms and good school behaviour management programs would be most useful" (p. 13). At a systemic level, recommendations from the Vinson report in 2002 included the need for the Commonwealth to join with the states in developing and supporting behaviour initiatives across government and non-government schools. In 2005, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released a report titled *A Framework of Principles and Best Practice for Managing Student Behaviour in the Australian Education Context*. The aim of the report was the development of a framework of guiding principles and practices that could be used to support the development of successful student behaviour management programs on a systemic,

district, school, classroom, and individual level in Australian education environments. Significantly, in developing the guiding framework, the report found "many programs focussing on student behaviour management issues, but few formally evaluated and well documented records of the programs" (De Jong, 2005, p. 357).

There is a range of theoretical approaches that sustain a range of behaviour support models nationally and internationally. The theory behind some of the models of behaviour support is that the behaviour of students is a function of the educational context students are in. That is, changing the educational context by, for example, moving students to a different educational setting, providing supportive student-teacher relationships and high academic expectations can assist in the effective implementation of models of intervention to support skill learning (Akey, 2006, p. 32).

A range of classroom, school, and systemic supports have been provided to support teachers and schools in managing students with disruptive behaviour. The next section of this chapter will outline some of the range of supports available to NSW government schools to help manage these students.

Supports available to NSW Government schools to help manage students with disruptive behaviour

First, it is important to provide some context of the scope of the Department in providing an education to students in government schools, including students who require additional support.

> The Department is the largest single organisation, public or private, in Australia. With a recurrent budget of $14.7 billion, the Department is responsible for around one quarter of the State's total budget. Around 741,000 students are taught by over 50,000 full time

> teachers in more than 2,200 NSW Government schools, including pre-schools, primary schools, central schools, high schools, colleges and specialist schools. (paras. 6-7)[7]

According to statistics published by the Department in 2010[8], "$1.7 billion will [have been] spent on equity and special education programs in schools as part of the 2010-2011 State Budget" (para. 1). This included "$1.150 billion to assist students with special learning needs and $210 million to socio-economically disadvantaged school communities" (paras. 2-3). With regard to this funding, the Department supported

> more than 15,000 students with confirmed disabilities in regular schools … with the provision of additional teacher and school learning support officer positions, … provided for more than 800 itinerant and outreach teachers to support students with confirmed disabilities or behaviour disorders in regular and special schools, … and provided more than 1,370 teaching positions to support students with learning difficulties through the Learning Assistance Program. (see Footnote 7, paras. 7-10)

The Department clearly provides considerable personnel and program support to assist NSW government schools manage students with disruptive behaviour. This includes support at a classroom, school, and regional level. Examples of some of these supports are listed below.

Classroom and school level

"Schools have a range of supports to meet the needs of all students. These include conflict resolution, mentoring, values education, counselling, and talking with parents" (para. 2).[9] Each school has a learning support team, or student welfare team. The team reviews policies and practices used to maintain high standards of student behaviour, and implements intervention

[7] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (n.d., online). Internet website homepage: About us-Who we are.

[8] NSW Department of Education and Communities (n.d., online). Equity and special education programs in schools.

[9] NSW Department of Education and Communities (n.d., online). Behaviour Programs.

strategies for students with inappropriate behaviour. A key member of the team is the school counsellor who provides expertise in the assessment of students, and supporting teachers with management strategies for both the classroom and playground. (see footnote 9, pp. 3&6)

Regional level

The Department's document titled *Behaviour Services: Guidelines for resource utilisation (2007)* states:

> Each region is allocated a range of resources to support students with disruptive behaviour. These resources include support teachers behaviour, suspension centres, behaviour schools, tutorial centres and programs, and support for students with emotional disturbance.
>
> The region is responsible for determining how behaviour resources will be utilised to meet the needs of students with disruptive behaviour. The allocation of resources will be determined by the regional director, and coordinated by the regional student support coordinators and student services officers in consultation with representatives of the relevant service (see Footnote 1, p. 3).

The range of resources includes *support teachers behaviour.* The Department's Behaviour Services Guidelines describes that support teachers behaviour "are school-based and assist schools in planning and implementing appropriate educational, vocational and behaviour management programs for students with disruptive behaviour" (see Footnote 1, p. 4). In carrying out their roles support teachers behaviour may, for example,

> support schools by assessing disruptive behaviours exhibited by students; … work in a case management model on individualised or group behaviour programs; and … support the transition of students returning to mainstream settings following a placement in a behaviour support program…. Specialist support teachers behaviour work in regional

> behaviour teams generally consisting of up to 5.5 full time equivalent behaviour teachers, supported by an assistant principal behaviour. (see Footnote 1, pp. 4-5)

In addition to the specialist roles of support teachers behaviour, other personnel are available at a regional level to provide specialist support for students in NSW Government schools. These personnel include, for example, student welfare consultants, student support officers, student services coordinators, home school liaison officers, and Aboriginal student liaison officers. These personnel assist students and their families and schools in providing various supports for students with attendance issues and emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties.

Specialist settings

If, despite implementation of a range of school and regional supports, a student is suspended from school or their behaviour is such that is felt that the student can no longer be maintained in a mainstream educational setting, students may be referred to a range of specialist settings. Researchers such as Fields (2005) cite the "introduction of separate educational facilities for chronically misbehaving students as one of the most significant educational decisions made by a state government" (p. 6). Some of the "separate educational facilities" provided to government schools include suspension centres; tutorial centres and programs; behaviour schools; and emotional disturbance schools. The Department provides statistics that: "In 2010 there are 1029 available places in NSW specialist schools supporting behaviour" (paras. 1-2 & 4-5).[10] A description of suspension centres; tutorial centres and programs; behaviour schools; and emotional disturbance schools and programs follows.

Suspension centres: The Department's Guidelines define suspension centres as "an intervention for students who are on long suspension and have been identified by their school as

[10] NSW Department of Education and Communities. (n.d., online). Schools Directorate 2010 specialist schools supporting behaviour-available places by year.

likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

Unlike suspension centres which are for students who are suspended from school, the Department's tutorial centres and behaviour schools provide intensive support for students who can no longer be maintained in a mainstream education setting.

Tutorial centres and programs: The Department's Behaviour Services Guidelines (see Footnote 1) state tutorial centres and programs cater for students generally "in Years 5 to 10 who display on-going violent and severe disruptive behaviours that require intensive and significant levels of intervention that cannot be provided within a mainstream or support class setting" (p. 22). "The program will usually be a 10 to 20 week intensive behaviour intervention with continued academic program provided in consultation with the home school" (p. 23) with the aim of "successful transition to a less restrictive setting" (p. 22).

Behaviour schools: Behaviour schools as defined in the Department's Behaviour Services Guidelines (see Footnote 1)

> provide intensive behavioural and educational support for students who have exhausted all other regional behaviour support provisions, and/or for whom a risk assessment indicates a behaviour school placement is required. Behaviour schools provide a range of specialist programs for students in Years 5 to 10 with the aim of returning the students to regular schools or supporting their transition to other education or employment opportunities. (p. 8)

The Guidelines further state that "generally students can be placed in the school for a maximum of four school terms. Exceptional circumstances may require a lengthier enrolment and are subject to negotiation using regional placement protocols" (p. 26). Some behaviour schools support students with diagnosed mental health disorders.

Emotional disturbance (ED) – Mental health schools and programs: Emotional disturbance schools and programs as defined in the Department's Behaviour Services Guidelines (see Footnote 1)

> provide intensive educational support for students who have been confirmed … as having mental health problems and/or disorders. Emotional disturbance schools, classes and programs provide a range of specialist support for students across Years K-12. They aim to address the needs of students with mental health problems and/or disorders by building a culture of support…. (p.8)

The Guidelines (2007) state that: "To be eligible for support students must have educational needs that are directly related to their identified disability that cannot be met from within the full range of resources available from the school and region" (p. 27). These schools (also called *schools for specific purposes*); tutorial centres and programs; and behaviour schools have seven students per class supported by a teacher and a teachers aide.

It is important to highlight at this point that the definitions of emotional disturbance schools and programs; tutorial centre and programs; and behaviour schools differ from suspension centres, in that they could be described as catering to students "who are unlikely or unable to access mainstream education programs for a number of reasons" (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006, pp. 30-31). Such supports have a similar purpose to "alternative education programs" described by researchers such Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) in that they serve "students who are at risk of dropping out of school" (p. 1). Suspension centres do not strictly fit this description of "alternative education programs" because suspension centres are for students who, for various reasons, are on long suspension from school. The alternatives for students when they are suspended from schools are either to stay at home or in the community for the duration of their suspensions, or to attend placements at suspension centres. Suspension centres, in supporting students who are "likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to

schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1), support the Department's *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures (2011)* which states the following.

> Suspension is not intended as a punishment…. A suspension resolution meeting must be convened by the principal at the earliest opportunity. The expectation is that students should be returned to school at the earliest opportunity. The school counsellor report and any advice from the school learning support team should be considered in resolving the suspension. (see Footnote 3, p. 9)

Suspension centres then are specifically designated for students who are on long suspension from school and are placed at the centres in the short-term, with the aim of successfully returning students to their schools. Therefore, the centres have a distinctively different purpose compared to emotional disturbance schools and programs, tutorial centre and programs, and behaviour schools which support students who can no longer be maintained in mainstream classrooms. This distinction is important to remember when comparing the differences between policy and practice in relation to suspension centres.

Australian and international supports to help schools manage students who have been suspended or excluded from school

Smylie, Miller, and Westbrook (2008) state that "among the distant contexts that shape teachers' work are state and federal policy environments" (para. 46). Smylie et al. (2008) identify research by McDonnell and Elmore (1987, p. 133) who say that state and federal policies influence teachers' work by "bringing the resources of government-money, rules, and authority into the service of political objectives and by using those resources to influence the actions of individuals and institutions" (para. 46). There are numerous examples of state and federal policies that influence teachers' work and this includes the provision of resources and/or programs to help schools support students with disruptive behaviour. For the purpose of this research, a literature

review of programs will be confined to models of support within Australia or internationally for students who have been suspended or excluded from school. In some countries, exclusion refers to either the suspension of students from school, or expulsion of students from school where students cannot return to particular schools.

At the outset, it should be noted, that much of the literature relating to other countries such as New Zealand, Britain, and the United States of America focus on "alternative education programs" for students with disruptive behaviour or who are "alienated from school". There are few references to research relating to programs that cater exclusively for students who are suspended from school. However, of the available literature in New Zealand, Britain, and the United States of America that refer to alternative education programs, the models are described in one of two ways. This provides some understanding of how models of support for students with disruptive behaviour are positioned. Commonly, researchers describe alternative education programs either as a punitive model, largely as a response to legislative requirements or as a proactive model of support that aims to teach students more appropriate behaviours. Researchers such as Morrison, Anthony, Storino, and Dillon (2001) describe the punitive models as "responses to legislative requirements rather than responses to student educational needs" (p. 276). These researchers say that such models aim to enable schools to remove any immediate danger posed by student behaviour while still meeting their responsibilities to students. Invariably, such interventions are described as having an over reliance on punishment rather than addressing ways of developing pro-social student behaviour and assisting students to return to school. However, during the last 10 to 20 years, there have been a number of examples of alternative education programs or "withdrawal programs" reported in the literature which encourage students to change their disruptive behaviour by providing opportunities for students to develop pro-social skills. Some researchers say that these programs are based on the premise that students act violently when they do not have alternative behaviours to use (Kellermann, Fuqua-Whittley, & Rivara,

1996; Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1996; Rotheram, 1982 as cited in Breunlin, Bryant-Edwards, Hetherington, & Cimmarusti, 2002, p. 351). Such researchers also follow the theory that it is possible to teach students alternative behaviour, as behaviour is learnt (Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1994; Eron & Slaby, 1994; Kellermann, Fuqua-Whittley, & Rivara, 1996; Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1996; Rotheram, 1982 as cited in Breunlin et al., 2002, p. 351).

There are some examples in the literature of models of alternative education programs that support students who are unable to access mainstream education and the characteristics of some of these programs appear to be similar to the models of behaviour schools and tutorial centres and programs provided for students in NSW government schools. For example, in New Zealand, under the alternative education policy, the Ministry of Education provides funding for education programs for young people, aged 13 to 15 years, who have become alienated from school. Alternative education provision, as defined within the New Zealand framework, includes school-based programs set within segregated units, community based programs, or individual alternative educational placements for young people. While the examples found in the literature were few, there were some international programs with descriptive information about how the programs operated and some of these described the outcomes for disruptive students and mainstream schools. Such programs include interim alternative educational settings established in American schools as a response to violent or disruptive student behaviour (Etscheidt, 2002, online). Etscheidt (2002, online) reported that students placed in interim alternative educational settings generally had an individual educational plan that outlined strategies and services to remediate their behaviour. Within the settings, students accessed the general education curriculum; received supports identified in their individual educational plans; and were provided with strategies designed to address the disruptive behaviour. While there are no program outcomes reported in the research related to these settings, it is noted that the model of support

provided follows findings described in the research which suggest that student placement is most effective if it follows a planned intervention.

A few programs which have been described in the literature are voluntary programs that offer support to students who have been suspended from school. Such programs align with the focus of this research on suspension centres, which aim to support students who have been long-suspended from NSW government schools. One example includes the American Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behaviour Program for students who have been suspended from school owing to acts of violence and for the parents of these students (Breunlin et al., 2002, p. 351). Parents enrol themselves and their child in the program which operates off the school site with non-school staff. By participating in the program students can reduce the length of time of their school suspension and students return to school at the conclusion of the program. The program aims to reduce the major risk factors identified as leading to violence: "academic failure and poor attitude to school" and the "rate of re-suspension and disciplinary action taken against program participants" (Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2010 as cited in Breunlin et al., 2002, pp. 351-352). Breunlin et al. (2002) describe the program as "multi-level" as it teaches students social problem-solving and thinking skills and includes parent and family training modules (p. 356). Breunlin et al. (2002) reported that follow up data was maintained on program participants and a review found that students who had participated in the program were "four times less likely to be re-suspended" for violent behaviour and received fewer other disciplinary infringements than did students who had been suspended for violent behaviour and had not participated in the program (p. 349). However, while these findings are significant, it is important to cite the delimitations Breunlin et al. (2002) noted relating to the program. These include that the program was trialled in a middle class area with a predominantly white population, making it difficult to generalise the positive findings to other socio-economic or cultural groups. Also, while the program identified

the goal of avoiding academic failure for students accessing the program, academic or remediation programs were not integrated within the program.

Britain's *learning support units* are another example of a program described in the literature which offered support to students who had been suspended from school and which students entered into voluntarily. However, such units also support a broader range of students than just those who had been suspended from school. Learning support units are described as existing "… to keep disaffected pupils in school and working whilst they are addressing their behavioural problems, facilitating their re-integration into mainstream classes as soon as possible" (Excellence in Cities, 2006, para. 1).

Research in Britain describes that learning support units are a small number of units which are shared between two or three primary schools and cater to students who require particularly intensive support. In reviewing the literature relating to the units, it seems that they have some characteristics in common with the Department's suspension centres. Braun, Xavier, and West (2002) found that the London Department for Education and Skills listed four main objectives of learning support units. These are to:

- enable schools to provide separate short-term teaching and support programmes tailored to the needs of difficult pupils;
- keep disaffected pupils in school and working while addressing their behaviour problems and helping to reintegrate them into mainstream classes as quickly as possible;
- minimise the disruption caused by the most difficult pupils without excluding them; and
- provide a short term 're-entry' point for pupils starting at schools who may have previously been excluded for behavioural reasons. (p. 9)

Braun et al. (2002) described that the units aimed to get "children on the fringes of education back on track by equipping them with new skills and strategies that could be carried over, or transferred, when they returned to full-time mainstream classes" (p. 4). The units followed the same curriculum as mainstream classes with a range of subjects including literacy, numeracy lessons, and information and communication technology. The units also included work on student behaviour issues and developing social skills, teaching students the skills and strategies that could be transferred to their mainstream schools (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 5).

The fact that the units catered to students who had been suspended from school and aimed to equip students with skills and strategies to return students back to mainstream classrooms as quickly as possible reflects their similarity to the Purpose and Goals stated in the suspension centre Guidelines (see Footnote 2) for NSW government schools. The learning support units were described as being staffed by full-time managers with backgrounds in teaching and expertise in behaviour management and special educational needs, and two other members of staff in each unit (p. 19). Again, some similarities are noted with suspension centres, as the Guidelines (see Footnote 2) state with regard to Staffing: "the head teacher appointed to the centre will have experience in teaching students with disruptive behaviours" and "a teachers aide special must be employed at the centre whenever the structured program is operating" (para. 10). Of the four units operating, three units ran programs for half a term, either part-time or full-time. The other unit ran a longer 12 week programme, offering three half-day sessions a week for stage two pupils, and two sessions a week for stage one pupils (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 4). The three units offered placements for lengths of time similar to the NSW Departments' suspension centres, which cater to students for up to 20 school days (20 days is the maximum number of days students can be long suspended from school).

Positive outcomes were generally reported for students who had been placed at learning support units and for their mainstream schools. Positive student outcomes included "increased

self-esteem and confidence, academic improvements, positive social and peer group impacts, and behaviour changes" as well as "improved attendance" (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, pp. 14 & 47). Positive outcomes reported in the literature across mainstream schools, in general, included that teachers appreciated the specialist knowledge and support of the learning support unit staff and their communication related to good classroom practices (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 41).

While the literature generally reported positive outcomes for students placed at learning support units and their schools in general, there were some instances identified by the managers or staff of the units where the outcomes were not so positive. These included where some parents initially thought that their child had been "singled out" (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 43). Examples were also reported of a student who did not want to attend the centre and another student who felt "singled out" and "resentful" because he thought he had been referred to the unit for "bad behaviour" and was not able to be convinced otherwise (Braun & West, 2003, p. 37).

Apart from such research in the United States of America and Britain there appears to be little other Australian or international research reported in the literature relating to supports that are similar to the NSW Department of Education and Communities' suspension centre model. While the literature describes many alternative education programs which cater to students with disruptive behaviour, the programs do not exclusively cater to students while they are suspended from school.

There has, however, been some relevant Australian research relating to effective practices in supporting students with disruptive behaviour. This research is useful to consider in scoping the characteristics of programs to enable successful outcomes for models of support such as suspension centres. Some characteristics of such programs include having proactive system-wide approaches to managing disruptive behaviour; a multi-level approach (that is, that the program as one part of a planned strategy to keep students involved in school); collaboratively developed

school plans; appropriate curriculum to help avoid academic failure; positive strategies to manage behaviour, including functional based assessment; explicit instruction in proactive social skills for students including conflict resolution; ongoing training for staff in positive behaviour management; assessment of program effectiveness; support of parents; and the active and willing participation of the students (Conway in Foreman, 2001, pp. 311-354). More recently, research by Michail (2011) has supported such earlier research findings in stating that

> a large volume of the literature supports a multi-sector approach to working with students with challenging behaviour. Strong links between school, community, and family are unmistakably one of the most fundamental and vital elements of the most promising programs (Collin & Law, 2001; Cowling, 2009; Massey et al., 2007; Partington, 2001) regardless of other strategies that are being utilised (Riordan, 2006). These links are said to increase student self esteem (Riordan, 2006) and even children considered these connections essential where students were in danger of being suspended, expelled or already had been excluded (Knipe et al., 2007). (p. 18)

Importantly, such researchers also note that other variables that need to be taken into account when developing any behaviour change or skill training program are that students need to "want to change" their behaviour and that they need to be actively involved in the process (Ashman & Conway, 1993, p. 130). Ashman & Conway (1993) also recommend that the change program "occur within the teaching-learning context" if new behaviours are to be integrated into the students' behaviour repertoire (Ashman & Conway, 1993, p. 130).

This literature review clearly indicates that educators nationally and internationally recognise the importance of addressing issues relating to students' behaviour in terms of the needs of individual students with disruptive behaviour as well as the impact such students have on others in the educational milieu. Interestingly it also indicates that while some systems have set up different models to cater for specific student needs, suspension centres established in NSW are unique in

providing support exclusively for students who have been suspended from school. The research also reveals that there has been little research to evaluate such programmes and compare policy and practice in the way that this research aims to do.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Rationale

The nature of educational institutions is reflective of the broader society in which we live. There is a range of individuals with unique personalities and characteristics existing in proximity to each other. Some individuals seemingly live in harmony with others around them while others, for a variety of reasons, do not. The terms "disruptive student behaviour" or "students with behaviour problems" are terms used within educational settings to describe students whose behaviour interrupts the learning of themselves and/or others. Australian research has shown that while disruptive student behaviour is not a widespread problem amongst large cohorts of students in any one school, the effects of such behaviour are significant (Vinson, 2002) and that poor student behaviour is one of the top concerns for classroom teachers (Freiberg & Reyes, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2002; McLeod, 2000; Thomas, Clarke, & Lavery, 2003; Vinson, 2002; Vinson, 2005; Williams, 2002; Youssef, 2001).

Of interest to this research is the fact that the New South Wales government established educational facilities separate from mainstream classrooms for students with disruptive behaviour including suspension centres that students can go to when they are on long suspension from school. The centres differ from the traditional model of "suspension from school" where students are excluded from their schools and usually remain at home or in the community for the period of their suspension.

The establishment of suspension centres afforded a unique research opportunity in that the model, implemented by the Department since 2003, appears to be one of only a few types of support provided for students while they are on long suspension from school world-wide. The centres provided a unique opportunity to understand better how policy guidelines have been

implemented in practice and the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the model from stakeholders' perspectives.

The conceptual framework for this study

This research is based on qualitative action-based research, which provides "a means to systematically resolve problems, develop and evaluate programs, and develop policies and procedures in a strategic, community orientated manner" (Stringer, 2004, pp. 5-6). Anderson, Herr, and Jones (2007) identify: "At its best, action research is 'disturbing' research, potentially interrupting day-to-day practices" (as cited in McGuire, 2009, p. 2) and Ferrance (2000) states that such research is "… a quest for knowledge about how to improve" (p. 9).

To help identify the parameters of this research Schwab's (1969) Table of Intervention was initially utilised as a way to help conceptualise the key aspects of suspension centres (as cited in Bryant, 1995, p. 20). Schwab's table was useful in revealing my knowledge and assumptions of suspension centres prior to conceptualising the research question. The table was also used in an ongoing way throughout this research as a means of checking underlying assumptions as the research was implemented. Schwab's (1969) table was used to consider what I knew about the practices in suspension centres and the interactions between stakeholders associated with the centres. In using the table (see Appendix C Table C4, Schwab's Table of Intervention), I considered what could be said about the particular subject (A-D) in relation to the particular predicate (1-4). In noting information within the table, the questions I considered included: "What do I think about …?" and "What have I noticed about …?" (as cited in Bryant, 1995, pp. 20-21). In recording information within the table my thoughts were based on observations made when I was facilitating the establishment of the centres during 2005-2006. As a result of completing the table the following broad research questions were initially considered for this research.

1. What is the role of suspension centres in supporting students' successful return to school following long suspension?
    - How can the centres work most successfully?; and
    - What are the enabling or inhibiting factors for success?
2. Are suspension centres an effective intervention for students with disruptive behaviour?
    - Does time spent in a centre help to "rehabilitate" students and prevent cycles of disruptive behaviour?

In considering the second group of questions, it quickly became apparent that translating these questions into something measurable would be challenging. To scope how this might be achieved, I used De Vaus's (2001) method and determined that the concept "student is placed at a suspension centre when they are on long suspension from school" would require a measurable outcome such as "reduced levels of student's disruptive behaviour when the student returns to their school". Developing a reliable and valid research design would entail ensuring that the causal conclusions claimed as a result of the research could be substantiated: that is, that the "plausible rival ways of accounting for the phenomenon being studied" would also need to be identified (De Vaus, 2001, pp. 22-23). Clearly, to determine whether suspension centres brought about improvements (or otherwise) in student behaviour or whether differences were attributable to other variables (such as other school programs) would be far too difficult a task. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to show how the findings had been arrived at in a way which would have enabled fellow researchers to repeat the research methods (Cohen, 2000).

In contrast, the first group of research questions enabled descriptive research and provided a means to discover the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995) to help provide new or more useful knowledge relating to the enabling or inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres.

Defended position on paradigm

This research aimed to facilitate a process whereby stakeholders involved with suspension centres were provided with the opportunity to identify, from their perspectives, the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres,.

Positioning this research within the qualitative paradigm acknowledges that suspension centres are flexible models of support that operate within a policy framework. The Guidelines (2006) state that "the model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). This research recognises that knowledge and practice are constructed by people together and, as such, the ways in which suspension centres have been established and operated is reflective of the influences and practices of stakeholders associated with the centres. This includes stakeholders at a regional level who have oversight of the centres; teachers within the centres; teachers at students' schools; parents of the students who have been placed at suspension centres; and students themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Paul & Marfo, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The ways in which suspension centres have operated could vary depending on how stakeholders have interpreted the suspension centre Guidelines and how they view the role of the centres in providing support for disruptive student behaviour. Positioning this research within the qualitative paradigm aimed to provide the means to influence effective practice via collaborating with other people. In establishing the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use", it was assumed that it was the community the suspension centres service that could provide information on what is real or useful knowledge.

The aim of this research

This research is descriptive and aimed to discover the differences between the Guidelines for suspension centres and how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice by exploring the

operation of suspension centres (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). The overarching research question is: “What are the differences between ‘espoused educational policy' and ‘policy in use’ in relation to suspension centres?” (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). To answer this question, stakeholders were asked their opinions based on the following sub-questions.

- Research sub-question one: What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question two: What needs to be improved with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question three: What evidence is there that suspension centres are meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines?

Stakeholders’ responses helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres from their perspectives. Comparing the responses to the suspension centre Guidelines, in turn, could result in recommendations for policy and practice to maximise the success of the centres. This research is intended to help inform future development of the suspension centres and the guidelines that govern them.

Methodology

The methodological framework for this research aimed to provide descriptive information by using a qualitative approach with a variety of stakeholders in two distinct research phases to generate rich qualitative data (Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen, & McCluskey, 2009, p. 3). The methodology used in both phases of this research is described here in detail.

Selecting suspension centres for the research

The 22 suspension centres across the state are located in buildings separate from mainstream classrooms in a mixture of metropolitan, non-metropolitan and rural areas across the 10 regions of the Department. Of the 22 centres, 11 centres are located on the sites of mainstream schools and

the other 11 centres are located on, or co-located with, the sites of other specialist behaviour support services for students in government schools such as behaviour schools or tutorial centres and programs (five out of the 11 centres) or other services such as Police Citizens Youth Clubs or community centres (six out of the 11 centres). For the purpose of this research, it was important to include representation of all of the different types of centres operating. Therefore, the 22 centres were grouped by like type according to three groups of distinguishing features. These features were firstly, the geographic location which included metropolitan, non-metropolitan, or rural areas of NSW; secondly, the sites on which the centres were located which included whether the centres were co-located at mainstream schools, on the sites of other specialist schools, or adjoining school sites; and thirdly whether the centres catered mainly to primary school students or high school students. Grouping each of the 22 suspension centres by like type according to their distinguishing features resulted in five different groupings and each of these groupings were given a *type number*. A breakdown of suspension centres by type is attached at Appendix D.

The names of each of the centres grouped within each type number were then cut out and randomly placed in a box from which one suspension centre was drawn from each type number. For example, for type number one, centres 1-6 were cut out individually and placed in a box. One suspension centre was then selected from the box. This selection was called *grouping type one*. Suspension centre number 14 was included as *grouping type three*, as it was one of the only type and provided a unique combination of the three groups of distinguishing features. This process resulted in the following random selection of five suspension centres, one from each grouping type from various regions of the Department, to participate in this research. Throughout this research the centres will be referred to by using a pseudonym as italicised in brackets.

- Grouping type 1: Metropolitan location on a school site catering to high school students - Northern Sydney Region *(Abberfield)*;

- Grouping type 2: Rural location on a school site catering to high school students - Riverina Region *(Ashwood and Blackburn)*;
- Grouping type 3: Non-metropolitan location on a school site catering to primary school students - Illawarra and South East Region *(Mitcham)*;
- Grouping type 4: Non-metropolitan location off site of a school catering to high school students - Hunter/Central Coast Region *(Listerfield)*; and
- Grouping type 5: Rural location adjoining a school site catering to high school students - Western NSW Region *(Heatherdale)*.

Blackburn-Riverina Region was added to the suspension centres used in this research post the random selection. This was because there were only two students placed at the suspension centre at Ashwood at the time the research was carried out, which was not a large enough sample. Ashwood and Blackburn suspension centres had the same distinguishing features.

Survey instruments and stakeholders involved

As this research encompassed a large state government organisation with a variety of different stakeholders, the ways in which descriptive data was gathered was instrumental in providing rich and meaningful information. To best address the research questions it was necessary to conduct the research in two phases. To enhance the reader's understanding each phase of the research, including the survey instruments and stakeholders involved, is represented diagrammatically at Figure 2. A description of the methodology used for the two research phases follows Figure 2.

Figure 2 Phases of the Research, Survey Instruments and Stakeholders Involved

Phase one: Semi-structured survey interviews

Four stakeholder groups (excluding mentors) were asked questions focusing on four key themes while students were placed at suspension centres.

As a result, 71 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following groups of key stakeholders.

i. 22 students placed at the centres
- 12 high school; and
- 10 primary school.

ii. 14 parents of the students who were placed at the centres
- nine high school; and
- five primary school.

iii. Seven head teachers and eight teachers aides of suspension centres

iv. 20 Regional management committee members
- five school education directors;
- five student support coordinators, student counselling and welfare;
- four student services officers;
- five principals of managing schools; and
- one community representative.

Phase two: Questionnaire surveys

Students, their parents and mentors self-completed a questionnaire survey on day one or two of the students' placements at suspension centres and four weeks after the students returned to their schools.

As a result, 41 questionnaire surveys were completed by the following groups of stakeholders.

i. 10 students placed at the centres
- five high school; and
- five primary school.

ii. 15 parents of the students who were placed at the centres
- eight high school; and
- seven primary school.

iii. 16 mentors from the students' schools
- nine high school; and
- seven primary school.

Research methodology: Phase One.

Phase One of this research aimed to provide descriptive information relating to the three research sub-questions to help reveal how the policy framework for suspension centres had been implemented in practice (Schön, 1995). Semi-structured survey interviews were used with four groups of stakeholders while students were attending the centres. The stakeholders were students accessing the suspension centres; their parents; head teachers and teachers aides of the centres; and regional management committee members. The regional management committee members included school education directors; student support coordinators; student services officers; community representatives; and principals.

The semi-structured survey interviews aimed to provide descriptive information relating to the three research sub-questions. The interview questions, therefore, aimed to establish, from stakeholders' perspectives, what were the best things happening or what should be maintained, what things needed to be improved in the suspension centres, and any evidence that the centres were meeting the purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines (Cherry, 2010). As such, the questions in Phase One were designed to invite stakeholders to share their thoughts and opinions relating to four key focus areas (see Appendix Ea-e Phase One focus area questions).

A synopsis of stakeholder's responses to one of the four focus area questions is provided at Appendix F. That is, whether stakeholders were able to comment on changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attended the centre.

It should be noted here that in reporting stakeholder's responses to the research questions the responses were cited according to the student and suspension centre to which the responses referred. For example, the two students at Ashwood suspension centres were identified as S1, Ashwood and S2, Ashwood. Therefore, if the mentor of S1 commented on the student, the citation reflected S1 mentor, Ashwood.

Research methodology: Phase Two

Phase Two of this research aimed to provide further descriptive information relating to the research sub-questions to help reveal how the policy framework for suspension centres had been implemented in practice (Schön, 1995). Phase Two aimed to discover whether the centres were meeting aspects of the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines: that is, what evidence was there that suspension centres

- assisted students make a successful return to schooling? (Purpose);
- reinforced and developed appropriate attitudes and behaviours? (Goals); and
- built capacity and understanding on how to reengage at school and re-integrate to positive work habits? (Goals).

Questionnaire surveys were self-completed by three groups of stakeholders who could best describe the students' behaviour and learning at home and school at two different times: first at day one or two of the students' placements at suspension centres and then four weeks after the students' last day at the centre. The stakeholders were students accessing the suspension centres, their parents, and a mentor from the students' schools. Having stakeholders complete the questionnaire survey early in the students' placements at the centres and four weeks after their placements provided stakeholders with some time to establish whether there were any short-term changes in students' behaviour and/or learning. The survey also enabled stakeholders to explain to what they attributed any changes (see Appendix G, Phase Two questionnaire survey: Student; parent; mentor).

A synopsis of stakeholders' responses to one of the three questions in the questionnaire survey is provided at Appendix H, Table H5. That is, question one: Describe the student's behaviour at school/home. Collecting information from a variety of stakeholders and using different methods at different points in time enhances the reliability and validity of the data gathered and enables triangulation of the data.

Appendix I shows the numbers of stakeholders who undertook the research at each suspension centre.

Analytical tools

The responses to the research questions in both phases of this research were analysed in two ways. First, stakeholders' responses were compiled and thoroughly examined to enable the responses to be grouped according to themes or common responses that emerged. That is, words or phrases that had similar meanings were highlighted using different colour codes. Then all of the words or phrases from the same colour coding were grouped together as 'types of responses'. These responses were then sorted according to the frequency of occurrence of the words or phrases from most to least frequent and a brief description written to explain the characteristics of each type of response. After all of the data was analysed and sorted in this way, the most frequent groups of responses were defined as robust themes or common responses.

After the sorting and grouping of responses, the responses were again analysed by theme or common response to help reveal the storylines associated with each theme (Bruner, 1990 as cited in Harrington, 2006, p. 102). The storylines were common groupings of responses within each 'type of response' that best described the characteristics of each type of response. The ways in which this helped to meet the aims of the research is described for each phase of the research.

Phase One

Responses to the research questions were first compiled and examined relating to research sub-question one "What are the best things that are happening with suspension centres or what do you think should be maintained with suspension centres?", and research sub-question two "What needs to be improved with suspension centres?". The responses were then analysed and sorted according to themes that emerged. The analysis revealed the following themes.

- What are the best things that are happening or what do you think should be maintained?
  - Theme one: “Students are learning …”; and
  - Theme two: “Suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills …”. (see Appendix J Table J6 for example)
- What things need to be improved?
  - Theme one: “Communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved”;
  - Theme two: “Head teachers require further professional learning …”; and
  - Theme three: “Students’ schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres …”. (see Appendix K Table K7 for example)

In order to make meaning of stakeholders’ responses, the themes were then reviewed and further examined to reveal significant storylines associated with each theme. The storylines were derived from the most common descriptions and explanations of stakeholders’ responses related to each theme. As such, the storylines gave meaning to the themes and further described what a significant number of stakeholders thought was working well or what should be maintained with suspension centres, and what things needed to be improved.

Phase Two

Stakeholders’ responses to the questionnaire survey were first compiled and examined relating to research sub question three: “What evidence is there that suspension centres are meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines?”. This was achieved by compiling and examining stakeholders’ responses to the first two questions in the questionnaire surveys: “Describe the student’s behaviour at school/home” and “Have there had been any noticeable

changes in the student's behaviour or learning recently? Explain this", at day one or two of students' placements at suspension centres and four weeks after the placements had concluded. Responses of stakeholders to Phase One focus area question one related to whether they were able to "comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attended the centre" (Appendix F) were also analysed to help address research sub-question three (whether the centres were meeting aspects of the Purpose and Goals outlined in the Guidelines).

Stakeholders' responses were then sorted according to themes that emerged to reveal the following three categories of response.

- Categories of response one: Stakeholders reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning (See example at Appendix L Table L8);
- Categories of response two: Stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning; and
- Categories of response three: Stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning.

In order to make meaning of these categories, stakeholders' responses were then reviewed and further analysed to reveal significant storylines associated with each category of response. The storylines emerged from comparing stakeholders' descriptions of students' behaviour at home and school; the nature of any noticeable changes in students' behaviour and/or learning; and stakeholders' explanations for any changes between day one or two of the students' placement at suspension centres and four weeks after the students had left the centres. In identifying associated storylines for each category of response, stakeholders' responses to question three were also analysed to establish whether stakeholders felt that students would/did benefit from the suspension centre placement and their explanation for their responses.

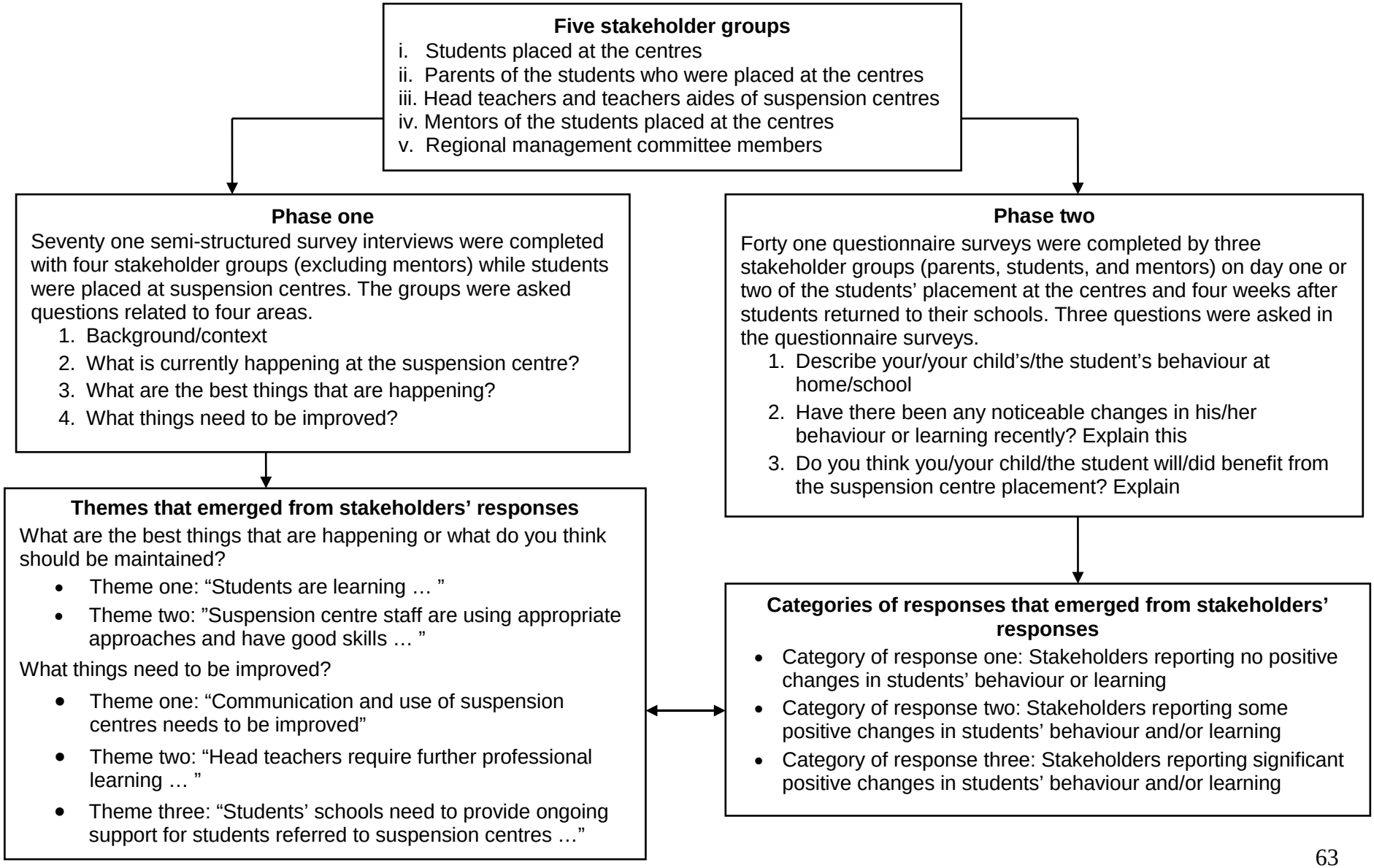
The storylines unpacked and gave meaning to the categories of response and provided descriptive information relating to stakeholders' responses. The information collated from

students, their parents, and mentors during Phase Two of this research supplemented information gathered from the four stakeholder groups (parents, students, head teacher and teachers aide of the centres, and regional management committee members) during Phase One semi-structured survey interviews.

Further exploring the themes (Phase One) and categories of responses (Phase Two) and their associated storylines helped to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres from stakeholders' perspectives. In turn, comparing stakeholders' responses to the suspension centre Guidelines enabled some understanding of the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995).

A diagrammatic representation of the stakeholder groups involved, phases of the research, survey instruments, questions, and emerging themes or categories of responses for each phase of this research is outlined at Figure 3.

Figure 3 Research Phases, Stakeholders, Survey Instruments, Questions and Emerging Themes



Analytical considerations

In orienting this research within the qualitative paradigm, particular care had to be taken with the methodology to ensure that researcher bias did not affect the research findings. In conducting this research, I was careful to ensure that my presence, as researcher, did not confound the results of this research and that the potential for stakeholders to inadvertently confound findings was minimised (Cohen, 2000; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

What counts as "evidence" is sometimes problematic. In conducting this research therefore, I was mindful of imparting practices to enhance the research validity (Groundwater-Smith, 2004). As this research aimed to provide descriptive information from stakeholders' perspectives, questions were asked of a variety of stakeholders associated with the centres using two different survey methods and in two distinct research phases. This helped to ensure that the thoughts and opinions of the research participants were triangulated from a wide pool of evidence to enhance the validity of this research. As Thurmond (2001) explains, triangulating data aims to "decrease, negate, or counterbalance the deficiency of a single strategy, thereby increasing the ability to interpret the findings" (p. 253).

In implementing this research and analysing responses to the research questions, I ensured that participants' responses were coded to ensure anonymity. I was also mindful of examining my own beliefs carefully and ensuring that the responses were reported as actually spoken or written by stakeholders. In analysing and reporting on stakeholders' responses I was also careful to ensure that assumptions were not made regarding the meaning of stakeholders' responses. Stakeholders' responses were clarified during Phase One of the research during the semi-structured interviews and stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to check written transcripts of their responses in Phases one and two of this research. While providing stakeholders with the opportunity to check my analysis of the interviews may have further enhanced the reliability of this research, it was decided that accuracy of the data was a higher priority. Analysis of the data

included the views of multiple respondents, and this approach acknowledged that research of this type could not give precedence to any one participant's view over another.

As Atweh, Bland, Carrington, and Cavanagh (2008) note, the actions undertaken acknowledge the fact that "the researcher is never free of his or her values" (p. 10) and that my beliefs and values had the capacity to influence this research. In drawing out the issues and implications associated with the findings within this research, associated research was also identified to help explore a range of possible explanations for the findings. Such practices recognised that to increase the validity of this research the findings and discussion needed "to be informed by systematically collected and interpreted data upon which sound judgments can be based" (Groundwater-Smith, 2004, p. 4).

In describing the methodology and reporting findings, a transparent process was provided to ensure that evidence was "open to scrutiny in terms of its quality and the conditions under which it was collected" Groundwater-Smith (2004, p. 8). Participants had access to all data related to themselves. Transparency was also heightened by providing examples of transcripts of participant responses in the appendices of this research.

Ethical considerations

During 2005-2007, I worked at state office of the Department and one of my work roles included coordinating the establishment of suspension centres statewide. The role primarily entailed supporting regions via distributing funding for the establishment and operation of the centres. As such, I did not have line management responsibility for supervising or managing suspension centres. While I am still employed at state office of the Department, I have not had any role or involvement with suspension centres since 2007. In conducting this research I have implemented practices to ensure transparent processes within each stage of the research to ensure validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As an employee of the Department in a state level

position, I have acknowledged that the potential for conflict of interest exists. Throughout this research the potential for conflict of interest was identified and steps put in place to ensure my impartiality. This included undertaking the Department's State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) and the University ethics committee approval as an independent researcher. I also regularly communicated with supervisors at the University of New England, Armidale, to ensure that the manner in which this research was conducted and the directions taken in this research were sound. Throughout this research the aims, methodology and findings of the research were explicitly stated to minimise the potential for conflict of interest and ensure that my impartiality could be observed by others. As such, examples of stakeholders' responses to the research questions are included in the Appendix of this research. The responses are also outlined for each phase of this research according to the identified themes, categories of responses and key storylines that emerged to ensure transparency of process.

Processes were put in place to ensure that stakeholders consented to being involved in this research; that they were aware that they could terminate their involvement at any time; and that they were provided with information relating to how to lodge complaints or raise any issues about this research. Stakeholders were made aware that in each area in which suspension centres were located, a local and readily accessible contact was available to lodge complaints or raise issues about this research. Participants were also advised that they could contact the Research Ethics Officer at the University of New England, Armidale, if they had any concerns about the manner in which this research was conducted (see Appendices P-S). I have maintained a commitment to following recognised principles of research in conducting this research honestly and planning to disseminate and communicate the results of this research, whether favourable or unfavourable, in ways that permit public scrutiny. These actions helped to ensure that the capacity for this research to be influenced by political or corporate agendas was minimised and my impartiality maximised to increase the validity and integrity of this research. Such actions enhanced the capacity of this

research to contribute in a meaningful way to increasing the knowledge and understanding of how suspension centres have supported students with disruptive behaviours.

Chapter Four: Phase One Results and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion relating to Phase One of this research.

Semi-structured interviews were used with four groups of stakeholders involved with suspension centres while students were at the centres. The stakeholders were students accessing the centres, their parents, head teachers and teachers aides of the centres, and regional management committee members. In analysing responses to the interviews themes and associated storylines were revealed which best described from stakeholders' perspectives what were the best things happening or what should be maintained, and what things needed to be improved with suspension centres. In this way Phase One of this research helped to identify and establish how the policy framework for suspension centres had been implemented in practice (Schön, 1995). Comparing responses to the Guidelines and associated research helped to identify what might be the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres.

This chapter explores the themes and associated storylines expressed in the 71 stakeholders' responses to the semi-structured survey interviews (see Appendices F-I). Two themes were revealed from these responses to the question: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?" (Harrington, 2006, p. 104). The themes were:

- "students are learning …"; and
- "suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills …".

Three themes were identified from stakeholders' responses to the question: "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?". The themes were

- "communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved";
- "head teachers require further professional learning …"; and
- "students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres …".

These themes and the associated storylines revealed in stakeholders' responses are described in further detail in this chapter.

Question one: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained?"

Theme one: "Students are learning …".

Figure 4. Theme One and Three Associated Storylines

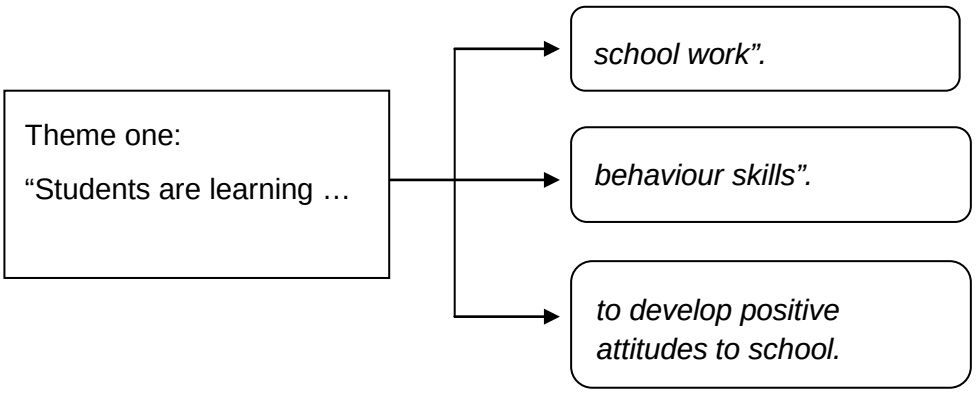


Figure 4. Best things happening - Theme one: "Students are learning …" and three associated storylines.

Research sub-question one aimed to reveal stakeholders' thoughts and opinions relating to what they thought were the best things happening or what they thought should be maintained with suspension centres. From the 71 responses to the semi-structured interviews it was clear that a range of stakeholders thought that among the best things happening were that students were being helped with, and/or were learning skills relating to, academic activities and behaviour. Common responses from stakeholders reported that students engaged with activities that modelled appropriate academic and behaviour responses, and/or learnt academic and behaviour skills. Stakeholders' comments also indicated that one of the best things happening was the fact that students had developed positive attitudes to school: that is, that students were attending school more regularly; were happier at school; and were succeeding with school work, after returning to their schools from suspension centres. To explain stakeholders' thoughts and opinions clearly, this next section makes links between the theme, "students are learning …", and the storylines that depicted stakeholders' responses.

Storyline one: "… school work"

When stakeholders were asked: "What are the best things happening or what things do you think should be maintained?" parents, students, a head teacher, teachers aide, and student services officer across four suspension centres commented on students being helped with, and/or learning skills relating to, academic activities. Parents and students, in particular, said that the best things happening at the centres were that students had been helped with specific academic activities such as "reading and spelling" (S2 parent, Ashwood) and learning "Maths a bit better" (S2 student, Blackburn). Other students noted that among the best things happening at the centres were the help with "school work" (S1 student, Abberfield) and "being able to learn better" (S2 student, Blackburn).

Parents and students, a head teacher, teachers aide, and student services officer at two suspension centres (Heatherdale and Abberfield) also commented on students being helped with school work, assignments, and assessment tasks. For example, at Heatherdale, the head teacher stated "helping kids with overdue assignments and assessments" and a parent stated "gets them back into education … getting them to do their school assignments" (S1, Heatherdale). The teachers aide at Abberfield also said "Students can get help with their school work if they need it".

Storyline two: "… behaviour skills"

In responding to the question: "What are the best things happening or what do you think should be maintained?" a range of stakeholders from the 71 respondents, including parents, students, head teachers and teachers aides of suspension centres, and regional management committee members (principals and student services officers) across the six centres, commented on students being taught and/or learning behaviour skills.

In relation to students being taught behaviour skills at suspension centres the teachers aide at Listerfield said that one of the best things happening was "giving directions and boundaries to the

kids through the program". Parents also commented on suspension centre staff looking at "reasons behind their [the students'] behaviour" (S2 parent, Ashwood) and "rephrasing the behaviour contract the school had written to be more positive" (S2 parent, Heatherdale). The principal at Ashwood stated that the best things happening were the "social skills activities and conversations" and the "… self reflection and recognising signals in themselves and others".

Parents and students commented most on students learning behaviour skills. Examples of parents' and students' responses included: "… to learn and also to control their anger" (S2 parent, Blackburn) and "to control aggression in certain situations" (S2 student, Abberfield). Similarly, the teachers aide at Abberfield said that one of the best things happening was "students learning different behaviour skills". Students and head teachers also mentioned specific games relating to behaviour that students played while at suspension centres as being among the best things happening. Comments indicated that one of the important aspects of suspension centre programs was that they taught students behaviour skills (S4 student, Mitcham and head teacher, Heatherdale).

Reviewing the responses further revealed that a range of stakeholders identified changes in students' behaviour as being among the best things happening with suspension centres. The majority of responses from students, head teachers, and teachers aides indicated that positive changes in students' behaviour were attributed to the behaviour skills students were taught and practised at the centres (S2 student, Heatherdale; head teacher, Mitcham; and teachers aide, Blackburn). Two head teachers commented on how students "conducted themselves" in suspension resolution meetings and the fact that "students led the suspension resolution meetings" as some of the best things happening with the centres (Abberfield and Ashwood). *Suspension resolution meetings* are defined in the following way in the Department's *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures (2011)*: "The principal must convene a suspension resolution meeting of personnel involved in the welfare and guidance of the student, including the

parents, to discuss the basis on which the suspension will be resolved" (see Footnote, 3, p. 11). Head teachers commented that they taught students the skills to be able to participate in suspension resolution meetings effectively, and they saw students' successful participation in the meetings as evidence that students had learned skills and that they had accepted responsibility for the behaviour that led to their suspension. Furthermore, in relation to changes in students' behaviour, the principal at Abberfield said: "It helped them with their learning and self esteem. Two students have been to the centre in the past and both thrived". The head teacher at Listerfield also commented on the fact that there had been some "remarkable achievements" with students who had been through the suspension centre. She noted that one girl in primary school, after attending a suspension centre, had been successfully mentoring another student at the centre. One student was also optimistic that the skills she learnt at the suspension centre would help her on her return to school. The student stated that she felt that when she went back to school she would "… know the skills and start behaving" (S4, Abberfield).

Storyline three: … to develop positive attitudes to school

When stakeholders were asked: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained?" with suspension centres, some comments from parents, students, head teachers, teachers aides, principals, and a student support coordinator revealed that students had developed positive attitudes to school. Many of the comments reflected that some students had learned to attended school regularly; were happier at school; and were succeeding with school work after returning to their schools from suspension centres. Such comments indicated that students were participating in their schooling in a positive way. The principal at Listerfield, for example, said that she had "noticed an improvement in the school attendance of students who [had] attended [the centre]". Likewise S5 parent, Mitcham, said "having to attend the centre is good for attendance".

Typical responses from head teachers and principals identified that students were happier at school; had belief in themselves; and had the skills to be able to cope with difficulties through comments such as the following from the head teacher at Listerfield

> Seeing kids connect with school and feeling safe, secure and happy … kids are willing to give school and teachers a go. The students start nervous and angry and have no self-respect or connection with the school. They leave with confidence that there have been issues [at their school] but that they have a plan to be able to deal with things … they have a voice.

Similarly, the principal at Listerfield said that "kids come back to school with improved self esteem, coping mechanisms, and skills". A former teachers aide at Listerfield said that one of the best things happening with the centre was "being able to place them [the students] back at school where they can succeed" and "students achieving goals".

In relation to the theme and storyline, "students are learning *… to develop positive attitudes to school"*, students and their parents also reported that the centres contributed towards students having the skills to be able to cope with difficulties at school. A typical example of a parent's response was it "… gets them [the students] back into education" (S1, Heatherdale). Students also said that they learnt skills which assisted them at school. One student, for example, stated that among the best things happening were "learning to cope with school" and "attending school" (S3, Abberfield). Reviewing the responses further, revealed that some stakeholders thought that amongst the best things happening with suspension centres was the fact that, unlike traditional forms of suspension from school, where students remain at home for the duration of their suspension, students had a place to go to that was still connected to education (teachers aide, Abberfield). Typical responses from parents included that students were "getting some form of education" (S5, Mitcham) and were able to "still learn while they are suspended" (S1,

Heatherdale). One parent further stated that "otherwise the kids are out on the street" (S1, Heatherdale).

Some stakeholders commented that student "recidivism" or re-referral to suspension centres was not high when students returned to schools after accessing suspension centres. Such comments provided further evidence that stakeholders felt that students had developed positive attitudes to school. The head teacher at Ashwood said: "Less than 10% are re-referred … a good result for some kids with some horrendous home lives". Likewise, the student support coordinator at Listerfield stated: "Recidivism is not high. Students generally have longevity back at their school and are not referred back to the centre".

Discussion of findings: Theme one

In response to the question: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?", of the 71 respondents a range of stakeholders reported that students were learning at the centres. From the theme "students are learning …" and associated storylines, *"… school work"*, *"… behaviour skills"* and *… to develop positive attitudes to school,* it was clear that stakeholders thought one of the best things happening was that students were being assisted to "successfully return to school" after their suspension centre placements. This was reflected by the following research findings.

Firstly, parents, students, a head teacher, teachers aide, and student services officer across four suspension centres commented on students being helped with, and/or learning skills related to, academic activities. These stakeholders at two of the centres also reported that students were being helped with school work, assignments, and assessment tasks. Secondly, a range of stakeholders across the six centres commented that students were being taught and/or were learning behaviour skills. A teachers aide, principals and parents commented on students being taught behaviour skills. Parents and students commented most on students' learning behaviour

skills. Students and head teachers also mentioned specific games related to behaviour that students played while at the centres. Related comments also reflected that students, principals, and staff at suspension centres thought changes in students' behaviour were among the best things happening with suspension centres. Another finding was that parents, students, principals, a student support coordinator, and staff at suspension centres said that students were attending school regularly; were happier at school; and were succeeding with school work after returning to school from the centres. Principals, parents, and students also commented on students having improved self esteem and coping skills on returning to school from suspension centres. Such comments seem to reflect that students had developed positive attitudes to school. Parents and a teachers aide also noted that one of the best things happening was that, unlike traditional forms of suspension from school, students had a place to go that was still connected to education. A range of stakeholders also described positive changes in students' behaviour, with the majority of responses from students, head teachers, and teachers aides attributing the changes to the behaviour skills students were taught and practised at suspension centres.

The responses were compared to the suspension centre Guidelines. In this way, stakeholders' thoughts and opinions helped to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from their perspectives and helped to reveal how the Goals of the Guidelines had been implemented in practice.

The Guidelines state the Goals of the centre will be:

- to assist students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences;
- to reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours;
- to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours;

- to provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students; and
- to provide professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students. (see Footnote 2, para. 4)

It should be noted that stakeholders' responses, reflected in theme one, "Students are learning …" did not make reference to two areas of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines: that is, whether skills development opportunities and support were provided for the parents or the teachers of the students. Therefore, it was unclear, from this theme, whether these aspects of the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. Stakeholders' comments did show, however, that students were helped to reflect on their behaviour; develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours; re-engage at school and re-integrate to positive work habits. Stakeholders' comments also clearly revealed that suspension centre placements helped students with academic and behaviour skills which "assisted students to make a successful re-entry to schooling", as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Clearly, from stakeholders' perspectives, such practices were enabling factors for the success of the centres.

However, some caution is necessary in reflecting on stakeholders' responses. This is because the research questions were designed to explore the operation of suspension centres and evidence that the Purpose and Goals in the Guidelines were being met. This phase of the research was not designed to determine whether the impact of what students gained at suspension centres was sustained over a long period of time. Therefore, stakeholders' comments in this phase of the research at best reflected that suspension centres assisted students to "successfully return to schooling" in the short-term (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

In comparing stakeholders' responses to the Guidelines, some caution must also be exercised in interpreting some responses to the research questions. An example is the head teacher at Ashwood's comment that "less than 10% are re-referred …" because the centre was located on a

school site from which 100% of the referrals to the centre were made and the head teacher described that students "were able to leave class to visit the centre if they were having difficulties after going back to school … lots come back again after 'flair ups' at school". The fact that the head teacher stated that "less than 10%" of students who have accessed the centre are re-referred is not necessarily an indication that the suspension centre was a successful intervention, as many of the students apparently had "flair ups" and went back to the centre "informally".

A more thorough investigation of the variables associated with students' successful return to school and over a longer period of time, would be of benefit. This would give some insight into the extent to which the positive academic and behaviour outcomes for students were sustained after students had left the centres. It cannot be established that simply because students do not access suspension centres again that they are successfully engaged in education and that the centres "prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

It is useful to consider previous research in relation to the findings in this research to help identify the enabling or inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres. Researchers such as Visser (2004) support stakeholders' descriptions that students were being taught and/or were learning behaviour skills as significant in helping to modify inappropriate student behaviours. Visser (2004) acknowledges that teaching students with behaviour difficulties why certain behaviour is not appropriate, and other ways to react appropriately, achieves far more successful outcomes in terms of improving students' behaviour (para. 44). Social skills need to be made achievable for students and students need to be taught how to express emotions in appropriate ways to be successful (Visser, 2004, para. 44). It is important to note, however, that a large body of research also identifies that one of the enabling factors for the success of suspension centres could be whether the successful behaviour and learning interventions established for students at suspension centres are sustained in different contexts, such as students' schools or homes (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008, para. 30). This would seem to be particularly important in

determining how well the centres, as short-term interventions, enable students to return successfully to their schools, where the inappropriate behaviours that led to the suspensions took place. Other researchers have also noted that the learning potential of students is different when the social environment changes (Skinner & Greene, 2008) and that it is important that people can generalise their learning to different places and times (Mayer, 2008). Landrum and McDuffie (2008) found that when behavioural interventions are used effectively, changes in behaviour are "often seen readily in the context in which the intervention is implemented" (para. 30). If, however, the changes are to be meaningful and lasting they need to be seen in different places and contexts at other times (para. 30). Such research appears to reveal one of the considerable challenges in enabling suspension centres to achieve successful outcomes for students and schools as outlined in the Goals of the Guidelines, over a longer period of time: that is "to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). While suspension centres may have assisted students to meet some of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines, research shows that it is considerably more challenging for a program that operates for a maximum of 20 days for any one student to be effective, by itself, in positively changing students' attitudes and behaviours over a longer period of time. Indeed, in relation to such interventions, researchers question the sustainability of changes in students' behaviour and learning "without significant and ongoing support for students when they return to their schools" (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 5).

Comments from stakeholders did in fact enable some understanding of how aspects of the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. Comparing stakeholders' responses to the Guidelines and related research also helped to ascertain what some of the enabling and inhibiting factors appear to be for the success of the centres.

Theme two: "Suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills …"

Figure 5. Theme Two and Two Associated Storylines

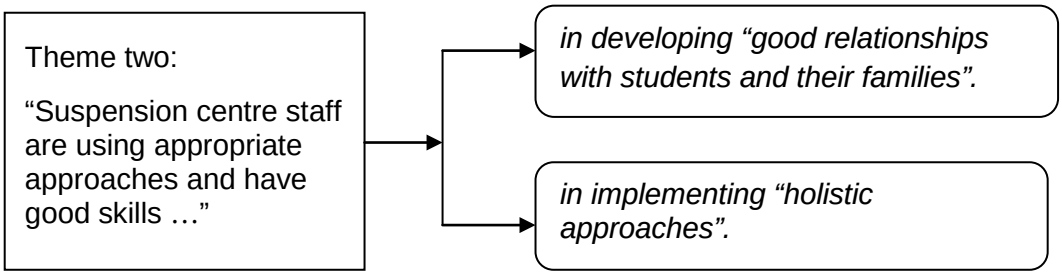


Figure 5. Best things happening - Theme two: "Suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills …" and two associated storylines.

The research questions aimed to reveal stakeholder's thoughts and opinions relating to what they thought were the best things happening and what they thought should be maintained with suspension centres. From the 71 responses, it was clear that all stakeholder groups, across the majority of the centres involved in the research, thought that suspension centre staff were using appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. The majority of the responses noted the good relationship head teachers had with a number of people associated with suspension centres and/or the ways in which head teachers implemented strategies and practices to support students and their families. To reveal stakeholders' thoughts and opinions clearly, this next section makes links between the theme and the storylines that depicted their responses.

Storyline one: … in developing "good relationships with students and their families"

When stakeholders were asked "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?" all stakeholder groups across the six suspension centres

involved in the research commented on the positive relationships head teachers had developed with a variety of people associated with suspension centres, particularly with students and their families. Some also noted the positive relationships teachers aides had developed with students and their families. The majority of responses were from parents and students. Parents' comments revealed the positive ways in which head teachers related to students and the fact that their children liked going to the centres. Some comments also revealed the support the head teacher gave to parents as one of the best things happening. One parent said "Staff have more time … more time to understand where he is coming from … [they are] also supportive of us" (S3, Mitcham).

Some parents' and students' comments, while general in nature, reflected that good relationships had developed between suspension centre staff and families. One parent, for example, said that the "head teacher and teachers aide are excellent" (S2, Heatherdale). Comments from students also indicated that good relationships had developed between suspension centre staff and students, with students saying, for example, "the head teacher understands" (S4, Abberfield); "teachers are nice" (S3, Mitcham); "staff help you more … they are nice people" (S1, Listerfield); and "the head teacher is fair" (S2, Ashwood). One student said "The suspension centre is too good and it should be made into a school" (S1, Heatherdale). Many of the students commented that they appreciated the smaller environment of the suspension centre and the concentrated support provided by suspension centre staff (S5 & S6, Abberfield; S1, Blackburn; S2, Blackburn; S3 & S4, Listerfield).

Head teachers and principals in half of the centres also commented on the good relationships suspension centre staff had developed with students and their families. The head teacher at Mitcham, for example, said that one of the best things happening was the "development of good relationships with students and their families". Another head teacher said "building rapport with the parents" was one of the best things happening, saying "some have rung up to a year after their

child has left the centre for support" (Listerfield). The head teacher at Abberfield also reflected that they had "good feedback from homes and schools". Some stakeholders acknowledged the positive response students had to suspension centre staff. The teachers aide at Blackburn, for example, said "the students treat staff at the centre with respect" and the principal at Abberfield said "the students are happy to see the staff at the centre when they visit [the school]". Similarly, the school education director at Abberfield observed that "students pick up that the head teacher and teachers aide really care about them".

Some members of regional management committees commented more broadly on the relationship head teachers had developed with schools and their school communities. At Heatherdale, for example, the student services officer noted the head teacher's engagement with schools, while at Mitcham the head teacher said "there is a mutual respect between medical people in the town and the head teacher …".

Storyline two: … in implementing "holistic approaches"

In revealing storylines related to the theme, "suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills … ," common comments from stakeholders revealed the skills of head teachers and their implementation of strategies and practices to support students and their families as among the best things happening. Some of the comments, in acknowledging the skills of suspension centre staff, were broad in nature. Students, for example, stated: "Everything is good…. The head teacher has fixed me *(sic)*" (S2, Abberfield) and "the head teacher is great and knows how to cope with students" (S3, Abberfield). Similarly, school education directors reflected that among the best things happening at the centres were the "quality of staff" (Mitcham) and that "Head teachers have been very committed to the kids and very skilled" (Abberfield).

Other stakeholders identified the head teachers' skills in managing student behaviour as among the best things happening. A retraining teacher at Mitcham, for example, said that she had

learnt a lot from observing what suspension centre staff "had done with kids" even though she had taught in high schools for 12 years. She commented that the strategies used in the centre with a small number of kids could be used "effectively with a whole class". The view of the retraining teacher was supported by the community representative at Mitcham who said the "consistency of how the suspension centre manages behaviour is good".

The principal at Abberfield, in reflecting on the head teacher's skills in managing student behaviour, said that the head teacher "up-skills teachers [from schools referring students to the suspension centre] on behaviour management strategies". Other stakeholders associated with overseeing, supporting, or running the centres also explained that among the best things happening were that head teachers provided relevant information to students' schools about strategies and practices to manage students' behaviour and/or learning. Student services officers and community representatives at Mitcham and Heatherdale, for example, noted that "reports on students that the head teacher provides the school are valuable" as were the "recommendations to the school from the head teacher regarding the student". The principal at Abberfield also said that the head teacher provided good "targeted professional learning to schools" and "a list of strategies on what's worked with the students". The student services officer at Abberfield explained that the "Professional learning the head teacher provides to schools around good practice suspension resolution is also good". She stated: "There is a focus on decreasing the repeat suspensions for students who access the program".

Reviewing the 71 responses to the semi-structured interviews clearly revealed that people overseeing, supporting, or running the centres thought that among the best things happening were the "holistic" approaches adopted by the head teachers in seeking additional support and/or providing relevant information to assist students and their families. The community representative at Mitcham, for example, stated that the "head teacher is good at identifying family problems" and "points families in the right direction". She commented that the head teacher completed an

"independent assessment of students in liaison with the parents … to process their needs further". Stakeholders also commented on the work of head teachers in liaising with, and accessing support from, other agencies. The student services officer and student support coordinator at Mitcham said: "The head teacher … has links to other agencies" and that the "community focus and involvement of other agencies are also excellent". Head teachers also explained that the work they did in liaising with, and accessing support from, students' schools and other agencies as being among the best things happening. The head teacher at Blackburn, for example, commented on the "phone calls with school counsellors and looking at results of students' [school] tests". The head teacher at Mitcham also cited the "holistic approach" stating that "doctors and counsellors ring to see how kids are going".

Discussion of findings: Theme two

In response to the question: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?", all stakeholder groups across the majority of centres involved in the research described that suspension centre staff, in particular head teachers, were using appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. In analysing the theme "suspension centre staff use appropriate approaches and have good skills …" the researcher grouped the 71 stakeholders' responses to identify associated storylines that best reflected the responses. The storylines … *in developing "good relationships with students and their families"* and … *in implementing "holistic approaches"* were reflected in the following findings as being among the best things happening and things that should be maintained.

Firstly, all stakeholder groups across the six suspension centres, particularly parents and students, commented on the good relationships the head teachers had developed with a variety of people associated with the centres, particularly with students and their families. Some stakeholders also commented on the positive relationships teachers aides had developed with

students and their families. The majority of responses were from parents and students, with parents noting the positive ways head teachers related to students and the fact that their children liked going to the centres. Parents also commented on the support the head teacher gave to them. Students reflected that they appreciated the smaller environment of the centres and the concentrated support provided by staff. Parents' and students' comments were supported by head teachers and principals in half the centres who also commented on the good relationships suspension centre staff had developed with students and their families. Some stakeholders also acknowledged the positive response students had to suspension centre staff, and some regional management committees members commented more broadly on the positive relationships head teachers had developed with schools and their school communities. Secondly, stakeholders noted the good skills of head teachers in implementing strategies and practices to support students and their families, with some reflecting that the head teachers' skills in managing student behaviour were among the best things happening. Thirdly, some stakeholders associated with overseeing, supporting, or running the centres, also commented on the head teachers' skills in providing relevant information to students' schools relating to strategies and practices to manage students' behaviour and/or learning and the "holistic" approaches used in seeking additional support and/or providing relevant information to assist students and their families. Likewise, head teachers said that the work they did in liaising with, and accessing support from, students' schools and other agencies were among the best things happening.

Stakeholders' responses were analysed and compared to the suspension centre Guidelines to gain a sense of how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. In this way, stakeholders' thoughts and opinions helped to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from their perspectives. The responses helped identify how the purpose and Goals of the Guidelines (2006) had been implemented in practice. The Guidelines state the following in relation to the Purpose of the centres.

The new suspension centres will:

- form part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs);
- increase the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students; and
- assist students to make a successful re-entry to schooling. (see Footnote 2, paras. 2 & 4)

Stakeholders' responses revealed that suspension centre staff had developed good relationships with a variety of people associated with the centres and that head teachers implemented effective strategies and practices to manage student behaviour. These practices were important in enabling the Purpose and Goals to be met. Researchers, for example, say that building high-quality relationships with teachers is one of the enabling factors in providing effective support to students with disruptive behaviour (Silver, 2005 as cited in Jerome & Pianta, 2008, para. 37). Other researchers, such as Visser (2004) explain the importance of positive relationships between students and teachers in enhancing the chances of students forming other positive relationships in the future, stating: "Relationships that children have with teachers affect their future relationships with teachers and good teacher relationships each year can improve children's chances of forming good relationships with future teachers" (as cited in Jerome & Pianta, 2008, para. 12).

The fact that stakeholders said that suspension centre staff had developed positive relationships with students would appear to be an enabling factor in providing a trusting and supportive foundation from which students could be taught appropriate skills, as outlined in the Goals of the Guidelines. It would also appear to be an enabling factor for suspension centres in meeting the Purpose outlined in the Guidelines (2006) to "assist students to make a successful

re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Such research supports that positive relationships formed in suspension centres could be the foundation from which effective strategies and practices implemented at suspension centres could be effectively transferred to students' schools. However, given this, it is noted that the extent to which good relationships with suspension centre staff assisted students to develop positive relationships with "educational figures" such as teachers in their schools is less clear. Researchers such as Jerome and Pinta (2008) also caution that it is a difficult task to expect that student-teacher relationships will necessarily improve in mainstream schools as a result of students accessing alternative programs or supports. This is especially true, as the researchers say that "children who enter school with more behavioural problems are more likely to experience relationships with teachers that have high levels of conflict" (Jerome & Pianta, 2008, para. 10). Such findings are clearly of interest to this research. While stakeholders' comments revealed that practices in suspension centres enabled some of the Purpose and Goals outlined in the Guidelines to be met, another question, which was raised earlier, is whether students can successfully sustain the skills learnt at suspension centres in their school environments over a longer period of time. The fact that research reveals that teachers can have difficult relationships with students with disruptive behaviour clearly has implications for students successfully transferring skills to their schools and in sustaining the skills learnt at suspension centres after they return to their schools. If students had previously experienced difficult relationships with teachers in their schools, then it could be anticipated that the same difficulties could be present when students return to their schools from suspension centres. This might be an inhibiting factor in assisting "students to make a successful re-entry to school" as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2).

Clearly, effectively assisting and supporting students when they return to school from suspension centres would appear to be one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres. Stakeholders did identify that the centres were providing some "skills development opportunities

and support for the parents/caregivers of the students" and "professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students" as outlined in the Goals of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Such practices may be enabling factors for the success of the centres and aid in enabling the transferability of practices to different setting such as students' homes and schools (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008).

It was also noted that stakeholders thought that among the best things happening with suspension centres were the positive relationships suspension centre staff had developed with other agencies, and the "holistic" approaches in seeking additional support and/or providing relevant information to assist students and their families. Head teachers commented on the work they did in liaising with and accessing support from students' schools and other agencies to provide this support. Such comments identify the potential for practices occurring in suspension centres to "form part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive" as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Stakeholders' responses, however, did not enable a clear picture of how suspension centres formed part of a "range of behaviour services" as described in the Guidelines. Future research which maps the provision of supports for students with disruptive behaviour and how suspension centres are utilised within such a range of supports may be beneficial in helping to determine how supports are being used and the outcomes for students and school communities. Researchers, such as Riordan (2006), for example, note that the transferability of practices to different settings such as students' homes and schools are more likely to occur where principals are willing to work with outside agencies. Riordan (2006) says "… the willingness of the principal to engage and work with agencies outside the school tended to be related to the effectiveness of the school in addressing student behaviour and learning problems" (p. 247).

It is important to acknowledge that this research did not aim to establish whether one of the statements in the Purpose of the Guidelines had occurred in practice. That is, whether schools had

increased their capacity “to deal successfully with disruptive students as a result of practices utilised by suspension centres (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Determining this would be useful and a focus for future research in terms of identifying more broadly the enabling factors for the success of the centres for school communities. Such research would be interesting in terms of the findings in this research: that is, that effectively assisting and supporting students when they return to school from suspension centres would appear to be one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres.

Question three: "What things need to be improved?"

The next section explores the themes and storylines expressed in stakeholders' responses to the question: "What things need to be improved"?

Theme one: "Communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved"

Figure 6. Theme One and Two Associated Storylines

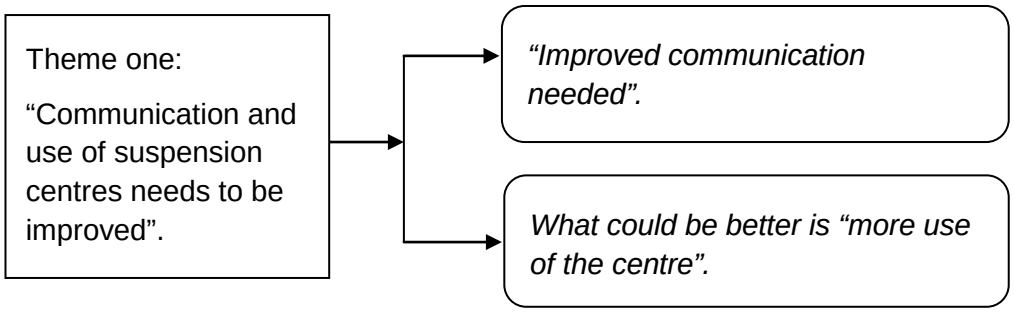


Figure 6. Needs to be improved - Theme one: "Communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved".

Research sub-question two aimed to reveal stakeholders' thoughts and opinions relating to what they thought needed to be improved with suspension centres. From the 71 responses to the semi-structured interviews, it was clear that a range of stakeholders across the majority of centres involved in the research thought that improved communication and use of suspension centres was needed.

To reveal stakeholders' thoughts and opinions clearly, this next section makes links between the theme, "communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved" and the storylines that depicted stakeholders' responses. The first storyline, *"Improved communication needed"* reflected stakeholders' comments relating to the need for improved communication:

- to schools, related to the purpose of suspension centres; and
- between regional and state office personnel and suspension centre staff, to discuss and clarify issues.

The second storyline, *what could be better is "more use of the centre"*, reflected stakeholders' comments relating to the use of suspension centres that needed to be improved, including:

- primary school students were not accessing suspension centres; and
- sometimes there were few students in some suspension centres.

Storyline one: "Improved communication needed"

Head teachers and members of regional management committees across the majority of suspension centres (excluding Listerfield) noted that aspects of communication needed to be improved. Head teachers said that there could have been improved communication to schools relating to the purpose of suspension centres. A typical comment included "letting schools know that the suspension centre is here and what service it provides" (Heatherdale). At Abberfield, the head teacher and student services officer commented on the fact that increased communication with schools had corrected misconceptions relating to the purpose of the suspension centre. They noted that some schools had viewed suspension centres as a "stepping stone" to disruptive students being placed at another alternative education setting, namely behaviour schools. Stakeholders reflected that they thought some schools were of the view that if disruptive students had been to a suspension centre, the school could say that they had tried all possible strategies to manage the students' behaviour with no effect and that, therefore, the only available option was to send the student to a behaviour school, a longer-term alternative education setting, separate to their mainstream school. The head teacher stated the following:

> [We are] getting more appropriate placements to the centre due to getting the message out to principals about the purpose of the centres. The centre is not so much seen as a last tick a box to get the student to a behaviour school setting (Abberfield).

The student services officer at Abberfield also commented that "overall the schools have improved…. They are more aware of the role of the suspension centre and are not suspending kids to get them to the [suspension] centre".

In relation to this storyline, head teachers and members of regional management committees also stated that improved communication was needed between regional and state office personnel, and suspension centre staff to discuss and clarify issues and to monitor the progress of the centres. Head teachers said issues requiring clarification included "the role of the head teacher"; "whether they should be presenting to staff meetings" (head teacher, Blackburn); and "how the operation of the centres are supervised" (former head teacher, Heatherdale). Members of regional management committees also described issues, with principals commenting, for example, on the fact that one centre was too full when the maximum six students were at the centre (Blackburn) and issues with the method of staffing the centres (Mitcham). The school education director and student support coordinator at Mitcham also thought that the suspension centre needed to focus on meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, including involving the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

A head teacher and regional management committee members also raised issues relating to monitoring the progress of the centres. In relation to what things need to be improved the head teacher said: "communication … especially with Sydney [state office]. It feels like you are running your own show. It is good if there is a check on data and what's happening in the centre to keep you on track" (Blackburn). Some student services officers commented on the need to understand the impact suspension centres had in the areas in which they were located. The student services officer at Abberfield, for example, said that the suspension centre relocated to a different place every year which "did not enable research into the professional learning impact" the centre had with schools that had accessed the centre: that is, "whether there are changes in suspension rates or practices of the schools which access the program". Stakeholders' responses, however,

also revealed that one suspension centre might have had such processes in place to show the impact the suspension centre had, with the student services officer at Listerfield saying that data seemed to reflect that it was "after about three years that the centres make a difference and are more effective". Such comments revealed a range of issues relating to communication with schools and between regional and state office personnel and suspension centre staff.

It is important to note that further analysis of the responses revealed that some stakeholders thought regular meetings between people responsible for overseeing, supporting, or running suspension centres could be one means of enabling such issues to be identified and discussed. The student services officer at Heatherdale, for example, said that what could be improved is having "management meetings" where "they could also table a report on how the centre is going". The student services officer at Abberfield noted the benefits of "management meetings". She said that the school education director; principal of the site the centre is located at; principal of the managing school; and head teacher regularly attended such meetings. She explained that "The benefits of having people who are at a high level within the region involved in the meetings means that they take back to their respective groups, (such as principals' groups), information about the centre and spread messages about the centre, in a positive way across the region".

Storyline two: What could be better is "more use of the centre"

In relation to the storyline "more use of the centre", stakeholders commented on students from schools that might benefit from the centres but did not access the centres, and the fact that sometimes there were few students in some centres.

In relation to groups of students from schools that did not access the centres, teachers aides and members of regional management committees in rural locations such as Ashwood and Blackburn thought that primary school students needed to access suspension centres. The teachers aide, principal, and student support coordinator at Ashwood, for example, commented on the need

for the centre to "improve the uptake" of primary school students. Some responses cited the "benefit of intervening when students are younger" so that students' needs "can be catered to more effectively". The teachers aide at Blackburn also commented that "the centre is supposed to cater to primary school students but the principals of the primary schools are reluctant". It is unclear from stakeholders' responses whether suspension centres were choosing not to cater to primary school students or whether the centres were offering placements to primary school students that had not been taken up for various reasons. Clarifying some of the issues around this would be useful in understanding the issues and identifying better the merits, or otherwise, of the centres catering to primary school students.

Members of regional management committees at Ashwood and Listerfield also said that there were sometimes few students in the centres, which was an area that "needed improving". For example, the teachers aide at Ashwood said "what could be better is more use of the centre. The start and end of each term is slow as kids are not suspended". The student services officer at Listerfield also commented on the under-utilisation of the suspension centre citing an average of 8.8 referrals each term. In relation to the possible numbers of students who could access the centre, the officer noted that feeder schools referring to the centre had an average of 18 long suspensions each term between them. A suspension centre, with a maximum of six students at any one time, over a 10 week term, could cater for a minimum of 18 students per term, which seems to support stakeholders' views that the centres were being under-utilised. Further analysis of why more students were not accessing suspension centres would be required to establish a better understanding of why sometimes the centres had few students. There could be a variety of reasons that students on long suspension were not referred to, or were not accepting offers of placement in, suspension centres which is beyond the scope of this research to explore. One reason might be, for example, that principals of students' schools did not think some students met the Definition of the suspension centre Guidelines: that is, that they did not think that students were "likely to

benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

The head teacher and student support coordinator at Ashwood, a centre that catered only to students from the school at which the centre was located, revealed that students referred to the centre were often not students "on long suspension" from school as outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines. Comments referred to the fact that students at the centre were often "on the verge of suspension" or were "visiting the centre" after using a "time-out" card from the classroom (provided to them after they had been at the centre and had returned to school). The Guidelines outline the Target Population for the centres as "students who are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension" (see Footnote 2, para. 5). Anecdotally, the head teacher of the centre told the researcher that students who were not on long suspension from school were placed at the centre as an "early intervention" strategy because there were sometimes few students on long suspension being referred to the centre. It is acknowledged that while stakeholders revealed practices that were not outlined in the Guidelines, further research would be required to determine whether such practices were enabling or inhibiting factors for the success of the centres. Exploring associated variables such as whether these practices prevented long suspensions from school and how effective the practices were in helping to manage disruptive student behaviour would also be useful.

In response to the question "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?" the student support coordinator at Ashwood raised concerns about the head teacher and the ways in which the centre was being used. She said that she was "very worried about the program" and that she thought the head teacher was "not effective". She also stated, "the head teacher sees himself as a counsellor which is problematic … there is nothing academic about the program". Comments made by other stakeholders about the need for "management meetings" where stakeholders could

"table a report on how the centre is going" (student services officer, Heatherdale) could be useful in helping to understand and resolve issues raised by stakeholders such as the need to "improve the uptake" of primary school students, "more use" of the centres, at times, and other issues such as the performance of suspension centre staff. The student services officer at Abberfield, for example, noted the benefits of "management meetings" and it could be that such meetings might be an enabling factor for the success of the centres.

Discussion of findings: Theme one

In response to the question "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?" a range of stakeholders across the majority of centres involved in the research commented on the need for improved communication and use of suspension centres. In revealing storylines related to the theme, the responses were best reflected in the storylines, *"improved communication needed"* and *what could be better is "more use of the centre"*. This was reflected in the following research findings. Firstly, in relation to the storyline *"improved communication needed"*, head teachers commented on the need for improved communication to schools relating to the purpose of suspension centres. At Abberfield, the head teacher and student services officer said that increased communication to schools had corrected misconceptions related to the purpose of suspension centres. Secondly, head teachers and members of regional management committees noted that improved communication was needed between regional and state office personnel and suspension centre staff to discuss and clarify issues and to monitor the progress of the centres. Some of the issues revealed by stakeholders included the role of the head teacher; how the operation of the centres were supervised; the size of suspension centres; and the fact that the centres needed to focus on meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. In relation to monitoring the progress of the centres, one head teacher reflected that having a check on data and what is happening at the centres could help "keep things on track". Some student services officers said that there needed to

be some identification of the impact suspension centres had in the areas in which they were located. Some stakeholders felt that regular meetings between people responsible for overseeing, supporting, or running suspension centres could help in understanding and resolving some of the issues raised by stakeholders. Student services officers at two suspension centres referred to "management meetings" as a means of achieving this.

In relation to the storyline "more use of the centres" teachers aides and members of regional management committees, particularly in rural locations, thought that more primary school students needed to access suspension centres. It was unclear from the responses whether suspension centres were choosing not to cater to primary school students, or whether the centres were offering placements to primary school students that were not being taken up for various reasons. Another finding was that members of regional management committees at two centres revealed that there were sometimes few students in the centres. In relation to this finding, it was described that the start and end of each term was slow, as students were not suspended. One student services officer (Listerfield) also described that some centres were being under-utilised in comparison to the numbers of students who were on long suspension from local schools. Further research would be required to understand better why, at times, some suspension centres had few students. Further research would also be useful in exploring the outcomes for students referred to one centre that were not on "long suspension" but were on the "verge of suspension" or were visiting the centre after using a "time out" card from the classroom. Finally, it was revealed that the student services coordinator at Ashwood said she was "very worried about the program" and that she thought the "head teacher was not effective". An interesting question to pose is whether "management meetings" mentioned by a couple of stakeholders could provide a means via which such issues could be explored and resolved.

Stakeholders' comments helped to reveal how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice and also helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres,

from stakeholders' perspectives. Stakeholders' responses relating to "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?" helped reveal how the Purpose and Target Population of the suspension centre Guidelines had been implemented in practice. The Guidelines (2006) state the following in relation to the *target population*, that is, students who:

- have been placed on long suspension; and
- are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension. (see Footnote 2, para. 5)

It appears that comments relating to ensuring that the centres were not seen as a "stepping stone" in removing disruptive students from their schools could be related to the degree to which principals understood the purpose and "target population" of the Guidelines. Exploring and understanding the apparent misconception of some principals in relation to these aspects of the Guidelines would be critical in successfully addressing such issues and enabling the success of suspension centres. It might be, for example, that principals have genuinely misunderstood the purpose of suspension centres and the target population they were established to cater to, because they had not been provided with, or had the opportunity to read and understand, the suspension centre Guidelines. Or, it might be that principals were using the centres to alleviate the stress of managing students with disruptive behaviour and/or because they did not think that students with disruptive behaviour belonged in their schools.

Such issues identified by stakeholders also relate to stakeholders' comments about the need for improved communication to schools and between regional and state office personnel, and suspension centre staff to discuss and clarify issues. Regular communication between stakeholders involved with the centres may be an enabling factor in identifying, understanding, and resolving issues. As stakeholders at Abberfield and Heatherdale noted management committees could

provide a means via which stakeholders could meet together. The Guidelines (2006) describe "management committees" in the following way.

> *Operational Guidelines-Management*
>
> - The region will establish a management committee chaired by a principal with representation from relevant departmental, school and community groups.
> - The committee will develop an implementation plan and oversight the management of resources, including funding.
> - A managing school must be designated by the regional director.
> - The principal of the managing school (if different from the chair) will attend regional management committee meetings.
> - The principal of the managing school is responsible for ensuring that the head teacher of the suspension centre has appropriate plans in place in the event of a serious incident.
> - The principal of the site at which the suspension centre is located is responsible for providing appropriate support in the event of a serious incident. This principal (if different from the chair and managing school) will also attend management committee meetings. (see Footnote 2, para. 8)

The range of representatives and functions of "management committees", as outlined in the Guidelines, might enable a means via which stakeholders could identify, understand, and resolve issues. Indeed, it was revealed that one centre had such a committee (Abberfield), which was being used to good effect with stakeholder groups to clarify issues. It was not entirely clear, however, whether other centres have had such committees. To understand better how such committees might operate effectively, it would be useful to ascertain how many centres had management committees and how they have operated. For example, who checks to see that such management committees have been formed; who is on the committees; how often they meet; and

what agenda focus there is for such meetings if they occur. It would also be useful to establish whether or not management committees have been used previously to monitor successfully, understand, or resolve issues relating to the operation of the centres. Identifying the ways in which management committees have been used and the benefits, or otherwise, of how they have functioned, could provide relevant information to enable the success of the centres. Further clarification of how management committees operate could also have implications for the Guidelines. It might be, for example, that the Guidelines need to define more clearly the role of management committees to facilitate the success of suspension centres. What does seem clear, however, is that, in comparing the Guidelines concerning management committees with practices that seemed to be occurring, there would appear to be some discrepancy between policy and practice which could well impact on the success of the centres.

In relation to enabling the success of suspension centres, some researchers note the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of programs to identify and address issues and to assist with planning. Researchers have found that such practices enable strategies to be put in place to best support the success of programs. For example, researchers in the United Kingdom found several aspects of the operation of learning support units that they felt were important. These aspects included the fact that all of the units undertook some form of monitoring or evaluation, usually against "individual targets that had been set for each pupil and/or in the form of feedback from teachers and parents" (Ridley & Kendall, 2005, p. 47). Similarly, Conway (as cited in Foreman, 2001) found that an important consideration in setting up programs to support students with disruptive behaviour was including "some sort of assessment of program effectiveness" (p. 338). As aspects of suspension centres appear to be similar to learning support units, these findings are particularly relevant. While monitoring and evaluation are not specified in the Guidelines, this could form one of the functions of management committees to help address some of the areas

stakeholders thought needed to be improved. A thorough analysis of how such committees might enable the success of suspension centres would clearly be beneficial.

Stakeholders also described that they felt that suspension centres could be used more. These comments were revealed in the storyline *what could be better is "more use of the centre"*. Stakeholders, particularly in rural locations, felt that "the uptake of primary school students" needed to be improved. Some stakeholders said that they thought there were benefits in using the centres to "intervene when students were younger" to cater more effectively to students needs. The Guidelines do not specify an age range for students who can be referred to suspension centres. However, research by Riordan (2006) and Rogers (2004) identifies the benefits of intervening earlier to address disruptive student behaviour. Rogers (2004) found early intervention as crucial in supporting students with "maladaptive behaviours" because such behaviours affect learning and positive peer-socialisation and also teachers' stress levels (Rogers, 2004). Gonczi and Riordan (2002, p. 10) note that "a sizable minority" of student suspensions occur in Year 3 to Year 6 and "because of the way primary classes are organised, the impact of a difficult student on a class and year and even the whole school, is far greater ….". In relation to Riordan's (2006) observation, the Department's Long Suspension and Expulsion Report (see Footnote 4, para. 2) appears to support such research. The report identifies that out of a total of 10,878 long suspensions for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 during 2009, 2,043 were for students from Kindergarten to Year 6, representing 20% of the total of long suspensions (see Table 2).

Clearly, more research would be required to explore the reasons why suspension centres have chosen to cater for certain age cohorts of students. Decisions could have been made for a number of reasons, such as the number of surrounding primary and high schools that had easy access to the centres and the availability of other supports to help manage students with disruptive behaviour in the local area. Nevertheless, researchers such as Tilling (2008) also establish the importance of well-designed early intervention programs for students, finding that one of the

benefits of early intervention is that the programs come at a time when families are more receptive to interventions (p. 6). Such research in identifying the importance of early involvement of students' families to enable successful outcomes is reflective of one of the Goals of the suspension centre Guidelines (2006). That is "to provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Importantly, the involvement of families was also revealed by stakeholders as one of the best things happening and/or something that should be maintained with the centres in theme two and the associated storyline "… to develop good relationships with students and their families".

In relation to the storyline, what could be better is *"more use of the centre"* stakeholders' comments revealed that one suspension centre was implementing practices that were not in the Guidelines. At Ashwood, for example, the suspension centre was catering to students on the "verge of suspension". While it is beyond the scope of this research to ascertain whether such practices were enabling or inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, identifying the outcomes of such practices would be useful in ascertaining whether the practices led to successful outcomes for students and school communities. Such research might, in turn, help to inform successful practices in managing disruptive student behaviour.

From stakeholders' comments relating to the key theme "communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved" it was revealed that stakeholders cited the need to engage relevant external services to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students (Mitcham). Riordan (2006) similarly identifies the need for different practices to engage particular groups of students and their families to enable successful outcomes for students who have been suspended from school. Riordan (2006) noted, for example, the case of a successful NSW principal who was seen to engage different external services such as an Aboriginal liaison officer "to facilitate relations between children, parents, teachers and the community" and that involving this person was a key to the effectiveness of strategies

implemented to manage students' behaviour, "… as this person was an important link in communication between the parties" (p. 247). It is noted that there is no mention of particular groups of students within the suspension centre Guidelines. The Target Population in the Guidelines is broad, requiring that students have been "placed on long suspension" and "are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension" (see Footnote 2, para. 5). Comments, however, from stakeholders revealed that particular strategies and practices might be required for different groups of students to maximise the success of the centres. One of the key questions, of course, is how this is best achieved. One way to address this issue might be in providing professional learning for head teachers of the centres. This is an area that will be further addressed in relation to theme two: "Head teachers require further professional learning …" in response to the question: "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?".

Theme two: "Head teachers require further professional learning …"

Figure 7. Theme Two and Associated Storyline

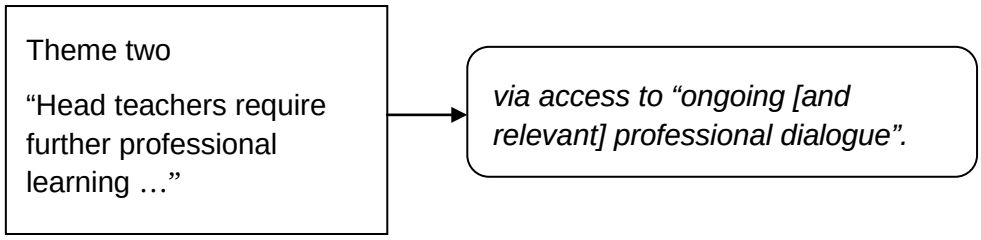


Figure 7. Needs to be improved - Theme two: "Head teachers require further professional learning …" and associated storyline.

The research questions aimed to reveal stakeholders' thoughts and opinions relating to what they thought needed to be improved with suspension centres. From the 71 responses to the semi-structured interviews it was clear that stakeholders, including head teachers and regional management committee members across the majority of centres involved in the research (excluding Blackburn), thought that head teachers required further professional learning "… via access to ongoing [and relevant] professional dialogue". The following storyline outlines stakeholders' comments.

Storyline one: … via access to "ongoing [and relevant] professional dialogue"

Half of the student services officers and a former head teachers across the centres commented on the need to recognise, and cater effectively for, the unique and often isolated role of the head teachers. The student services officer at Heatherdale said "the suspension centre not being left isolated is an ongoing challenge". Similarly, in reflecting on areas that needed improving, the former head teacher at Heatherdale stated "support for the head teacher in what is an isolated role".

Student services officers and head teachers commented on different types of professional learning required for suspension centre staff. The student services officer at Listerfield stated that three head teachers from suspension centres in the region "meet a couple of times a term, which is good" but said "this seems to be an autonomous process". She felt that having the head teachers meet with "involvement from other regional and school personnel" would have been good. Similarly, the student services officer at Mitcham said that head teachers of suspension centres "meet once a term" in the region but that "this needs to happen more often so that the head teachers have collegial support of a like-minded group and are not so much on their own". She also said that support from state office was needed to "bring all of the head teachers together for a day to share research and resources".

The head teacher at Abberfield questioned whether there was a statewide meeting for head teachers. He said that he attended behaviour school meetings with other regional people which "could be helpful … but also could be irrelevant, as they [behaviour school staff] deal with a different clientele of students". The student services officer at Heatherdale also made reference to the fact that "the head teacher has access to professional learning but also needs access to ongoing professional dialogue".

Discussion of findings: Theme two

Stakeholders' responses to the question: "What things needed to be improved with suspension centres?" revealed the theme "head teachers require further professional learning" and the associated storyline … *via access to "ongoing [and relevant] professional dialogue"*. Stakeholders' responses were reflected in the following research findings. Firstly, half of the student services officers and a former head teacher commented on the need to recognise and cater effectively to the unique and often isolated role of the head teachers. Secondly, student services officers and head teachers commented on the different types of professional learning required.

This ranged from having head teachers from centres in regions meeting "a couple of times a term with "involvement from other regional and school personnel" to ensuring that head teachers who met "once a term" met more often so that they had the collegial support of a "like-minded group" and to state office bringing "all of the head teachers together for a day to share research and resources". One head teacher also questioned whether there was a state wide meeting for head teachers of suspension centres, noting that attending behaviour school meetings with other regional people, "could be helpful"… but also "… irrelevant, as they deal with a different clientele of students".

The responses helped reveal how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice and also helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from stakeholders' perspectives. It seems that one of the key issues in appropriately addressing the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff is being able to establish clearly what stakeholders' needs are and identifying strategies to cater effectively to those needs. In exploring this issue more closely, it was noted that the suspension centre Guidelines did not directly refer to the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff. There did, however, appear to be some relevant parts of the Guidelines which outlined mechanisms via which such issues could be addressed, including at Operational Guidelines-Management and Operational Guidelines-Resourcing. For example, the management committee outlined at Operational Guidelines-Management of the Guidelines could be one enabling factor in more clearly identifying the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff and in facilitating practices to cater for those needs. The descriptions of the committee, in developing an "implementation plan" and "oversighting the management of resources, including funding", as outlined in the Guidelines (2006), would appear to enable such support (see Footnote 2, para. 8). Such committees, for example, might liaise with stakeholders to establish the types of support head teachers need and could be a conduit to sharing information between regional and state office

personnel. Such practices could help identify emerging issues and guide professional learning for suspension centre staff. They could also help address another area that stakeholders felt needed to be improved in theme one which was "communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved". Also, the *Operational Guidelines-Resourcing* is described in the following way in the Guidelines (2006).

- The managing school will receive funding to support the establishment and operation of the suspension centre.
- The head teacher position will be established at the managing school. (see Footnote 2, para. 9)

While only one response referred to the role of the managing school in supporting the professional needs of a head teacher, it may worth further exploring the role of managing schools in enabling the success of the centres. The principal at Mitcham commented on practices that had been put in place to support the professional needs of the head teacher of the centre stating that generally "there is no opportunity for promotion for the head teacher unless they are well supported at the school". The principal explained that the head teacher of the centre, which was co-located on the site of the school, had been provided with opportunities to relieve in higher positions within the school, such as relieving assistant principal and principal. He viewed that such opportunities would aid the head teacher in applying for more senior positions in schools when she wanted to move on from the head teacher suspension centre role. In light of such comments, one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres might be how suspension centre staff can use the skills they have developed in suspension centres more broadly across school communities. During this phase of the research, for example, stakeholders revealed that one of the best things happening with suspension centres and/or something to maintain was the "appropriate approaches and skills of suspension centre staff". Clearly, one would think that there are advantages to

schools if skilled head teachers of suspension centres took up positions in schools after being at the centres.

In reviewing related research, it was found that researchers over many years have identified the importance of professional learning for teachers. Hirsh and Hord (2008) found that professional learning was a powerful strategy in increasing the effectiveness of educators and in enhancing student results. Kennedy (2008) also cited the benefits of professional learning to individuals and others in finding that "teachers can learn a great deal more from their own experiences … if they take time to reflect upon those experiences" (Grimmet & Erickson, 1988; Schön, 1983) (para. 2). Kennedy (2008) found that sharing experiences can be a powerful learning tool as teachers do not implement curricula or other instruction exactly as they have been given (Grimmet & Erickson, 1988; Schön, 1983). The importance of enabling professional learning as a tool for sharing experiences is relevant for head teachers and teachers aides of suspension centres who could benefit from exploring the ways in which other suspension centre staff have interpreted the Guidelines and the practices they have put in place to enable the success of the centres. Having the opportunity to share experiences also seems to be particularly important in addressing what stakeholders described as the "isolated" role of head teachers. Early research by Lortie (1975), for example, found that teachers' isolation led them to adopt "an attitude of individualism" in which they were reluctant to work with others and "trusted only their own judgments and experiences" (Kennedy, 2008, p. 3). Clearly, isolated practices could result in the implementation of strategies and practices that inhibit the success of suspension centres. Therefore, ensuring there are practices in place to clearly identify and cater to the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff is important.

In discussing the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff the finding in this research that "suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills" could be of benefit to communities of schools. York-Barr, Sommerness, and Hur (2008, para. 11),

for example, cite researchers that advance the idea of "building leadership capacity" to the extent that many people are involved in "leading the learning work in schools" while at the same time being "supported in their own learning and growth to do so" (consistent with Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Lambert, 2003; Louis, 2006). Such research recognises the importance of understanding "leadership as shared practice", and the "transformation of schools as learning communities" (York-Barr et al., 2008. para. 9). York-Barr and Duke (2004, pp. 287–288) define teacher leadership as the following. "Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (as cited in York-Barr et al., 2008, para. 10). Exploring the ways in which head teachers of suspension centres might help to enhance practices in schools relating to managing students with disruptive behaviour, would be useful. The practices described at Mitcham, for example, where the head teacher had experiences relieving as assistant principal and principal reflects this notion of building leadership capacity. Such practices might have the potential to support head teachers' professional learning in a way that enables their growth towards leadership as well as positively influencing practices in school communities. These practices could, therefore, enable the success of suspension centres for both the people who staff the centres as well as for school communities more broadly.

In outlining the importance of professional learning opportunities for head teachers to enable the success of the centres, the researcher notes that one head teacher revealed some associated difficulties that might need to be addressed. The head teacher at Heatherdale, for example, anecdotally stated that he had applied for more senior positions in schools and had been unsuccessful. He explained that one of the reasons he felt that he was unsuccessful was that personnel recruiting for senior school positions viewed the role of suspension centre head teachers as being very "limited". The head teacher reflected that he felt the role was seen in this way by

school personnel because the maximum number of students at the centres at any one time was six and the fact that the centres had two staff. He reflected that school personnel often did not understand the breadth of the head teachers' role and the skills they had developed in liaising with a range of schools, families, and external service providers to support students with disruptive behaviour. Such issues may need to be further explored and addressed within the NSW Department of Education and Communities to enhance an understanding of the work being undertaken in suspension centres within educational communities.

In addressing the types of professional learning required for head teachers, research by Freiberg and Reyes (2008) and Riordan (2006) relating to the use of data and assessment may also be relevant in considering the enabling factors for the success of the centres. Such researchers note that using data and utilising teams of people from a cross-section of the community are important components in identifying and evaluating professional learning opportunities and to support improved teaching and learning practices. Riordan (2006) also cites the importance of training and ongoing support for staff to manage students with disruptive behaviour effectively (p. 248). Riordan found that teachers and support staff need to be well trained with respect to assessment and intervention and that staff working with students who have behaviour problems require ongoing staff development. Staffing suspension centres with personnel who have good skills, and supporting staff in their roles in the centres, was clearly found to be important in enabling the success of the centres. Supporting head teachers and teachers aides with appropriate professional learning was also found to be important for sharing good practice among suspension centre staff and in ensuring staff were not "isolated". Appropriately supporting suspension centre staff is also important in ensuring that the good skills and appropriate approaches of suspension centre staff can be shared in a transferable and practical way more broadly across school communities.

Theme three: "Students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres …"

Figure 8. Theme Three and Associated Storyline

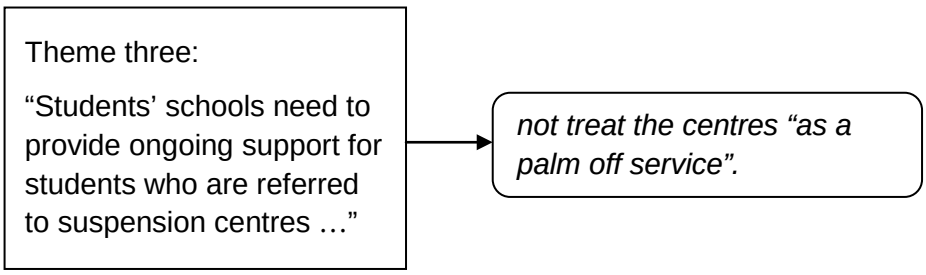


Figure 8. Needs to be improved - Theme three: "Students schools need to provide ongoing support for students referred to suspension centres …" and associated storyline.

When stakeholders were asked: "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?", a number of stakeholders commented on the need for schools to provide ongoing support to students who had been referred to suspension centres. Of the 71 respondents, the following storyline best reflects stakeholders' responses to the theme.

Storyline one: … not treat the centres "as a palm off service"

Head teachers and teachers aides of suspension centres; parents of students placed at the centres; and student services officers from regional management committees commented on the lack of ongoing support for students who were placed at suspension centres as an area that needed to be improved. One related issue noted by a number of stakeholders across half of the centres (Abberfield, Listerfield, and Blackburn) was that schools needed to provide timely and meaningful learning programs for students when they were referred to the centres. The head teacher at Abberfield, for example, said "schools are not sending school work to the centre … or if they are, it is inappropriate". The student services officer at Abberfield also said the "school work provided is not as effective as I would like…. The schools provide worksheets that are not

appropriate or textbook work that is difficult for students to complete". One student at Listerfield also said that he did not use a booklet provided to him by his school while he was at the centre because "the plurals are hard" and that he "couldn't do about 10 pages of the booklet" (S3, Listerfield). The student services officer at Abberfield, however, did say that "schools that use the centre frequently are better".

The teachers aide at Listerfield also commented on the need for "more input and involvement from the kids' schools". She said that work schools provided for students "can take a week to arrive … and in that time the kids have already fallen behind …". The teachers aide further stated that one of the difficulties relating to students keeping up with their school work while they were at the centres was the fact that students "often go back mid-way through a new topic at their school which is not good … they go back and are struggling because they have missed things".

Head teachers and teachers aides at some of the centres also reflected that schools needed to maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while they were at suspension centres. The head teacher at Listerfield stated "schools need to be more accountable … some just forget about the kids while they are on suspension". Similarly, the teachers aide at Blackburn said "the centre is seen as a 'palm off service'…. It would be nice to see the home school of the students showing more interest in them while they are at the centre…. It's out of sight out of mind". Head teachers revealed that they often spent time unsuccessfully chasing up work or information from students' schools and that this was an area that needed to be improved. The head teacher at Blackburn said that "it would be useful if schools completed data requested on the students", noting that information relating to risk assessments on students that were provided by schools "are a joke". He also gave an example of a student who was diagnosed as emotionally disturbed being placed at the centre without a risk assessment being completed by the student's school. The head teacher at Ashwood also noted related difficulties in saying that "sometimes high behaviour problem students are referred but this information [about the behaviour] is not

passed on". He said that the purpose of the suspension centre was not to cater to such students, stating: "Higher order kids need a behaviour class with a specially trained teacher" as opposed to the centre, which is "a short-term placement".

A range of stakeholders also commented on the lack of support provided by students' schools for students when they returned to their schools from suspension centres as an area that needed improvement. Parents at Abberfield commented on the poor support for students when they return to school, with one parent noting that the school's expectations "can be too high of a short-term program". One parent said "they expect the kids to go back to school and be perfect which is not reasonable. Often the kids have changed some behaviours and this should be recognised and encouraged" (S5, Abberfield). Another parent felt that the school did not give her daughter a chance, saying "it was the same old with the teachers who hated her" (S4 Abberfield). Similarly, the teachers aide at Listerfield said that "sometimes the kids' attitudes have changed but the teachers haven't". Clearly, such comments appear to be inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres in assisting "students to make a successful re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2).

Another issue raised by some head teachers and a teachers aide was that they thought schools disregarded the information they sent to them relating to students who had been placed at suspension centres. The former head teacher at Heatherdale, for example, questioned the "credibility and respect" afforded the head teacher from "school management", particularly in secondary schools. He stated: "I would gather a lot of important information about a student over the time they were at the centre [such as with learning difficulties and relevant family circumstances] which was often disregarded by the school". He further noted that, in his experience, "primary schools were more willing to listen and take on board suggestions on how to work with a student". Similarly, the teachers aide at Blackburn said that all students were sent

"back to their schools with a draft individual learning plan but many schools probably don't follow through with it [use it]".

In relation to theme three: "Students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres …", head teachers in almost all of the centres spoke of difficulties associated with the concept of *mentoring* for students referred to suspension centres: that is, in the school providing a "mentor teacher" while the student was at the suspension centre and to "support the student's return to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 12). The head teacher at Blackburn, for example, said the "mentoring component is difficult to set up … most kids have burned their bridges with teachers and most end up with the deputy principal or principal as their mentor by default". Similarly, the head teacher at Listerfield stated: "Mentors are difficult to find for the kids and often the mentor ends up being one of the school's executive". The head teacher at Blackburn said that he had tried to be creative in seeking mentors for students placed at the suspension centre. He described setting up a mentoring system where "teachers were paid to be a mentor at $20 an hour … but still no-one was very keen". As Blackburn suspension centre was co-located at the school that referred students to the centre, I asked the head teacher whether he had observed mentoring with students after they had returned to school. In response, he said that he had "seen some contact … but that they [the student and mentor] were not necessarily sitting down together … what they were doing was less formal".

One of the head teachers thought the practice of mentoring established for students placed at the suspension centre worked well. When asked to describe how the mentoring component worked he said that students were not linked with mentors as such, but "were able to leave class to visit the suspension centre if they were having difficulties after going back to school". He further stated that "lots come back again after 'flair ups' at school" (Head teacher, Ashwood). In relation to the practice of mentoring at the suspension centre, however, the student support coordinator did not think that such practices were necessarily enabling the success of the centre. In relation to the

head teacher's practice of mentoring she stated: "They are not using the mentoring aspect of the program effectively…. The head teacher is the mentor, not teachers at the school which is limiting".

Only a couple of stakeholders said that mentoring was an important aspect of the suspension centre program and/or that mentoring was working well. The head teacher at Listerfield commented that "mentors seem to be a good part of the program". The head teacher at Abberfield thought the use of mentors was important for students who had been placed at suspension centres. He stated: "There is more accountability on schools when mentors are used".

Finally, in noting stakeholders' comments relating to the question: "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?" of the 22 students who took part in the semi-structured survey interview, the majority responded in various ways that they could think of nothing that needed to be improved. Comments included: "Nothing to be improved" (S1, S2, S4, Abberfield; S2, Ashwood; S3, Mitcham); "No comment" or could not think of things that needed to be improved or changed (S1, S2, S3, Blackburn; S2, S4, Mitcham); "Nothing to improve, it's perfect. No it isn't, it is more than perfect" (S5, Mitcham). Of the two students that identified things that could be improved, one student (Listerfield) commented that a booklet the school provided to him to complete while he was on suspension was "too hard" and the other student (Abberfield) commented on the need for another male teacher at the suspension centre because the "students go crazy" when the male teacher left the room.

Discussion of findings: Theme three

Stakeholders' responses to the question: "What needs to be improved with suspension centres?" revealed that a number of stakeholders' thought that schools needed to provide ongoing support to students who were referred to suspension centres. The associated storyline … *not treat the centres as a "palm off service",* was reflected in the following findings. Firstly, a number of

stakeholders, across half of the centres involved in the research, felt that schools needed to provide timely and meaningful learning programs for students referred to the centres. In particular, head teachers stated that they often spent time unsuccessfully chasing up work or information from students' schools. One of the areas of concern was the lack of information relating to risk assessments requested for students with special needs or "high behaviour problems" who had been referred to the centres. Secondly, head teachers and teachers aides at some of the centres reflected that schools needed to maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while students were at the centres. A third issue was that parents and suspension centre staff commented that the lack of support provided by students' schools when the students returned from suspension centres was an area requiring improvement. Some head teachers and a teachers aide thought that schools disregarded the information they sent to them relating to students who had been at the centres. An associated finding was that head teachers in almost all of the centres, spoke of difficulties associated with mentoring for students in supporting their return to their schools. Finally, of 22 students who took part in this phase of the research, the majority responded that they could think of nothing that needed to be improved with the centres.

The responses identified several inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from stakeholders' perspectives. When comparing the practices to the suspension centre Guidelines, the practices also seemed to be at odds with information outlined in the Purpose and Target Population of the Guidelines that have been previously stated in this research. The practices also seemed to be at odds with the Operational Guidelines-Program in the Guidelines that state "The home school will remain responsible for the management of the student and provision of the learning program" (See Footnote 2, para. 11).

Stakeholders' comments indicated that the practices of some schools were not reflective of the Guidelines. For example, the finding that students' schools were not providing an adequate learning program for students when they were placed at suspension centres is at odds with the

Operational Guidelines-Program. Such practices would also appear to be an inhibiting factor in "successfully returning students to school" as per the Purpose and Target Population of the Guidelines. Researchers such as Riordan (2006, p. 245) clearly support the need for students with disruptive behaviour to be engaged in meaningful learning and academic programs, to increase the likelihood that they will be successfully engaged at school.

Stakeholders also revealed that schools were not providing suspension centre staff with information related to risk assessments on students' behaviour and this may also be an inhibiting factor for the success of the centres. Without information relating to students' behaviour, for example, it would be difficult for the head teacher to confirm whether or not students "were likely to benefit from" the suspension centre placement (see Footnote 2, para. 1). This lack of information could also result in occupational health and safety risks for suspension centre staff and other students at the centres. Another inhibiting factor might be that such students could negatively influence the likelihood that other students at the centres benefit from the suspension centre placement.

A range of stakeholders also commented on the lack of support provided to students by their schools when they returned from the centres as an area for improvement. Parents, for example, felt that the school's expectations could be too high. Head teachers and teachers aides also thought that schools disregarded information they sent them relating to students who had accessed the centres. Finally, head teachers in almost all of the centres noted difficulties associated with the concept of mentoring for students placed at the centres. In relation to students returning to schools from suspension centres, the Guidelines (2006) state the following, in Operational Guidelines-Transition.

- The student will be linked to a mentor teacher while in the suspension centre program. The mentor teacher will support the student's return to school.

- Students returning to school after suspension will be supported through the continuum of available support services including mentoring, support teacher behaviour and school counsellors. (see Footnote 2, para. 12)

The importance of schools providing appropriate support to students when they return to their schools from suspension centres is highlighted by other themes within this phase of the research as being important to the learning continuum between suspension centres and schools. In establishing what were the best things happening with the centres, for example, stakeholders' reported that students were being helped with and/or were learning academic activities and behaviour skills at suspension centres (Theme one: "Students are learning …"). It seems clear from research that this is an important aspect in enabling the success of the centres for students when they returned to their schools but that it is only a first step. This is because researchers have noted the importance of the transferability and sustainability of gains in behaviour and learning in different contexts, such as students' schools or homes (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008; Mayer, 2008; Skinner & Greene, 2008). Such research seems to be particularly important in connsidering how well the centres, as short-term interventions, enable students to return successfully to their school, where the inappropriate behaviour that led to the suspension took place. Previous research has shown that the suspension centre intervention, alone, may not enable sustainable changes in students' behaviour and learning "without significant and ongoing support for students when they return to their schools" (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 5).

There might also be a correlation between stakeholders' concerns that students' schools were not providing support via contact with, and ongoing responsibility for, students while they were at suspension centres with the likelihood that these same schools would also be least likely to support students on their return to school after their suspension centre placements. The Guidelines state that students will be supported in their return to school via being linked to a "mentor teacher" and through a "continuum of available support services" which includes "mentoring,

support teacher behaviour and school counsellors" (see Footnote 2, para. 12). The fact that stakeholders said that the mentoring component of the Guidelines was problematic may be an inhibiting factor in successfully returning students to their schools after their suspension centre placements. Therefore, although it is beyond the scope of this research, it would be useful to identify more clearly if and how positive gains in students' behaviour and learning are sustained, and the strategies and practices implemented by schools to support students when they return to their schools after suspension centre placements, and the potential correlation between these and the success of the centres. It might be, for example, that schools are implementing "informal" mentoring strategies or other supportive strategies to good effect to enable the success of the centres for students and school communities and this may have implications for the Guidelines. It might also have implications for the types of professional development opportunities provided for schools more generally by the Department of Education and Communities to ensure appropriate support for students with disruptive behaviour.

In identifying the need to establish more clearly how the positive gains established for students at suspension centres are sustained when students return to their schools, stakeholders' comments relating to the ongoing support provided by suspension centre staff to students when they returned to their schools are interesting. This is because other research has established the importance of students' schools actively supporting students to assist in maintaining such positive gains. Therefore, it could be questionable as to how beneficial and sustainable it is to have head teachers of suspension centres mentoring students and providing ongoing support to students when they return to their schools. In fact, according to other research, such practices may inhibit the likelihood that students are "successfully returned to school" in the long-term, if they are isolated practices used to support students and not part of broader and more sustainable supports. Researchers have cited the actions of schools as enabling or inhibiting factors for student suspension and disengagement from school. Within the past ten years, two extensive reviews have

been conducted relating to student suspensions in NSW government and non-government schools (Gonczi & Riordan, 2002; Riordan & Gonczi, 2003). The reviews suggested that difference among rates of student suspensions in schools could be explained by "school effects" and not only the "characteristics of students" (as cited in Riordan, 2006, p. 239). Riordan (2006) noted that student misbehaviour could be understood as a result of "student characteristics in combination with school factors such as rules, policies, curriculum offerings, attitudes of staff and principals and the provision or lack of counselling and other student-support services" (p. 240). Clearly, focusing on students' behaviour while they are placed in short-term settings is not sufficient. To enable successful outcomes for students and school communities, the interventions established in the short-term settings needed to follow the student to his or her next placement (and elsewhere). Schools have an important role in enabling ongoing success for students when they return to their schools from the centres.

To enable student success at school, researchers such as Gladden (2002) and Riordan and Gonczi (2003) have noted the importance of the development of successful reintegration plans for students who have been suspended from school to ensure that they can engage with school and to help prevent the recurrence of disruptive behaviour (as cited in Riordan, 2006, p. 246). Rogers (2004) noted that the central person in engaging and developing such plans was the classroom teacher supported by teachers aides. Riordan (2006) also cited the importance of "providing school work for students who were suspended and developing re-integration plans that addressed both the counselling and learning needs of the student upon their return to the school" (p. 249). The importance of the provision of ongoing support at schools for students returning from suspension was also identified by Braun et al. (2002, p. 5) in their evaluation of learning support units in the United Kingdom.

Summary

In response to the question: "What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?", **theme one: "Students are learning …"** revealed that of the 71 respondents, a range of stakeholders, across the majority of the centres, thought that students were being helped with and/or were learning skills relating to academic activities and that they were being taught and/or were learning behaviour skills. Students, suspension centre staff, and a principal commented on positive changes in students' behaviour, which many attributed to the behaviour skills students were taught and practised at suspension centres.

Stakeholders also stated that students were attending school regularly; were happier at school; succeeding with school work; and had improved self esteem and coping skills after returning to their schools from the centres. Such comments may reflect that students had developed positive attitudes to school. Parents and a teachers aide also commented that, unlike traditional forms of suspension from school, students had a place to go that was still connected to education. These things appeared to be enabling factors for the success of the centres.

In comparing policy and practice, the responses revealed that the centres assisted the majority of students to reflect on their behaviour; develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours; and build capacity and understanding on how to reengage at school and reintegrate to positive work habits (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Students were also "assisted to make a successful re-entry to schooling (see Footnote 2, para. 2). However, it was identified that some caution is necessary because this research was not designed to determine whether the impact of what students gained at suspension centres was sustained over a long period of time after their placements at the centres had concluded. Therefore, stakeholders' comments in this phase of the research, at best, reflected that suspension centres assisted students to "successfully return to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 1). A more thorough investigation of the variables associated with students' successful return to school and over a longer period of time, would be of benefit. This would help in determining

whether the positive academic and behaviour outcomes for students were sustained after students had left the centres. This may also be important as research identifies that one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres could be whether the successful behaviour and learning interventions established for students at suspension centres are seen and sustained in different contexts, such as students' schools or homes (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008).

Theme two: "Suspension centre staff are using appropriate approaches and have good skills …" reflected that all stakeholder groups across the majority of centres reported that suspension centre staff, in particular head teachers, were using appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. Stakeholders also noted the good relationships head teachers and some teachers aides had developed with a variety of people associated with the centres, particularly with students and their families. Some regional management committee members also commented on the positive relationships head teachers had developed with schools and their school communities. Such practices appeared to be important in enabling the Purpose and Goals outlined in the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, paras. 2 & 4) to be met. Some researchers cite the importance of providing effective support to students with disruptive behaviour by building, "high-quality relationships with teachers" or between young people and other adults (Silver 2005 as cited in Jerome & Pianta, 2008, para. 37). However, the extent to which the positive relationships with suspension centre staff assisted students to develop positive relationships with "educational figures", such as teachers in their schools, was less clear. All stakeholders groups across the six centres, particularly students and their parents also commented on the good skills of head teachers and their implementation of strategies and practices to support students and their families. This included the provision of relevant information to students' schools relating to the management of students' behaviour and/or learning and the provision of skills development for the parents and teachers of the students. Stakeholders described the holistic approaches used in seeking additional support and/or

providing relevant information to assist students and their families. Such findings are clearly of interest to this research as such practices were outlined in the Goals of the Guidelines and appeared to be one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres. However, while comments revealed that practices in suspension centres enabled some of the Purpose and Goals outlined in the Guidelines to be met in the short-term, another factor is whether students can sustain the skills learnt at suspension centres in their schools successfully over a longer period of time. The fact that research reveals that teachers can have difficult relationships with students with disruptive behaviour clearly has implications for students successfully transferring the skills they learned at suspension centres to their school environments and in sustaining the skills learnt over a longer period of time after their suspension centre placements concluded.

In responses to the question: "What things need to be improved with suspension centres?", **theme one: "Communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved"** was revealed from stakeholders' comments. Head teachers thought that there needed to be improved communication to schools, relating to the purpose of suspension centres. Head teachers and members of regional management committees also said that improved communication was needed between regional and state office personnel and suspension centre staff to discuss and clarify issues and to monitor the progress of the centres. Some also raised issues related to monitoring the progress of the centres.

It was noted that monitoring and evaluation were not specified in the Guidelines. Other researchers, however, cited these as important in measuring effectiveness, assisting with planning and in identifying and addressing issues as they arise (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 26).

Some stakeholders felt that regular meetings between persons responsible for running, overseeing, or managing suspension centres could help in understanding and resolving some of the issues raised by stakeholders. At Abberfield, for example, the student services officer and head teacher commented on the fact that increased communication to schools had corrected

misconceptions relating to the purpose of suspension centres. Comments from two student services officers at two centres also revealed that regular communication within the forum of management committees might enable such issues to be addressed and provide a means of monitoring and evaluating the centres. However, it was acknowledged that it would first be useful to ascertain whether management committees have functioned and how they have functioned which might also have implications for the Guidelines. It might be, for example, that the Guidelines need to define more clearly the role of management committees to facilitate the success of the centres.

Some stakeholders in rural locations thought that primary school students needed to access suspension centres, citing the benefits of intervening when students were younger. Some researchers also identify the importance of intervening early to address disruptive student behaviour (Riordan, 2006; Rogers, 2004) and at a time when families are "more receptive to interventions" (Tilling, 2008, p. 6). The Guidelines do not specify an age limit for students and there would be some benefit in establishing why most of the centres were not catering to primary school students. Some stakeholders revealed that there were sometimes few students in some centres and that one centre was implementing practices that were not in the Guidelines in catering to students on the "verge of suspension". Identifying the outcomes of such practices would be useful in ascertaining whether the practices led to successful outcomes for students, schools, and school communities.

In relation to **theme two: "Head teachers require further professional learning …"** regional management committee members and head teachers across the majority of the centres commented on the need to cater effectively for the unique and often isolated role of head teachers. Head teachers and student services officers identified that head teachers required further professional learning ranging from having the head teachers in regions meeting "a couple of times a term" with "involvement from other regional and school personnel", to state office bringing the

head teachers together to "share research and resources". The Guidelines did not directly refer to professional learning. However, "management committees" as outlined in the Guidelines might be one means of establishing stakeholders' needs more clearly and ensuring that strategies are put in place to cater to those needs.

In theme two, a range of stakeholders said that one of the best things happening with or something to maintain with suspension centres was the "good skills of suspension centre staff" and this could benefit school communities more broadly. Finally, it was noted that while research establishes the importance of professional learning for teachers (Hirsh & Hord, 2008; Kennedy, 2008) some difficulties were cited by stakeholders that would need to be addressed. This included that head teachers applying for more senior positions in schools had been unsuccessful because they felt that personnel recruiting for the positions viewed the head teacher suspension centre role as being very "limited".

In **theme three: "Students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres …"** of the 71 respondents, a number of stakeholders' thought that schools needed to provide ongoing support to students who were referred to suspension centres, including providing timely and meaningful learning programs for students when they were referred to the centres. Head teachers said that they often spent time unsuccessfully chasing up work or information from students' schools. One of the areas of concern was the lack of information relating to risk assessments that had been requested for students with special needs and students with "high behaviour problems" who had been referred to the centres. Another issue revealed by suspension centre staff was that schools needed to maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while they were at suspension centres. Parents, teachers aides, and head teachers also commented on the lack of support provided by students' schools for students when they returned to their schools, with head teachers in almost all of the centres commenting on the difficulties associated with mentoring in supporting the students return to school. That the

"mentoring" component of the Guidelines was problematic may be an inhibiting factor for the centres in successfully returning students to their schools post suspension centres. Therefore, although it is beyond the scope of this research, it would be useful to identify more clearly how the positive gains established for students at suspension centres are sustained when students return to their schools. Stakeholders commented on the ongoing support provided by suspension centre staff to students when they returned to school. However, other literature clearly establishes the importance of students' schools actively supporting students to maintain such positive gains and the importance of supporting students via broader and more sustainable supports.

Practices of some schools were not reflective of the Purpose, Target Population, and Operational Guidelines-Program outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines (2006) and as such the practices appeared to be inhibiting factors in "successfully returning students to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Researchers such as Riordan (2006, p. 245) clearly support the need for students with disruptive behaviour to be engaged in meaningful learning and academic programs to increase the likelihood that they will be successfully engaged at school. To enable student success at school, researchers have noted the importance of the development of successful reintegration plans for students who have been suspended from school, to ensure that they can engage with school and to help prevent the recurrence of disruptive behaviour (Gladden, 2002; Rogers, 2004; Riordan, 2006).

Finally, of the 22 students who took part in the semi-structured survey interviews, only two commented on things they thought needed to be improved with the centres.

Chapter Five: Phase Two Results and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion related to Phase Two of this research. Questionnaire surveys were self-completed by stakeholders who could best describe the student's behaviour at home and school. The stakeholders were students accessing the suspension centres, their parents, and a mentor from the students' school. The surveys were completed at two different times, at day one or two of the student's entry to the suspension centre and at four weeks after the student's last day at the suspension centre.

In reviewing responses to the surveys, categories of responses and associated storylines were revealed that best described, from stakeholders' perspectives, any noticeable changes in students' behaviour or learning and stakeholders' explanations for any changes. Three categories of response were revealed from the responses to the research questions. The categories of response were:

- stakeholders reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning;
- stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning; and
- stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning.

Phase Two of the research further revealed how the policy framework for suspension centres had been implemented in practice (Schön, 1995). Comparing responses to the Guidelines and associated research then enabled some description of what might be the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres. The following sections of this chapter explore the categories of responses and storylines expressed in stakeholders' responses to the questionnaire surveys.

Category of response one: Stakeholders reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning

Figure 9. Category of Response One and Associated Storyline

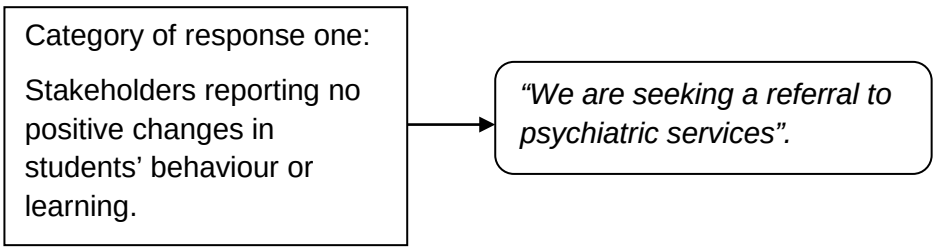


Figure 9. Category of response one: Stakeholders reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning and associated storyline.

Questions one and two of the questionnaire survey enabled students, parents, and mentors to describe students' behaviour at home and school; whether there had been any noticeable changes in students' behaviour or learning recently and to what stakeholders attributed any changes. From responses to the questionnaire survey it was clear that a small number of the 36 respondents of students, parents, and mentors reported no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning between day one or two of the suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded. (See Appendix Q Table Q9 Phase Two research: Number of stakeholders responding by category of response).

Where stakeholders reported no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning, a range of disruptive student behaviours were typically described at home and school on day one or two of the students' placements at suspension centres. Some stakeholders also described that the students' behaviour had recently become worse. Parents' descriptions of their children's behaviour at day one or two of their placements at the centres included the following: "He has slowly gone downhill. He has become aggressive and explosive and threatened to kill himself"

(S1, Abberfield). Another parent described her son's behaviour as "defiant and disruptive. He has no respect for rules, boundaries or others" (S2, Heatherdale).

Students' mentors also described students' behaviour in similar ways, stating "defiant behaviour and aggression … behaviour has worsened at school over the past few weeks" (S1, Abberfield). Another mentor stated of the student's behaviour: "threatening violence towards other students … disrespectful of teachers" (S2, Heatherdale).

Students themselves described a range of disruptive behaviours at home and school and in some cases said that their behaviour was getting worse. A typical response from a student was: "at school it's hard to be good…. I keep getting worse" (S1, Abberfield).

Four weeks after the suspension centre placements, a small number of students, parents, and mentors typically described no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning at home or school. One parent described: "… at home he is absolutely out of control and has always been this way" (S1, Abberfield). Another stated: "At home and at school his attitude is appalling … his behaviour is terrible and he does not care" (S1, Mitcham).

The students' mentors also described continuing disruptive behaviour when students returned to their schools from suspension centres, with comments indicating that there had been no positive changes in students' behaviour. The mentor of S1, Abberfield, noted: "… escalating rapidly when frustrated … he would leave the room, swear … no there have been no changes….".

Likewise, while the responses of students were shorter and non-descriptive, the students themselves did not identify that there had been positive changes in their behaviour or learning at home or school. S1, Abberfield in response to whether there had been any changes in his behaviour or learning recently stated: "No not really". Stakeholders' responses appeared to be at odds with their responses to question three of the questionnaire survey which mostly indicated, at day one or two of students' placements at the centres, that they thought students would benefit from the placements. Almost all of the stakeholders, except one mentor, for example, "thought" or

"hoped" the students would benefit. A typical response of parents was: "We are hoping he will benefit with his interaction with others … and also bringing his school studies up to date" (S1, Abberfield).

Mentors, in responding that they thought or hoped students would benefit, typically commented on the smaller environment and the skills and strategies that might be provided to students at the centres. One mentor noted that "… he will definitely benefit … he needs to be taught the strategies for coping and behaviour management techniques" (S1, Abberfield). One mentor did not think the student would benefit from the suspension centre placement stating: "No his behaviours have not changed after the last suspension centre placement" (S1, Mitcham).

Students' responses were generally positive when they were asked: "Do you think you will benefit from the suspension centre placement?". Typical responses, from the 10 respondents included: "Yes, because they can help me. It can help me cope" (S1, Abberfield). One student stated: "Yes because I don't want to go to the behaviour school or come back to the suspension centre" (S2, Heatherdale).

Further reviewing stakeholders' responses to question three of the questionnaire survey, relating to whether they thought students had benefited from their suspension centre placements, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the questionnaire survey, revealed the following storyline.

Storyline one: "We are seeking a referral to psychiatric services"

From the 36 responses to the questionnaire surveys, a small number of students, parents, and mentors indicated that there were no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning. In analysing stakeholders' responses it was noted that some of these students were described as having severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs.

Some parents described that their children had significant mental health issues which required additional support. One parent, for example, noted that while her son derived some benefit from the suspension centre "his mental health problems prevented him putting his plans into action". She further noted: "We are seeking a referral to psychiatric services". The mentor of the student also stated that he did not think the student had benefited from the suspension centre because "his case is so messed up" (S1, Abberfield). Two parents also described that their children either had accessed, or needed to access, external counselling services. One parent, for example, stated that she had "tried contacting a local adolescent centre to organise some major counselling for [her son]" (S3, Abberfield). Another parent described "giving the private counselling a break, as it was not working" (S2, Heatherdale). Such comments indicated that students had behaviour and/or learning needs that required additional support.

In analysing stakeholders' responses to phases one and two of this research, it was noted that some of the students described as having no positive changes in their behaviour or learning, were also described by stakeholders as having diagnosed special needs. One such student was S2, Heatherdale. During Phase One of the research, the head teacher said that the Year 6 student had spent the majority of his schooling in a class for emotionally disturbed students on the site of the primary school where the student had just started attending a mainstream class. In another case, during Phase One of this research the head teacher at Abberfield said that a Year 6 student was at the centre while waiting for a placement in a school for emotionally disturbed students. During this phase of the research, the mentor of the student described that the student's behaviour and learning had not changed and that the student had remained extremely disruptive. The mentor stated that the student had "consistently behaved in this way for a very long time …. His refusal to engage and explosive behaviour is entrenched" (S6, Abberfield). The head teacher at Blackburn also said that some of the students referred to the centre had mental health issues. He noted that some students had a diagnosed mental health disorder but could not access specialist schools and

so were placed at the centre in the short-term. It was noted in discussions with the head teacher that this was sometimes for more than a 20 day period (that is, more than the length of a long suspension).

In exploring this storyline further, the term *entrenched behaviour* was mentioned by several stakeholders who described students as having no positive changes in their behaviour or learning after their suspension centre placement. During Phase One of this research the principal at Mitcham also said that the success rate for students accessing suspension centres with entrenched behaviours and/or diagnosed learning and behaviour needs was not high. By success rate, the principal was referring to whether students were likely to benefit from the suspension centre placement. The principal stated the following.

> There is a 50:50 strike rate because there are more entrenched behaviours for 20% of the students. It would be easier if there were more ED/BD [emotional disturbance/behaviour disordered] placements available close by. Some parents won't take their kids to a doctor (to obtain diagnosis), which makes it difficult.

Such comments raise questions about whether these students were placed at suspension centres as an alternative to mainstream education because principals found it difficult to refer the students to other more appropriate placements. Also, in at least one case, a student for whom the parent and mentor described no positive changes in behaviour or learning post the suspension centre may not have been "likely to benefit" from the placement in the first place. This is because the mentor of the student stated at day one or two of the student's placement that: "His behaviours have not changed after the last suspension centre placement" (S1, Mitcham). The mentor also stated that previously the student had been "suspended from the suspension centre after two days".

An observation made by one of the teachers aides during Phase One of the research revealed that students placed at suspension centres also needed to take some ownership of their behaviour. A comment by the teachers aide highlighted the fact that students placed at the centres not only

need to be "able to" but "willing to" change their behaviour. She stated: "Some students are not willing to change" (Blackburn). Clearly, students who were not willing to change their behaviour might have been "less likely to benefit" from a suspension centre placement.

Discussion of findings: Category of response one

The following questions were asked of students, their parents and mentors on day one or two of the students' placement at the suspension centres and four weeks after their placements had concluded.

1. Describe your/your child's/the student's behaviour at school/home.
2. Have there been any noticeable changes in his/her behaviour or learning recently? Explain this.
3. Do you think you/your child's/the student will/did benefit from the suspension centre placement? Explain.

A small number of students, parents, and mentors, of the 36 who responded to the research questions, reported no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements. This was indicated by the fact that, in addressing questions one and two, stakeholders typically described a range of disruptive student behaviours at home and school on day one or two of the students' placement at the centres, with some stakeholders describing that the behaviours had recently become worse. Four weeks after the students' placements these stakeholders described no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning at home or school.

In response to question three of the survey, almost all of the parents, mentors, and students, except one mentor, hoped or thought the students would benefit from their placements. However, further analysis of stakeholders' responses relating to whether they thought students had benefited from the placements, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the

questionnaire survey, revealed a storyline, described by the quote: *"We are seeking a referral to psychiatric services"*. In relation to this storyline, stakeholders described a range of issues which might help explain why, for a small number of students, stakeholders described no positive changes in the students' behaviour or learning four weeks after their suspension centre placements. One issue described by stakeholders was that some students had severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs. This included significant mental health issues that required additional support. Parents also described that their children had either accessed, or needed to access, external counselling services. Another issue was that some of the students were described as having diagnosed special needs such as emotional disturbance/behaviour disordered. One principal noted that the success rate for such students accessing suspension centres was not high and made the observation that there were some difficulties with such students in assessing their needs and accessing special education settings. One mentor also revealed that one student might not have been likely to benefit from the suspension centre placement, as the student's behaviour had not improved after the previous placement.

The comments were analysed and compared to the suspension centre Guidelines to gain a sense of how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. In this way, stakeholders' thoughts and opinions helped to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from their perspectives. It seems that students with severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs, such as mental health issues and diagnosed special needs may be less likely to benefit from suspension centre placements and less likely to achieve the first three Goals outlined in the Guidelines. That is, such students were less likely to have been assisted "to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences", "to reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours", and "to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and

prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Clearly, from stakeholders' comments, an inhibiting factor for the success of the centres appeared to be the referral of such students, including one student who had been re-referred to the centre after a previously unsuccessful placement. In such cases, comments described no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning after they returned to their schools. Therefore, such students were not assisted "to make a successful re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2) as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines and it is also questionable as to whether such students were "likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1) as outlined in the Definition of the Guidelines.

Stakeholders' comments again raise a question explored in Phase One of this research in theme one: "Communication and use of suspension centres needs to be improved": that is, whether principals understood the Purpose and Goals of the Guidelines, or whether principals were referring students who had less potential to achieve some of the Goals as a way to alleviate the stress of managing students with these types of disruptive behaviours and/or because they did not think that students with those types of disruptive behaviours belonged in their schools. Again, it is acknowledged that comments do not identify why principals referred such students to the centres. However, exploring and understanding why some principals referred students with highly disruptive behaviours to suspension centres is critical in successfully addressing such issues and enabling practices for the success of the centres.

In considering the implications of these findings, it is important to consider relevant research related to these issues. According to some researchers, it may be particularly important to look carefully at suspensions involving students with serious mental health issues or disabilities. Gonczi and Riordan (2002), for example, cite that if suspensions involve such students, the opportunity is provided "to involve other resources and services from both inside and outside the DET [the Department], such as health, welfare and employment" (p. 6). Hayward (2002) also

reported in a good practice guide for learning support units that "pupils who have complex and significant behavioural problems, perhaps with a statement of SEN [special education needs], may require external placement in specialist provision" (p. 23). Such research again focuses on the question as to whether suspension centres are suitable for such students who require significant supports as they are less likely to benefit from a short-term placement to return them successfully to their schools.

It should also be noted, that a couple of stakeholders felt that the students' schools were a barrier to students demonstrating positive behaviour and/or learning changes when they returned to their schools from suspension centres. One student and her parent (S4, Abberfield), for example, said that the student had gained some benefit from the suspension centre placement. However, the mother noted difficulties with her daughter's return to school, explaining that her daughter had been expelled from school just after she returned. In Phase One of this research, the mother attributed her daughter's decline in behaviour shortly after returning to school to two factors. One was a two week holiday period between the end of the daughter's suspension centre placement and return to school, which she said contributed to her daughter "forgetting the skills she learnt at the centre". The other factor was the attitude of some of the school staff towards her daughter. She said that while her daughter was at the suspension centre, her daughter heard via friends at the school, that some of the teachers "were glad she was no longer at school". The mother also said that the deputy principal told her that if he expelled her daughter and another boy in the class, that the "rest of the students would fall into line". The parent stated that she felt the school did not give her daughter a chance. "It was the same old with the teachers that hated her" (S4, Abberfield). In Phase One of this research the mentor of the student stated that the student "is now attending a behaviour school". Such comments suggest that the student might have had the potential to meet some of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines but that practices at the student's

school might have inhibited her successfully returning to school after the suspension centre placement.

In analysing stakeholders' responses further, it was noted that another parent stated that her daughter "… wasn't really good back at school after the centre placement … because the school didn't give her a chance" (S3, Blackburn). Similarly the teachers aide at Listerfield said "Sometimes the kids' attitudes have changed but the teachers haven't". Such comments clearly identify the role students' schools play in enabling or inhibiting the success of suspension centres. These comments also have some relationship to findings in Phase One of this research, as to what needed to be improved with the centres as reflected in theme three: "Students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres" and when they return from suspension centres. Riordan (2006) also noted that student misbehaviour could be understood as a product of student characteristics along with school factors including such things as "rules, policies, curriculum offerings, attitudes of staff and principals and the provision or lack of counselling and other student-support services" (p. 240). Clearly, focusing on students' behaviour only while they are placed in short-term settings is not sufficient. To enable successful outcomes for students and school communities, the interventions established in the short-term settings needed to follow the student to his or her next placement (and elsewhere) (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008; Mayer, 2008; Skinner & Greene, 2008). Such research seems to be particularly important in terms of how well the centres, as short-term interventions, enable students to return successfully to their school, where the inappropriate behaviour that led to the suspension took place. It is important that schools also provide an environment in which any changes in students' behaviour or learning can be maintained and built on when students return to their schools from other placements, such as suspension centres.

Clearly, this research, along with other research, identifies the importance of the provision of ongoing support for students when they return to their schools, from suspension centres to

facilitate the success of the centres. Related to these findings, during Phase One of the research, the principal at Abberfield stated: "… one boy and one girl placed at the centre were not so successful … the placements that were not successful were not a reflection on the program". While the meaning of this response is subject to interpretation, the response did imply that at least one stakeholder felt that where students' behaviour and/or learning did not change after the suspension centre placements, that this was not necessarily an indication that there was anything deficient with the suspension centre program. Further research would be required to analyse all of the variables that inhibit the potential for some students to re-integrate successfully at their schools. What is clear, however, is that some stakeholders saw students' schools as inhibiting their successful return to their schools.

It should be noted that stakeholders' responses did not reveal how two of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines (2006) had been implemented in practice, within this category of response. These were "to provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students" and "to provide professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

Category of response two: Stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning

Figure 10. Category of Response Two and Two Associated Storylines

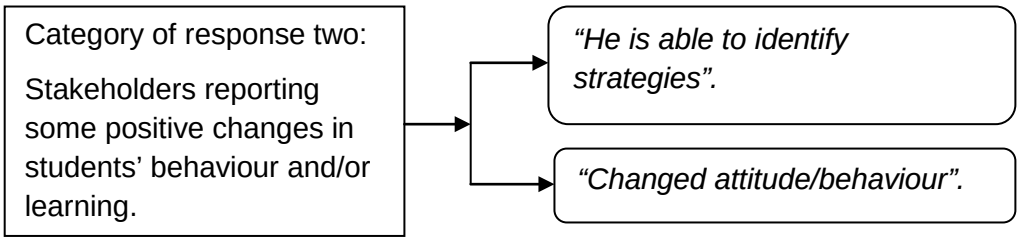


Figure 10. Category of response two: Stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning and two associated storylines.

Questions one and two of the questionnaire survey enabled students, parents, and mentors to describe the students' behaviour at home and school, whether there had been any noticeable changes in students' behaviour or learning recently, and to what any changes were attributed. From the 36 responses, it was clear that almost half the students and mentors and half of the parents reported some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of the students' suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded. Appendix Q Table Q9 Phase Two research: Number of stakeholders responding by category of response provides an overview of stakeholder responses by category.

Where stakeholders reported some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning, a range of disruptive student behaviours were typically described at home and school on day one or two of students' placements at suspension centres. Some stakeholders also stated that the students' behaviour had recently become worse. Parents' descriptions of their children's behaviour at day one or two of the suspension centre placements included the following: "Impulsive, aggressive, lacking focus, lying and stealing … his behaviour is deteriorating" (S2, Abberfield). Another

parent described her son's behaviour as "erratic and emotional at home and at school…. In the last five months … his learning is stable or paused" (S5, Mitcham).

Mentors of the students also described students' behaviour in similar ways. One mentor, for example, stated: "His behaviour scares his parents … there are lots of negative reports about his behaviour after school hours … all of the negative behaviours seem to have increased in frequency and magnitude" (S2, Abberfield). Another mentor noted: "She has an overwhelming need to be physical…. She has also been involved in aggressive physical fights in the playground" (S3, Blackburn). S1 mentor, Blackburn similarly stated: "Shows signs of disrespect … including swearing and threats of violence".

Students also described a range of disruptive behaviours early in their placements at suspension centres. One student, for example, stated: "[I am] … violent if I don't get what I want and I am mean. I am impulsive and have concentration problems" (S2, Abberfield). Another student stated: "My behaviour is bad because I fight people, run away from teachers, swear, hurt people. At home I do the same thing" (S5, Mitcham).

Four weeks after the suspension centre placements stakeholders typically described some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning at home and school. Parents, for example, stated: "… he learned an enormous amount of self control that he took on board" (S2, Abberfield). Another parent said: "He is calmer and will talk about situations now … at school he is doing his work. He is happy to work. He was not like that before" (S5, Mitcham). Mentors also described some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning with one mentor saying: "There has been a noticeable change in her behaviour. The physical aggression has not been obvious and she appears more cheerful than in the past" (S3, Blackburn). Another mentor revealed the following

> He was settled in class and attempted set tasks. His behaviour outside of the classroom did not improve and he still demonstrated the poor decisions he was displaying before entering the suspension centre (S1, Blackburn).

Students also commented on some positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning after they returned to their schools, saying: "I was more tolerant towards things and less distractible. Learning was coming along more noticeably than it was before" (S2, Abberfield). Another student said: "I don't run away from teachers anymore. I am doing heaps of school work. I am polite to the teachers now" (S5, Mitcham).

However, a small number of stakeholders who described some positive changes in students' behaviour after their suspension centre placements also indicated that the changes were not sustained. One student, for example, described her behaviour at day one or two of the suspension centre placement in the following way: "Talking across the room … not completing school work … swearing so that the teachers can hear me … arguing with teachers". Four weeks after the placement she said "The first week was okay but I started mucking up on the second week … and I got expelled" (S4, Abberfield).

Question three of the questionnaire survey asked students, parents, and mentors to comment on whether they thought students "would" and "did" benefit from the suspension centre placements and to explain their responses. The question provided further information relating to any changes in students' behaviour or learning and what any changes were attributed to, from stakeholders' perspectives. In analysing responses to this question, at day one or two of students' placements, almost all of the stakeholders, with the exception of one mentor, hoped or thought students would benefit from their placements. Typical responses of parents included: "Yes, learning ways to cope in an educational environment and dealing with his feelings and aggression" (S2, Abberfield) and "Yes … the unit is supportive of the entire family. It will minimise anxiety for him" (S5, Mitcham).

Mentors' responses also revealed that they thought students would benefit from suspension centre placements via learning academic and behaviour skills at the centres. Examples included: "He will benefit from the smaller class size … the head teacher can work on communication and

survival strategies to help him adjust" (S2, Abberfield). Another mentor stated: "She can become more organised and prepared for lessons … the head teacher can work with her and enable her to reflect on her current behaviour" (S3, Blackburn). The mentor of S1, Blackburn similarly stated: "I think he will benefit…. It will be a time for him to work one-to-one with a teacher, increase his confidence in literacy and numeracy activities and give him the skills to be able to reflect on his behaviour".

Students also felt they would benefit from suspension centres. A typical response included: "My behaviour will change … everything will change. I will learn more" (S5, Mitcham). Another student stated: "Yes, I think that by rewarding my behaviour will help" (S4, Abberfield).

Further analysis of stakeholders' responses to question three of the questionnaire survey related to whether they thought students had benefited from the suspension centre placement, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the questionnaire survey, revealed the following two storylines.

Storyline one: "He is able to identify strategies

Of the 36 respondents, many of the students, parents, and mentors who identified some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning commented that students had learnt new skills, were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt, and were trying to put the skills or strategies into practice. Some examples include the following statements from parents. "We could see that he was trying to put the strategies he had learned in place when his sister was annoying him" (S2, Abberfield), and "he is very good at identifying strategies … he benefited from the quiet one to one support to work out how to deal with problems" (S5, Mitcham).

Students also reflected that they had learnt skills and/or were able to identify strategies and were trying to put them into practice. One student, for example, stated: "I learned how to listen. I remember about the 'scruffy wheel' and sometimes I use it" (S5, Mitcham). Another student

commented: “I got a lot of skills that I hadn’t been taught before” and “I still have times when I was ‘off’ and times when I was ‘on’. I was behaving a lot more when I was ‘on’” (S2, Abberfield).

Two teachers aides also reflected that they had seen students use the skills they were taught at suspension centres. One of the teachers aides stated: “Some of them take on board what is happening at the centre and remember what they are taught at the centre … show these skills” (Abberfield). The other teachers aide said: “I have heard students use the skills they have learned in the games in other contexts … the language has been transferred” (Mitcham). Similarly, the head teacher at Blackburn noted that students had learnt skills at the suspension centre. He stated: “They have gained skills and made a connection with adults…. I can generally tell with the students who have accessed the program that there is a change”. These findings support the findings in Phase One of the research, theme one: “Students are learning …”. However, one head teacher (Heatherdale) noted some changes in students’ behaviour and/or learning over the period of time they were at the centre but questioned whether there was the same positive effect back at school: that is, whether students could maintain what they had learned at the centres when they returned to their schools.

Storyline two: “Changed attitude/behaviour”

Many of the responses revealed positive changes in students’ attitude and behaviour. Mentors, for example, described positive changes in students’ attitude and behaviour stating: “[He] seemed a little more settled and more in control of his temper and distractibility” (S2, Abberfield). Another mentor said: “… there has been a noticeable change in her behaviour. The physical aggression has not been obvious and she appears more cheerful than in the past” (S3, Blackburn).

Parents also described positive changes in students' attitude and behaviour, with some noting that their child was more willing to undertake class work. One parent said: "He is calmer and will talk about situations now … at school he is doing his work. He is happy to work. He was not like that before" (S5, Mitcham). Another parent stated that "… he learned an enormous amount of self control that he took on board" (S2, Abberfield). One parent described that the positive changes in her son's attitude and behaviour had led to a work experience placement and possible employment. She said that her son was doing work experience as a motor mechanic and working there in his school holidays because his report from work experience was so good and that her son had "… accepted work there for (the) next year" (S5, Abberfield).

Students also reflected on positive changes in their attitude and behaviour, stating: "I was more tolerant towards things and less distractible. Learning was coming along more noticeably than it was before" (S2, Abberfield). Another student stated: "I am doing heaps of school work. I am polite to the teachers now" (S5, Mitcham).

In Phase One of this research stakeholders were asked: Are you able to comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attended the suspension centre? The responses of stakeholders provided further information relating to some positive changes in students' behaviour. Principals, for example, described positive changes in students' behaviour, stating: "For some students there is a change in behaviour. For some it has an effect on their behaviour just while they attend the centre; for others there is a longer-term effect" (Mitcham). Another principal said: "The majority of the kids don't re-offend. Some are "hard core" kids who have been to the centre two or three times but there are still improvements in their behaviour. Their self confidence is a huge behaviour change" (Ashwood).

The student support coordinator at Mitcham also noted: "Principals report improvements in some students' behaviour". Suspension centre staff also described positive changes in students' attitude and behaviour over the time they were placed at the centre. The former teachers aide at

Listerfield stated: “Some kids came in angry and just to see them laugh while they were in the centre was good … It was great seeing when kids ’got it’… were able to do something that they hadn’t been able to”.

Discussion of findings: Category of response two

The following questions were asked of students, their parents, and mentors on day one or two of the students’ placements at suspension centres and four weeks after their placements concluded.

1. Describe your/your child’s/the student’s behaviour at school/home.
2. Have there been any noticeable changes in his/her behaviour or learning recently? Explain this.
3. Do you think you/your child/the student will/did benefit from the suspension centre placement? Explain.

In response to the research questions, it was clear that of the 36 respondents, almost half the students and mentors and half of the parents reported some positive changes in students’ behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements. This was reflected by the fact that stakeholders typically described a range of disruptive student behaviours at home and school on day one or two of the students’ placement at suspension centres, with some stakeholders describing that students’ behaviour had recently become worse. Four weeks after the placements, some positive changes were typically described in students’ behaviour and/or learning at home and school. Parents and mentors commented on observable changes in students’ behaviour and learning, describing students as “calmer”, “more settled in class”, and “attempting set tasks”. Students also said that they were “more tolerant” and “less distractible” and that they were “doing heaps of school work”. However, it was also noted that a small number of stakeholders who described positive changes in

students' behaviour and/or learning post the suspension centre placements also indicated that the changes were not sustained.

In relation to question three of the questionnaire survey, the researcher found that almost all of the stakeholders, with the exception of one mentor hoped or thought the student would benefit from the suspension centre placement. Further analysis of stakeholders' responses to this question, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the questionnaire survey, revealed two storylines. One storyline, *"he is able to identify strategies"*, reflected that many of the stakeholders noted that students had learnt new skills; were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt; and were trying to put the skills into practice. One head teacher noted some changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they were at the centres but questioned whether there was the same positive effect back at school: that is, whether students could maintain what they had learned at the centres when they returned to their schools. The other storyline, *Changed attitude/behaviour*, reflected that many of the stakeholders reported positive changes in students' attitude and behaviour with some describing that students were more willing to undertake class work. These responses also support stakeholders' comments in Phase One of the research in relation to the questions, theme one: "Students are learning …".

Students', their parents', and mentors' comments were analysed and compared to the suspension centre Guidelines to gain a sense of how the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. The comments helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from stakeholders' perspectives.

In analysing the responses, it was noted that the comments helped identify how the Goals outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines had been implemented in practice. Their comments showed that the majority of the students were "assisted to reflect on their behaviour"; "develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding on how to re-engage at school, and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Clearly, from

stakeholders' perspectives such practices were enabling factors for the success of the centres. However, as noted in Phase One of this research, some caution is necessary in reflecting on stakeholders' responses. The research questions were designed to explore the operation of suspension centres and evidence that the Purpose and Goals in the Guidelines were being met at the time students were in suspension centres and up to four weeks after their placements had concluded. This research was not designed to determine whether the impact of what students gained at suspension centres was sustained beyond four weeks after their placements. Therefore, stakeholders' comments in this research reflected that suspension centres assisted students to "successfully return to schooling" in the short-term (see Footnote 2, para. 1). This research did not aim to discover the long-term attitudinal and behaviour changes in students or whether, as stated in the Goals of the Guidelines (2006), the centres prevented the "recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). While stakeholders did describe some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning at home and school in describing that students were "calmer", "more settled" in class, and "attempting set tasks", further research would be helpful in ascertaining whether students' behaviour and learning changes were sustained beyond the four weeks that was the focus of this research.

Exercising some caution in identifying stakeholders' comments as evidence that suspension centres have helped students to attain all of the Goals described in the Guidelines may be well founded. In conducting this research, for example, it was revealed that a small number of stakeholders who described positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning after their suspension centre placements also indicated that the changes were not sustained. One head teacher also noted some changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they were at the centre but questioned whether there was the same positive effect back at school: that is, whether students could maintain what they had learned at the centre. Clearly the centres would be most effective if students could sustain the positive changes via implementing strategies learnt at the suspension

centres in their school contexts. Despite the need to exercise some caution in interpreting stakeholders' responses, however, the storyline, *"he is able to identify strategies"*, reflected that many of the stakeholders found some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning and revealed that students had learnt new skills; were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt at the centres; and were trying to put them into practice. Therefore, stakeholders' comments clearly showed that students were assisted to meet the first three Goals as outlined in the Guidelines.

In the storyline, *"changed attitude/behaviour"*, many of the stakeholders who identified some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning with some describing that students were more willing to undertake class work. One principal (Mitcham) stated: "For some students there is a change in behaviour. Some it has an effect on their behaviour just while they attend the centre, for others there is a longer-term effect". Such comments appeared to be enabling factors for the success of the centres and aligned with the goals outlined in the Guidelines. In relation to this category of response, it was not possible though to identify how two of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines were being implemented in practice, owing to the fact that the research questions asked stakeholders to focus on students accessing the suspension centres. Therefore, stakeholders' responses did not enable the researcher to ascertain whether skills development opportunities and support were being provided for the parents and teachers of the students (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

Further discussion relating to these findings and in relation to associated research, will be explored in the following category of response: "Stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning".

Category of response three: Stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning

Figure 11. Category of Response Three and Two Associated Storylines

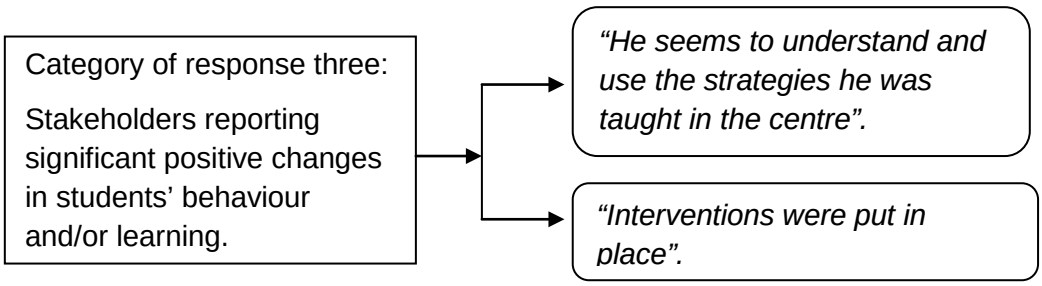


Figure 11. Category of response three: Stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning and two associated storylines.

Questions one and two of the questionnaire survey enabled students, their parents, and mentors to describe students' behaviour at home and school; whether there had been any noticeable changes in students' behaviour or learning recently; and to what any changes were attributed. From stakeholders' responses to the questionnaire survey, it was clear that of the 36 respondents, half of the students, almost half the mentors, and a third of the parents reported significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of the students' suspension centre placement and four weeks after their placements had concluded. Appendix Q Table Q9 Phase Two research: Number of stakeholders responding by category of response provides an overview of stakeholder responses by category.

Where stakeholders reported significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning, a range of disruptive student behaviours were typically described at home and school on day one or two of the students placement at the centres. Some stakeholders noted that the behaviours had been evident for some time. Parents' descriptions of their children's behaviour at day one or two of their placements at suspension centres included the following. "He doesn't like

doing what he is told … he fights a lot at home with his brother and at school with whoever" (S3, Listerfield). The grandmother of S1, Heatherdale described her grandson's behaviour in the following way: "… if any difficulties arise he becomes emotionally upset and this is what his aggression is about … he is on a counselling program".

Mentors of the students also described students' behaviour as disruptive, distracting and at times dangerous. One mentor stated: "He does not cooperate in class activities or discussions, and often distracts the other students … he is continually being disobedient" (S2, Ashwood). Another mentor said that the student "was only at the school for three days before he threatened another student that he would stab him with some scissors" (S2, Listerfield).

Similarly, students described their own behaviour as disruptive. One student stated: "When I start a new one [school] I just lose my temper. For the first time this time I was violent" (S2, Listerfield). Another student said: "At school I am bad and shocking. I get angry very easy and throw stuff at the teacher. I also threaten other students" (S3, Listerfield).

Four weeks after the suspension centre placements, significant positive changes were described in students' behaviour and/or learning at home and school. One grandmother said: "Things seem to have made him better. No problems at school and he is not playing up at night time" (S1, Heatherdale).

Mentors similarly described significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning. "He participates more in class activities, follows most of my instructions, attempts all work … and interacts better with the other students" (S2, Ashwood). Another mentor stated: "He is attending school full time and all classes. He appears to be much calmer" (S2, Listerfield). Students also described significant positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning at home and school. One student said: "I have friends and I am calm. I also get along with my teachers" (S2, Listerfield). Another stated: "At home I don't yell much or fight much. At school my friends are good and I am good. I don't get violent" (S3, Listerfield).

Question three of the questionnaire survey asked students, their parents, and mentors to comment on whether they thought the students would, or did, benefit from the suspension centre placements and to explain their responses. The question provided further information relating to any changes in students' behaviour or learning and what any changes were attributed to, from stakeholders' perspectives. In analysing the responses to question three early in students' suspension centre placement, it was found that all of the parents and students and over half of the mentors hoped or thought the students would benefit from the placements. Parents stated the benefits of the centres for their children as "being in a smaller environment with fewer distractions" (S4, Mitcham) and being at a place that could "address issues" and "teach skills" (S1, Heatherdale; S3, Listerfield; S4, Listerfield).

A number of mentors said that they hoped the benefits would be teaching students to manage "frustrations" and "anger" (S4, Mitcham; S1, Listerfield; S3, Listerfield; S4, Listerfield). Other mentors noted that they thought the benefits would be that students would "gain skills" or have their "needs meet" (S2, Ashwood; S1, Heatherdale).

Students thought they would benefit from the suspension centre via "being in a smaller environment" (S4, Listerfield; S3, Listerfield). Others thought they would benefit by "learning about behaviour and/or learning skills" (S4, Mitcham; S2, Listerfield; S1, Heatherdale).

Further analysis of students, parents, and mentors responses to question three of the questionnaire survey related to whether they thought students had benefited from the suspension centre placements, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the questionnaire survey, revealed two storylines.

Storyline one: "He seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre"

Students, their parents, and mentors who reported significant changes in students' behaviour and/or learning said that students had learned skills and were putting them into practice. Many of the comments revealed that students had changed their attitude and behaviour. The former head teacher at Heatherdale, for example, said that anecdotal reports and feedback from students' homes was "that their children were more pleasant after attending the centre".

Typical comments included the following from a parent and a mentor. The parent said: "Today he puts things into practice that he learned at the centre such as removing himself from situations … and then talking about things when he has calmed down" (S5, Abberfield). Similarly, the mentor stated: "… he seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre" (S4, Mitcham).

Mentors also described that they thought students had built some capacity to reflect on, and understand, their behaviour and its consequences. One mentor stated:

> He is recognising that his behaviour leading to the suspension was him being 'mean'. This is positive in that he recognises that his anger/violent outbursts hurt others and he is making more of an effort to be gentle and play sensibly in the playground (S3, Listerfield).

Another mentor said: "… because he can actually stop and think before making decisions that will get him into trouble…. He can now recognise his own bad behaviour and accepts the consequences" (S2, Ashwood).

Students reflected that they had learnt skills and were putting the skills into practice. One student, for example, stated: "I have learned more. I learnt to do fractions in the unit and subtractions" (S4, Listerfield). Another student stated: "My behaviour has improved heaps. Little things like helping at home, working with the teachers, following instructions, going to class, and showing respect" (S1, Heatherdale).

Such findings correlate to findings in Phase One of the research, where stakeholders' responses revealed that they thought students had learned skills and were putting them into practice in theme one: "Students' are learning …". The principal at Listerfield commented on "remarkable changes" and "remarkable achievements" with one student at her school who was "at the end of the road" and who she thought that she would "have to expel". She said that as a result of the suspension centre program the student was working with the local primary school to mentor a student. She stated that the student had "been good at the school for six weeks after coming back from the suspension centre".

In further analysing the storyline, *"he seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre"*, it was found that students, their parents, and mentors described students with significant changes in their behaviour and/or learning as being "more confident", "calmer", and more "relaxed". One student, for example, said "I have friends and I am calm … ' The suspension centre helped me be more confident and safe" (S2, Listerfield). Other students noted "They taught me to be calm and relax" (S4, Mitcham) and "It helped me to be calmer" (S4, Listerfield). Mentors and parents made similar comments, with one mentor stating: "He appears to be much calmer…." (S2, Listerfield). Another said: "He has returned much more settled and calm….". One parent noted: "He is more confident and willing to try things" (S3, Mitcham). Another parent said that"… now he is calm and he seems to avoid getting into situations like he used to" (S4, Mitcham). Such comments also support findings in Phase One of this research, in theme one: "Students are learning …" where stakeholders, in describing noticeable changes in students' behaviour or learning, noted that students were "more confident", "calmer", and more "relaxed".

Storyline two: "Interventions were put in place"

In commenting on significant changes in students' behaviour and/or learning, students, parents, and mentors revealed that interventions were put in place for students and that these helped students with their behaviour and/or learning when they returned to their schools from suspension centres. Such interventions included changes in students' medication regimes. In relation to one student, the following comments were noted by stakeholders: "The school gives him a reward for taking his medication" (S3 parent, Listerfield); "He is monitored closely in terms of his medication regime" (S3 mentor, Listerfield); and "I remember to take my tablet and I feel better about myself" (S3 student, Listerfield). A change in medication was also described as helpful for S1, Heatherdale, with the student's grandmother stating: "He is better at school and his medication has changed which has helped". The mentor at the student's school also said that "due to his change in medication his behaviour has improved".

Students and mentors also reported other strategies and practices that were put in place which helped students with their behaviour and/or learning when they returned to their schools such as contact with a specialist person at the school; communication of issues to school staff; having students on a "monitoring card"; rewarding students; and targeted support programs to help students' transition back into their schools. One student, for example, stated: "I am getting rewards at home and I am motivated to go good at school. Stuff like *(sic)* having breakfast at school and the teachers are more friendly" (S1, Heatherdale). One mentor described that a student met with a learning support officer at the school each morning to discuss the outline of the school day and the student's anxiety levels. The mentor also described that the officer supported the student by accompanying him to periods one and five during the school day. Some practices were also described which assisted students in the playground where there was less structure and supervision. The mentor of S2, Listerfield, for example, said that the student "occasionally attends the 'drop-in' at recess and lunch if he is anxious". Another mentor made the statement that "he

[the student] was placed in the lunch and recess play program and is slowly making his way into the playground…. His welfare and grief issues have been communicated to all staff" (S3, Listerfield).

During Phase One of this research, the mentor of S1, Ashwood also said that interventions had been put in place for the student as a result of his placement at the suspension centre saying: "He has had a referral from the suspension centre to the learning support team with regards to his literacy, but it is too early to determine results from this extra step just yet."

Discussion of findings: Category of response three

The following questions were asked of students, their parents, and mentors on day one or two of the students' placement at suspension centres and four weeks after their placements.

1. Describe your/your child's/the student's behaviour at school/home.
2. Have there been any noticeable changes in his/her behaviour or learning recently? Explain this.
3. Do you think you/your child's/the student will/did benefit from the suspension centre placement? Explain.

In response to these questions, it was clear that of the 36 respondents, half of the students, almost half the mentors, and a third of the parents reported significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements. This was reflected by fact that in addressing questions one and two, stakeholders typically described a range of disruptive student behaviours at home and school on day one or two of students' placements at suspension centres, with some stakeholders noting that the behaviours had been evident for some time. Four weeks after the placements, stakeholders described significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning at home and school.

In relation to question three of the questionnaire survey, it was revealed that all of the parents and students and over half of the mentors hoped or thought students would benefit from their suspension centre placements. Further analysis of stakeholders' responses to this question, combined with an analysis of responses to questions one and two of the questionnaire survey revealed two storylines. One storyline, *"he seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre"*, revealed that students had learned skills and were putting them into practice. Many comments related to the fact that stakeholders thought students had learned skills and described significant changes in students' attitude and behaviour. Mentors, for example, described that they felt that students had built some capacity to reflect on, and understand, their behaviour and its consequences. A number of stakeholders also described students as being "more confident", "calmer", and "more relaxed". The other storyline, *"Interventions were put in place"*, reflected that a range of stakeholders described strategies and practices that were put in place for students which helped students with their behaviour and/or learning when they returned to their schools from suspension centres. Parents, mentors, and students, for example, said that changes to students' medication regimes assisted students. Other strategies and practices revealed by parents and mentors included contact with a specialist person at the school; communication of issues to school staff; having the student on a "monitoring card"; rewarding the student; and support programs to help students' transition into various school environments such as the playground. The responses support comments made by stakeholders in the category of response, "stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour/learning" and the associates storylines *"he is able to identify strategies"* and *"changed attitude/behaviour"*. Stakeholders' responses also provided support for stakeholders comments revealed in Phase One of the research related to theme one: "Students are learning …".

Students', their parents', and mentors' comments were analysed and compared to the suspension centre Guidelines to gain a sense of how the Guidelines had been implemented in

practice. In this way stakeholders' thoughts and opinions helped identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres. Comments helped reveal how the Goals in the Guidelines had been implemented in practice, revealing that the majority of students were assisted to "reflect on their behaviour", "develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; "build capacity and understanding on how to re-engage at school, and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). From stakeholders' perspectives such practices appeared to be enabling factors for the success of the centres.

Comparing stakeholders' responses to the Guidelines and related research helped to ascertain what some of the enabling and inhibiting factors contributing to the success of the centres might be. One of these appeared to be the fact that stakeholders described how students had learned skills at the centres and were putting them into practice, and that they had built some capacity to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences. Visser (2004) acknowledges that in teaching students with behaviour difficulties "reasons why the behaviour is inappropriate as well as alternative ways to react appropriately" (para. 44) achieves far more successful outcomes in terms of improving students' behaviour. However, as previously noted, some research also identifies that one of the enabling factors for the success of suspension centres could be whether the successful behaviour and learning interventions established for students at suspension centres are sustained in different contexts, such as students' schools or homes (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008). This would seem to be particularly important for how well the centres, as short-term interventions, enable students to successfully return to their school, where the inappropriate behaviour that led to the suspension took place. This could be a considerable challenge in enabling the success of suspension centres more broadly. While this research found that suspension centres assisted students to return successfully to school, it would appear to be considerably more challenging for a program that operated for a maximum of 20 days for any one student to be effective by itself in positively changing students' attitudes and behaviours over a

longer period of time. Indeed, as has been previously noted, some researchers question the sustainability of changes in students' behaviour and learning "without significant and ongoing support for students when they return to their schools" (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002, p. 5).

There was some evidence that schools provided some support to the students when they returned to their schools. The storyline *"interventions were put in place"* provided some evidence of such support. Students, their parents, and mentors noted, for example, that changes to students' medication regimes assisted students when they returned to their schools. Parents and mentors also commented on other strategies and practices that were put in place which helped students with their behaviour and/or learning when they returned to their schools. These included contact with a specialist person at the school; communication of issues to school staff; having the student on a "monitoring card"; rewarding the students; and support programs to help the students' transition into various school environments such as the playground. As such, the storyline *"interventions were put in place"* also seems to have provided some evidence of how another Goal in the Guidelines had been implemented in practice: that is "to provide professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). The fact that teachers indicated that schools were implementing practices to support students seems to reflect that suspension centre staff might have provided some professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students.

Finally, it should be noted that this category of response did not reveal how one of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines had been implemented: that is, "to provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

Summary

Phase Two of this research aimed to establish, from the perspectives of students, their parents, and mentors evidence of whether suspension centres were meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines. This phase of the research enabled some understanding of how the policy framework for suspension centres had been implemented in practice (Schön, 1995). It also provided information relating to the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres, from stakeholders' perspectives.

Stakeholders' reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning

A small number of the 36 respondents of students, parents and mentors reported no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning between day one or two of the students' suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded. Stakeholders revealed that some of the students had severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs. Some parents described that their children had mental health issues which required additional support with two parents describing that their children either had accessed, or needed to access, external counselling services. Some of the students were also identified as having diagnosed special needs. One student in Year 6 had spent the majority of his schooling in a class for emotionally disturbed students on the site of the primary school where the student had just started attending a mainstream class. In another case, a Year 6 student was at the centre while waiting for a placement in a school for emotionally disturbed students.

The term "entrenched behaviour" was mentioned by several stakeholders and during Phase One of this research one principal also reported that the success rate for students placed at suspension centres with entrenched behaviours and/or diagnosed learning and behaviour needs was not high. Stakeholders described that students with mental health issues, special needs and/or entrenched behaviours were less likely to achieve the Goals in the suspension centre Guidelines. That is, students were less likely to have been assisted "to reflect on and understand their

behaviour and its consequences"; "to reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Stakeholders' comments again raise the question as to whether principals understood the Purpose and Goals of the Guidelines, or whether they were referring students who were less likely to achieve the Goals as a way to alleviate the stress of managing students with these types of disruptive behaviours and/or because they did not think that such students belonged in their schools. Researchers (Gonczi & Riordan, 2002, p. 6) cite the importance of suspensions which involve students with serious mental health issues or disabilities providing the opportunity to "involve other resources and services …" and that such students may require " … external placement in specialist provision" (Hayward, 2001, p. 23).

Finally, a parent and student felt that the students' schools were a barrier to students demonstrating positive behaviour and/or learning changes when they returned to their schools from suspension centres. Stakeholders' comments also related to findings in Phase One of this research in theme three: "Students' schools need to provide ongoing support for students who are referred to suspension centres", where stakeholders commented on the lack of support provided by schools when students returned from suspension centres. Clearly, one of the enabling factors for the success of the centres could be whether the positive behaviour and/or learning interventions established for students at suspension centres are transferrable and whether they are able to be sustained in different contexts, such as students' schools or homes (Landrum & McDuffie, 2008; Mayer, 2008; Skinner & Greene, 2008).

Stakeholders reporting some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning

Of the 36 respondents, almost half the students and mentors and half of the parents reported some positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of the students' suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded.

One storyline, *"he is able to identify strategies"*, reflected that many of the stakeholders noted that students had learnt new skills; were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt; and were trying to put the skills or strategies into practice. These findings support the findings in Phase One of this research, in theme one: "Students are learning …". However, one head teacher (Heatherdale) who described some positive changes in students' behaviour questioned whether the changes were sustained when students returned to their schools. The other storyline, *"Changed attitude/behaviour"*, reflected that many of the stakeholders revealed positive changes in students' attitude and behaviour with some citing students' willingness to undertake class work. The responses of principals, a student services coordinator, and suspension centre staff in three centres (Mitcham, Ashwood, and Listerfield) in Phase One of this research also supported that there were some positive changes in students' behaviour. Stakeholders' comments showed that the majority of the students were "assisted to reflect on their behaviour"; "develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding on how to re-engage at school and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Stakeholders' comments also reflected that suspension centres assisted students to "successfully return to schooling" in the short-term (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

Stakeholders reporting significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning

Of the 36 respondents, half the students, almost half the mentors, and a third of the parents reported significant positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded.

Stakeholders reported that students had learned skills and were putting them into practice and many of the comments referred to significant changes in students' attitude and behaviour.

The storyline, *"He seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre"*, revealed that students, their parents, and mentors thought that students had learned skills and were putting them into practice. Mentors described that they felt students had built some capacity to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences and mentors and parents described students as being "more confident", "calmer", and more "relaxed". Such comments were also revealed in stakeholders' comments during Phase One of this research, in theme one: "Students' are learning …". Stakeholders' comments revealed that the majority of students were assisted to "reflect on their behaviour"; "develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding on how to re-engage at school and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). From stakeholders' perspectives such practices appeared to be enabling factors for the success of the centres.

The storyline *"interventions were put in place"* revealed that students were provided with some support when they returned to their schools from the centres. Such support included changes to students' medication regimes; contact with a specialist person at the school; communication of issues to school staff; having students on a "monitoring card"; rewarding students; and targeted support programs to help students' transition back into their schools. The storyline may also have provided some evidence of how another in the Guidelines had been implemented in practice: that is, the goal "to provide professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students' (see Footnote 2, para. 4).

The following chapter outlines the implications and recommendations of this research.

Chapter Six: Implications and Recommendations

Researchers have reported that the management of a relatively small number of students with disruptive behaviour is a continuing issue for schools (Vallance, 2001; Freiberg & Reyes, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2002; McLeod, 2000; Thomas, Clarke, & Lavery, 2003; Vinson, 2005; Williams, 2002; Youssef, 2001). Fields (2005) said that one of the "most significant educational decisions made by a state government [has] been the introduction of separate educational facilities for chronically misbehaving students" (p. 12). Of interest to this research was the decision by the NSW government to establish suspension centres which appear to be unique across education systems world-wide in exclusively aiming to support students on long suspension from school. This research aimed to discover "What are the differences between 'espoused educational policy' and 'policy in use' in relation to suspension centres?" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995) by exploring the operation of suspension centres. To answer the research question, a variety of stakeholders associated with the centres were asked their opinions based on the following three sub-questions.

- Research sub-question one: What are the best things happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question two: What needs to be improved with suspension centres?
- Research sub-question three: What evidence is there that suspension centres are meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines?

Stakeholders' responses described how suspension centres were operating in practice and revealed the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres from stakeholders' perspectives.

In this chapter, the responses will be explored further in light of relevant research for each of the three sub-questions. The responses will then be compared to the Guidelines to describe practices occurring that reflect aspects of the Guidelines (and whether they enable or inhibit the success of the centres); practices occurring that are not in the Guidelines; and aspects of the

Guidelines that are apparently not practised or not identified in the responses. In this way the differences between educational policy and policy in practice will be made apparent. Finally, this chapter outlines recommendations for the success of the centres.

Research sub-question one: What are the best things happening with suspension centres or what should be maintained with suspension centres?

Students were being helped with and/or were learning skills related to academic activities and behaviour, according to parents, students, suspension centre staff, and regional management committee members. Almost all of the students, their mentors, parents, and some principals reported some, or significant, positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements had concluded. The majority of responses from students and suspension centre staff attributed the changes to the behaviour skills students were taught and practised at the centres. Many of the stakeholders said that students had learnt new skills; were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt; and were trying to put, or putting, the skills into practice. A range of stakeholders also reported that students were attending school regularly; were happier at school; succeeding with school work; and had improved self-esteem and coping skills after returning to their schools from the centres. Parents and a teachers aide also commented that, unlike traditional forms of suspension from school, students had a place to go that was still connected to education. From the responses, these things appear to be enabling factors for the success of the centres.

These findings are important in light of research reported by Hemphill and Hargreaves (2009) who cite researchers that refer to the "unintended consequences" of suspensions on students. Such consequences include academic difficulties and poorer academic outcomes (Arcia, 2006; Carter, 2008); depression (Gross, 2008); disengagement from school (Butler et al., 2005); student alienation, crime and delinquency (Fondacaro & Fasig, 2006); and alcohol and drug use

(American Academy of Paediatrics, Committee on School Health, 2003) (p. 5). The fact that stakeholders in this research said that students were learning and had some, or significant, changes in their behaviour and/or learning showed that practices occurring in suspension centres were enabling positive outcomes for the majority of students placed at the centres. These findings support research which identifies the importance of providing programs to connect students to schooling as well as providing supportive services for students with disruptive behaviour (Freiberg & Reyes, 2008). Research over the last 10 years, for example, has described the positive effects alternative education programs can have for students with disruptive behaviour. Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) say that the structure of alternative programs varies, but one of their major purposes is "to serve students at risk of dropping out of school" (p. 1). Alternative education programs have been described by researchers such as De Jong and Griffiths (2006) in the following way.

> Those programs [are] designed to support students who are unlikely or unable to access mainstream education programs for a number of reasons and often as a result of a combination of factors including … alienation from the mainstream school environment due to long-term nonattendance and truancy, social and family issues including poor personal social skills and personal behavioural difficulties … inability to access the curriculum due to extremely poor literacy and numeracy. (pp. 30-31)

It could be argued that suspension centres do not strictly fit this description of an alternative education program. This is because suspension centres are for students who for various reasons are on long suspension from school. The alternatives for a student in a NSW government school who is suspended from school is to stay at home or in the community for the duration of their suspension, or to accept the offer of a placement at a suspension centre. Therefore, the purpose of suspension centres is different from alternative education programs which are described as being "… designed to support students who are unlikely or unable to access mainstream education

programs …" (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 30). Nevertheless, some students at suspension centres were described by stakeholders as having characteristics similar to students that alternative education programs were designed to support, such as poor academic skills, including literacy skills; and behaviour difficulties. Anecdotally, in visiting the centres, I also found that a number of students were described as having social and family issues.

As suspension centres are a relatively new concept, and appear to be unique in providing support to students on long suspension from school, there has been almost no research, to date, related to models of support for disruptive students that are the same as the support offered by suspension centres. Therefore, research related to alternative programs might provide information that is useful to consider in terms of managing students with disruptive behaviour. Researchers, for example, report that one of the benefits of alternative programs could be that they can play a critical role in meeting the educational, social, and emotional needs of students with disruptive behaviour (Doeford & Shirley, 2009, p. 156). Researchers cite the importance of addressing students' social, emotional and behaviour needs to enable students to be able to benefit from the academic curriculum (Collett, 1999; De Jong & Griffith, 2006; Doeford & Shirley, 2009). Researchers acknowledge the reciprocal link between learning difficulties and behaviour problems (Collett, 1999; Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen, & McCluskey, 2009, p. 27) and the relationship between social skills and success in the classroom (Collett, 1999, p. 41). Researchers such as Flook et al. (2005) and Catalano et al. (2004) for example, identified that well developed social skills were positively correlated with academic competencies and school success (as cited in Brunker, 2007, p. 2). Some aspects of the suspension centre Guidelines reflect aspects of alternative education programs researchers cite as being important for successful outcomes for students. De Jong and Griffiths (2006), for example, say that alternative programs offer a learning environment that caters more fully to the "individual social, emotional and academic needs" of young people (p. 33). Similarly, the Goals of suspension centres are to assist students to "reflect

on and understand their behaviour and its consequences"; "reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding on how to reengage at school and reintegrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Stakeholders' responses to the research questions: "What are the best things that are happening or what should be maintained with suspension centres?" revealed a range of social, behavioural, and academic supports for students accessing suspension centres and positive changes were described in students' behaviour and/or learning that were attributed to the skills students learned at the centres.

Another main finding of this research was that suspension centre staff used appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. All stakeholder groups, across the majority of centres, described the good relationships head teachers and some teachers aides had developed with a variety of people associated with the centres, particularly with students and their families. Some stakeholders also commented on the positive relationships head teachers had developed with schools and their school communities. The responses revealed that the good skills of suspension centre staff and the "holistic" approaches used in the centres were enabling factors for the success of the centres. In comparing the responses to related research, it is apparent that the appropriate approaches and skills of suspension centre staff may have been an important factor in enabling positive outcomes for students placed at suspension centres. Researchers such as De Jong and Griffiths (2006), for example, say that staff in alternative education programs want to work with students who have high needs and so they often have "the values and skills to build strong relationships with the young person and their family" (p. 34). Numerous researchers also support that quality teachers who foster effective relationships, within a supportive environment, are important to improving behaviour and learning outcomes for students (Atweh, Bland, Carrington, & Cavanagh, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hayes & Noonan, 2008; Smith & Giromini, 2008; Stafford, Moore, Foggett, Kemp, & Hazell, 2007). Similarly, Pirrie et al. (2009) conducted research on Britain's learning support units which have

some similarities to suspension centres. From interviews with young people, their parents and a range of service providers, the researchers found that what ultimately made the difference for some young people was the "quality of personal relationships" (p. 9). In this research the particular skills or approaches of suspension centre staff seemed to be important factors in building effective relationships to enable positive student outcomes.

Research related to the importance of effective relationships to enhancing student outcomes is also evidenced in research related to motivation. Wang, Gibson, and Slate (2007) found "teacher behaviours can affect student motivation and interest in a subject or course and their approach to learning" (p. 3) (as cited in Strikwerda-Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer, & Watts, 2008, p. 30). Similarly, researchers such as Smith and Giromini (2008) have found that "students are not likely to stay at school or reach higher academic standards if they do not like school, feel no sense of belonging, and are not motivated to engage in the … work prescribed" (para. 13). In light of such research, the appropriate approaches and skills of suspension centre staff appear to have been fundamental in fostering conditions which helped students learn and enabled positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning. Such research clearly reveals that the particular approaches and skills of suspension centre staff has probably been an important factor in enabling students in this research to be described by stakeholders as having positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning.

Principals, head teachers, and regional management committee members also commented on suspension centre staff seeking additional support and/or providing relevant information to assist students and their families. Some of these stakeholders also explained that students and their families were supported by, or referred to, a range of education and community services to help support their needs. Research by De Jong and Griffiths (2006) cites characteristics of effective alternative education programs as providing a "holistic, wraparound framework of delivery" and a "comprehensive approach to behaviour issues" (p. 36). Such practices include catering to

students' needs in a way that supports "a broad range of services … contributing to the education and wellbeing of the student" (p. 36). Researchers also note the importance of working in partnership with parents, the community, and external agencies in addressing students' learning and behaviour needs (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 35; Riordan, 2006, p. 247). The good relationships suspension centre staff had developed with students and their families might have also been important to parents' trusting the information and referrals suggested by suspension centre staff.

It is interesting to speculate as to whether the particular approaches and skills of suspension centre staff and the small environment of suspension centres were the factors that primarily enabled positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning. An interesting question to pose would be whether the same positive outcomes would have been obtained for students, if they had been suspended from school and not been placed at a suspension centre. Although dated, research by Collett (1999) reported the perception of suspended secondary students towards their school disciplinary absences and the findings indicate that students may not necessarily have had the same positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning had they been suspended from school without access to a support such as a suspension centre. Although the sample size was small (23 students from regional Queensland schools) the results showed that "while most students reported that they wanted to improve their behaviour (83%) some said they needed help" and "only a small number of these students said their behaviour had actually changed following their suspension" (p. 49). Furthermore, "74% of students in the research didn't receive any help while they were on suspension" and "nearly half (43%) indicated that their behaviour didn't change" (Collett, 1999, p. 49).

Research sub-question two: What needs to be improved with suspension centres?

For a small number of students, students themselves, their parents, and mentors reported that there were no positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of the students' suspension centre placements and four weeks after the placements. These students were described as having severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs. Two parents described that their children had significant mental health issues that required additional support, and two head teachers from two different centres gave examples of two students who were described as having diagnosed special needs such as emotional disturbance. One principal also stated associated difficulties in that there were no emotional disturbance/behaviour disordered (ED/BD) placements close by and that some parents were unwilling to go to a doctor to obtain a "diagnosis" for their children. Such comments may have reflected that in some cases principals referred students who were "less likely to benefit" from the suspension centre placement because principals required additional support to help manage the students and experienced difficulties in referring students to other placements. The principal also said that the "success rate" at suspension centres for students with "severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs" was not high (Mitcham). The responses clearly revealed that such students may not have been appropriate candidates for the suspension centres in the first place because they were less likely to "… have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

Stakeholders also reported a range of areas that needed to be improved with suspension centres including communication and use of the centres; further professional learning for head teachers; and that students' schools needed to provide ongoing support for students placed at the centres. In relation to communication and use of the centres, head teachers and members of regional management committees explained that improved communication was needed between

regional and state office personnel and suspension centre staff to discuss and clarify issues such as the role of the head teacher and the need for some type of monitoring related to the progress of the centres in the areas in which they were located. Head teachers also said that improved communication was needed to schools, relating to the purpose of suspension centres. Two regional management committee members at one centre also said the centre needed to focus on meeting the needs of particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students. That some stakeholders at one centre identified the need to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students, raises broader questions not identified in this research: that is, what are the numbers of students from different cultural backgrounds placed at suspension centres; and have suspension centre practices supported these students? While this research showed, for example, that the majority of students had positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning after a suspension centre placement, it was unclear as to whether any of the students were Aboriginal. Reflecting on the Department's data relating to the suspension rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students determining such information could be important to augment the success of suspension centres. The 2009 Long Suspension and Expulsion Report (see Footnote 4), for example, showed that the long suspension numbers for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student were significant compared to non-Aboriginal students. Of a total of 10,878 students long suspended from school, the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students suspended was 2,286 (or 22%) (paras. 2 & 5-6). When compared as a percentage of enrolment, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students long suspended as a percentage of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrolment was 5.6 % and as a percentage of total enrolment was 0.3 % (para. 7). Some exploration of the numbers of students referred to suspension centres from different cultural backgrounds is important in ascertaining whether practices in suspension centres are enabling positive outcomes for such students. Researchers cite the importance of involving Aboriginal people and relevant external services to meet the needs of Aboriginal students

successfully (Hayes, Johnston, Morris, Power, & Roberts, 2009, p. 58). Hayes et al. (2009) found that "Aboriginal support workers were attuned to the language and insecurities of indigenous learners to a degree not easily achieved by non-Aboriginal teachers" (p. 61) and that "Aboriginal support staff were also a source of vital information for teachers about underlying tensions and conflicts, often from outside the school, which influenced the students' behaviour" (p. 62).

Stakeholders also reported that the use of the centres needed to be improved by suggesting that there are more primary school students who could benefit from a suspension centre placement and the fact that there were sometimes few students in some of the centres. Research supports the benefits of early intervention programs in facilitating positive outcomes for "at risk children" with some researchers showing that "social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and health problems that appear early in childhood generally worsen over time in the absence of intervention" (Follansbee & Stuart, 2008, para. 1). However, while some research supports the need to intervene early with students with disruptive behaviour, the aim of this research was not to establish whether referring higher proportions of primary school students on long suspension to suspension centres would better manage disruptive student behaviour. The Department's data relating to long suspensions in 2009 reports that a total of 10,878 students were long suspended. Of these, 2,043 were students in Kindergarten to Year 6 and 8,139 were students in Year 7 to Year 10 (see Footnote 4, para. 9). These statistics show that a greater proportion of high school students are suspended compared to primary school students and as such it might be that the pattern of students being referred to suspension centres mirrors these statistics. It could also be the case, however, that suspension centres were catering to local need in supporting the age groups of students who stakeholders felt were "more likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1). Clearly, it could be useful for future research to ascertain why suspension centres cater to certain age groups of students and their relative successes in doing so.

More research would also be required to examine why there were sometimes few students in some suspension centres. Anecdotally, suspension rates in Government schools are lower in the first semester of the year. Stakeholders' comments might reflect such a pattern.

In relation to comments on the need for "improved communication" and "use of the centres" some stakeholders suggested that regular meetings between stakeholders might be one way that these and other issues could be identified, understood, and resolved. Student services officers at two centres referred to "management meetings" as a useful way to identify and discuss issues and to provide a means of communicating messages about the centres across regions. Given the range of issues stakeholders raised in relation to the need for improved communication and use of the centres, it would be useful to establish what the communication pathways have been at suspension centres including the nature and frequency of communication between suspension centre staff and regional and state office personnel and local schools. It would also be useful to establish whether the centres had monitoring processes in place to address these issues to ensure that students accessing suspension centres are, in fact, the students "most likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1).

The majority of student services officers and a former head teacher also commented on the need to recognise and cater effectively to the unique and often isolated role of head teachers. Stakeholders explained that head teachers needed further professional learning and reflected that it was important to ensure that suspension centre staff could use their skills more broadly across school communities. Researchers such as Crevola and Hill (2000) have found that "professional learning communities" can help to "remove the feelings of isolation experienced by teachers" (as cited in Hayes & Noonan, 2008, p. 22). Professional learning is also identified by researchers as a powerful strategy in helping to increase educators' effectiveness by providing educators with opportunities to reflect and learn from one another and is helpful to improving practice

(Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hirsh & Hord, 2008; Hayes & Noonan, 2008). Stakeholders' responses revealed a range of views relating to the type and frequency of professional learning head teachers required. Researchers such as Hayes and Noonan (2008), however, have found that to be effective professional learning communities need to be built "across the boundaries of space and systems" via "multiple modes of communication" which include practices other than only face-to-face meetings (as cited in Wyatt-Smith, Bridges, Hedemann, & Neville, 2008, p. 14). Such practices include professional readings disseminated via post or email; teleconferencing; videoconferencing facilities connected to hubs located in universities and schools; and online workshops and forums where teachers shared "success stories and innovations that occurred in their particular contexts" (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2008, p. 15). Researchers cite that a range of practices are particularly important in rural and remote communities where there are "significant distances and a lack of staff … to cover teacher release" which inhibit the capacity for people to meet and share in professional learning opportunities (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2008, p. 17). Such research has implications for considering the types and frequency of professional learning for suspension centre staff.

Exploring a variety of practices to cater effectively to the unique and often isolated role of suspension centre head teachers, in the future, is especially important as researchers note that people can sometimes find themselves in managerial type positions with little or no training (Henning & McIver, 2008, p. 36). Anecdotally, all of the head teachers of suspension centres involved in this research, for example, were classroom teachers prior to their appointment to suspension centres. It would also be interesting to identify the professional learning needs of teachers aides and the types of support they may require. This was an area that was not identified by stakeholders in this research but is important in enabling the success of suspension centres. Teachers aides might also experience some isolation in their roles and require professional learning to help them learn from one another and improve practice. Finally, Wyatt Smith et al.

(2008) cite early research by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) who described that to be most effective professional learning must be “sustained” and “ongoing” and “include the collective solving of particular problems of practice” (p. 6).

In relation to ensuring that suspension centre staff could use the skills further developed in suspension centres more broadly across school communities, one head teacher felt he had been unsuccessful in applying for more senior positions in schools because personnel recruiting for the positions viewed the head teacher suspension centre role as being very “limited”. In light of these findings it might be useful to have principals and other school staff visit suspension centres and engage with the practices occurring in the centres as a way of helping to enhance school personnel’s understanding of suspension centre programs. Clearly, it would also be useful to explore such issues with stakeholders further as they may be able to provide further insight into the ways in which these issues can best be communicated and addressed at a local, regional, and state level. Management committees as identified in the Guidelines (2006) could be one way of helping to explore such issues. The committees are described as being “chaired by a principal with representation from relevant departmental, school and community groups” (see Footnote 2, para. 8). Such a committee might, for example, liaise with head teachers related to the support they feel they need and act as a communication conduit between suspension centre staff and, regional, and state office personnel to share information and plan to address such issues.

A recurring theme was that schools needed to provide ongoing support to students who were placed at suspension centres. Head teachers in particular described that schools often did not provide timely and meaningful learning programs and that they spent time unsuccessfully chasing up work or information from students’ schools. Head teachers, teachers aides, and parents also felt that schools needed to maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while they were at suspension centres and provide support to students when they returned to their schools. Head teachers in almost all of the centres also spoke of difficulties associated with the concept of

"mentoring" in supporting students' return to school, describing that mentors were "difficult to find" for students. Research clearly establishes the importance of students' schools actively assisting students to maintain positive gains in behaviour or learning, utilising holistic and ongoing support (Braun, Xavier, & West, 2002; Lewis & Newcomer, 2004; De Jong & Griffiths, 2006; Riordan, 2006). Research reflects that mentoring could be one way of assisting students as the mentoring relationship is described as "facilitating appropriate, meaningful relationships between children and adults" (Calderra, Adams, Valentine, & Young, 2009, p. 1) and enabling "another's personal growth and development" (Kensington-Miller, n.d., p. 320). The benefits of mentoring have also been identified by researchers such as Collett (1999) who found that students felt a stronger sense of belonging and support when a teacher or mentor took an interest in them (p. 50). Some researchers cite the benefits of school-based mentoring as "being associated with academic achievement and behavioural improvements" (Ryan, Whittaker, & Pinckney, 2002); encouraging more "positive relationships between students, their teachers, and school administration" (Herrera, 1999); and being a "cost-efficient intervention for students at risk for emotional and behavioural disorders" (Glomb, Buckley, Minskoff, & Rogers, 2006) (as cited in Calderra, Adams, Valentine, & Young, 2009, p. 2). However, in further exploring the ways in which mentoring might work best to enable the success of suspension centres, recent research by Caldarella et al. (2009) found that mentoring is still considered "to be in its early developmental stages" (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002) with "limited empirical studies" (Jackson, 2002) having been undertaken, with sometimes discrepant findings (as cited in Keating et al., 2002, p. 2). Nevertheless, this research revealed that one head teacher said that "mentors seem to be a good part of the program" and it would be useful to review the practices at Listerfield suspension centre to establish how mentoring was working and to identify the factors that might have enabled such success. It would also be useful to scope the ways in which other

centres have tried to implement mentoring practices to facilitate the work of the centres in successfully returning students to their schools after their suspension centre placements.

Finally, of the 22 students who completed the survey the majority responded that they could think of nothing that needed to be improved with the centres. Of the two students that identified things that could be improved, one student (Listerfield) commented that a booklet the school provided to him to complete while he was on suspension was "too hard" and the other student (Abberfield) commented on the need for another male teacher at the suspension centre because the "students go crazy" when the male teacher left the room.

Research sub-question three: What evidence is there that suspension centres are meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the Guidelines?

Almost all of the students in this research benefited from their suspension centre placement and the practices in suspension centres were reported by stakeholders as enabling positive outcomes for students. A range of stakeholders described that students were being helped with and/or were learning skills related to academic activities and behaviour and that they were being taught and/or were learning behaviour skills. Students, their parents, mentors, and principals across all of the centres commented on positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning between day one or two of the students' placement at suspension centres and four weeks after the placements. A significant number attributed changes in students' behaviour to the behaviour skills students were taught and practised at the centres. As such, the centres were meeting aspects of the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines (see Footnote 2, paras. 2 & 4). Stakeholders' responses showed that the centres assisted "students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences"; "reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, and re-integrate to positive work habits" as outlined in the Goals of the Guidelines (see Footnote

2, para. 4). In turn, such findings indicate that the centres did assist "students to make a successful re-entry to schooling", as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2).

However, some care is required to ensure that the findings in this research are not generalised too broadly. This research was designed to explore the operation of suspension centres and whether suspension centres were meeting the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines for the period of time students were placed at the centres and up to four weeks after they had left the centres. Hence the research design did not aim to discover whether positive changes in students' behaviour and learning were sustained beyond these four weeks. Caution in ensuring the research findings are not generalised too broadly seems well founded in light of previous research that cites difficulties with suspended students positively changing their behaviour and learning when returning to their schools. Jerome and Pinta (2008), for example, note that it is a difficult task to expect that student-teacher relationships will necessarily improve in mainstream schools as a result of students accessing alternatives education programs. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the need for some caution in ensuring the findings of this research are not generalised too broadly, the responses did describe positive outcomes for students placed at suspension centres.

It is interesting to reflect on whether such positive outcomes would have been described for the students had they been suspended from school without any support. Available research indicates this would be unlikely. Early research by Collett (1999, p. 49) relating to the "perception of suspended secondary students towards their school disciplinary absences" asked students if their suspension made any difference to their relationships with teachers when they went back to school. Although Collett's study was small (23 students from regional Queensland schools) most of the students in the study (74%) said nothing changed; 13% of students said relationships became worse; and 13% reported improved relationships with teachers and peers. More recent research by Hemphill and Hargreaves (2009) found that school suspension increased the

likelihood of subsequent antisocial behaviour and violent behaviour: “Students suspended from school were 50% more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and 70% more likely to engage in violent behaviour” (p. 6). It would be useful to conduct longitudinal research relating to the outcomes for students who were placed at suspension centres beyond the four week period after their placements had concluded. It would also be useful to conduct research comparing the long term effect on students who have attended the suspension centres with students who have not had any such structured support during their suspension.

Finally, it would also be useful to conduct longitudinal research related to the outcomes for school communities more broadly. One Purpose of suspension centres as outlined in the Guidelines was to “increase the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students” (see Footnote 2, para. 2). The design of this research did not enable such outcomes to be identified. However, again, this highlights the need for some caution in generalising the results of this research more broadly. A 2003 Harvard study, for example, showed “little evidence that increased suspension improves the learning environment for other students” at the school (Jacob, 2005, p. 15).

There was some evidence that practices in suspension centres were meeting another one of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines (2006) in providing “professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students” (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Stakeholders in half of the centres described that head teachers provided professional learning and relevant information to students’ schools about strategies and practices to manage students’ behaviour and/or learning. There was less evidence that suspension centres were meeting the Goal relating to providing “skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students” (see Footnote 2, para. 4). Although, however, stakeholders did not comment on providing “skills development opportunities” to parents per se they did say that among the best things happening were the positive relationships suspension centre staff had developed with families and the

implementation of strategies and practices to support families. In visiting the centres, I also observed that one of the good things happening with the centres was that a number of parents visited the suspension centres to drop off or pick up their children. Suspension centre staff said that this provided them with the opportunity to speak to parents about their child's behaviour and learning and to suggest external services that might assist the family. This indicated that some support was provided to parents.

For a small number of students, there were no positive changes in their behaviour or learning between day one or two of their placements at the centres and four weeks after the placements. These students were described as having severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs, including significant mental health issues and diagnosed special needs. The responses revealed that these students were less likely to have been assisted to meet some of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines (2006) such as to "reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences"; "reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). It would also follow that these students were less likely to meet the Purpose of the Guidelines (2006) in being assisted "to make a successful re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2). The fact that students described with severe behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs had been referred to, and placed at suspension centres, raises some interesting questions. Were these students referred to the centres because principals did not understand the Purpose and Goals of the suspension centre Guidelines? Or, were principals referring students who they knew were unlikely to have the potential to meet the Purpose and Goals because principals, themselves, required additional support to help manage the students and were not able to access other supports that may have been more appropriate? One of the inhibiting factors for the success of the centres could have been that, as a head teacher and student services officer at

one suspension centre said, some schools had viewed suspension centres as a "stepping stone" to disruptive students being placed at another alternative education setting. It is important to explore this apparent misconception or potential misuse of suspension centres by some principals to help address such issues and enable practices for the success of the centres. These issues are also relevant when reflecting on what evidence there was that suspension centres were meeting the Purpose outlined in the Guidelines (2006) as forming "part of a range of behaviour services for students who were disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs)" (see Footnote 2, para. 2). Stakeholders' responses did not enable the researcher to ascertain how suspension centres formed "part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive".

Finally, stakeholders' comments highlighted other practices which appeared to inhibit "successfully returning students to school" and making it less likely that aspects of the purpose and Goals outlined in the suspension centres Guidelines would be meet. Head teachers, teachers aides, and parents across all suspension centres, except Mitcham, reported that schools needed to provide timely and meaningful learning programs to students referred to suspension centres; maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while they were at the centres; and support students when they returned to their schools. Researchers such as Riordan (2006) emphasise the need for students with disruptive behaviour to be engaged in meaningful learning and academic programs to increase the likelihood that they will be successfully engaged at school (pp. 244 & 247). Such researchers also cite the importance of developing successful reintegration plans for students who have been suspended from school to ensure that they can engage with school and to help prevent the recurrence of disruptive behaviour (Michail, 2011; Rogers, 2004; Riordan, 2006). The importance of such research is highlighted by the fact that some parents, mentors, and students said that while a couple of students derived some benefit when they were at the suspension centre, no positive changes were described in their behaviour or learning four

weeks after they returned to school. In such cases, it was apparent that aspects of the Purpose outlined in the Guidelines (2006) were not met in as much as students could not be described as having had "a successful re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2).

In reflecting on sub-question three, the Purpose of suspension centres in forming "part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive" as stated in the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2) requires further exploration, particularly in light of the finding that a small number of students did not benefit from suspension centre placements. As previously acknowledged, some students placed at suspension centres had characteristics reflective of the types of students "alternative education programs" were designed to support (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006). Some of the aspects researchers cite as being important for effective alternative education programs are also aspects important for other programs, such as suspension centres, in effectively supporting students with disruptive behaviour. These include: catering to students' needs in a holistic way; frequent family and community communication and participation; and high levels of interagency collaboration to ensure a "broad range of services contribute to the education and wellbeing of students" (De Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 36). However, in analysing relevant information relating to the supports available to government schools to help manage disruptive student behaviour it is apparent that suspension centres were established to provide support that is distinct from that offered by what researchers term "alternative education programs". Over the past 10 years, the NSW government has provided significant funding for a range of additional supports, external to mainstream classrooms, to support students with disruptive behaviour in Government schools. Some parliamentary discussion involving the then Minister of Education and Training, Dr Andrew Refshauge describes some of these additional supports and explains how the supports were envisaged to help support students with disruptive behaviour. At a 2003 General Purpose Standing Committee meeting Dr Refshauge said the following.

> We have provided $48.4 million in the 2003-04 State budget, and over the next four years for a range of placement and support options for students with disruptive behaviour ... and a further $8 million in this year's budget over four years to establish 20 new suspension centres to implement behaviour modification plans for students…. Through that funding we will be establishing 11 new special schools [refers to behaviour schools and schools for emotionally disordered/behaviour disordered students], 17 new tutorial centres for students with severe behaviour difficulties, an additional 22 teachers aide positions to assist teachers to implement programs for students with disruptive behaviour…. (p. 26)

The descriptions of suspension centres, behaviour schools, and tutorial centres, and programs by Dr Refshauge positions each of these types of supports for students with disruptive behaviour very differently. Suspension centres aim to "implement behaviour modification plans for students returning to school after a long suspension" and behaviour schools, and tutorial centres and programs are described for "students with severe behaviour difficulties". The review of literature in chapter two also showed that the "range of support services" for students with disruptive or challenging behaviour was described by the Department in different ways which shows that students suited to such supports might be very different (see Footnote 1). Students described as having "support needs of high intensity, frequency and duration, for example, were described as being able to access one of the Department's behaviour schools that provide "specialist programs for students in Year 5 to 10 whose behaviour can no longer be supported by the students' home school". Some supports are also offered for students with diagnosed mental health disorders or students who are emotionally disturbed and it was described that students could remain "for longer periods of time" (General Purpose Standing Committee, 2003. p. 26). From such literature the type of support accessed by students should reflect the nature, intensity and duration of that behaviour. Therefore, if the supports are viewed along a continuum, suspension centres are described best as a supportive program, separate to mainstream schools, for students on long

suspension from school who would "benefit from a structured program that aims to return students to their schools as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1). This infers that the centres were not envisaged to support students in the same way as, for example, behaviour schools which are described for students who could no longer be supported at their home (mainstream) school. The relevance of such conceptualisation of the range of supports for students with disruptive behaviour, that are separate to mainstream classrooms, appears to be supported by some of the findings in this research. Stakeholders' responses clearly revealed, for example, that students described with "severe and entrenched behaviours" did not benefit from suspension centre placements but this was probably because these students were less likely to have met the Purpose and Goals as outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines (see Footnote 2, paras. 2 & 4). The researcher reflects that such students may have been better suited to a specialist behaviour school for emotionally disturbed/behaviour disordered students and that further consultation may be necessary to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of these distinctive placements provisions.

Overarching research question: Issues and implications

The overarching research question, "What are the differences between 'espoused educational policy' and 'policy in use' in relation to suspension centres?" aimed to discover the differences between the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Suspension Centres* and descriptions of what was occurring in practice, from stakeholders perspectives, via exploring the operation of suspension centres (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). From responses to the research questions, descriptive information was analysed to compare the descriptions of what was occurring in practice to the suspension centre Guidelines. The research findings can be considered in three categories.

- Practices occurring in suspension centres that reflected aspects of the Guidelines and whether they enabled or inhibited the success of the centres.
- Practices occurring in suspension centres that were not in the Guidelines.
- Aspects of the Guidelines that were apparently not practised or not identified by stakeholders' responses.

Addressing these research findings formed the basis of the recommendations for practice and research outlined later in this chapter.

Practices occurring in suspension centres that reflected aspects of the Guidelines and whether they enabled or inhibited the success of the centres

In comparing stakeholders' responses to the Guidelines it was clear that parts of the Guidelines were being successfully implemented in practice. Parts of the Guidelines stakeholders' responses referred to that appeared to be enabling factors for the success of suspension centres included aspects of the: Definition; Purpose; General Operating Principles; Goals; Target Population; Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance; Operational Guidelines-Management; Operational Guidelines-Resourcing; Operational Guidelines-Staffing; and Operational Guidelines-Transition (see Footnote 2, 2006).

Stakeholders described that a majority of the students placed at suspension centres had positive changes in their behaviour and/or learning which reflected that some aspects of the Purpose and Goals of the suspension centre Guidelines were being met. Parents, students, head teachers, teachers aides, principals, and student services officers across the six centres revealed that students were being helped with and/or were learning skills related to academic activities and behaviour; that they were identifying the skills or strategies they had learnt and were trying to put, or putting, the skills into practice. Parents, students, head teachers, teachers aides, principals, and a student support coordinator, across four centres, also said that students were attending school

regularly; were happier at school; succeeding with school work; and had improved self-esteem and coping skills after returning to their schools from the centres. These responses showed suspension centres assisted "students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences"; "reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "built capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). In turn, such findings showed the centres assisted "students to make a successful re-entry to schooling", as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (2006, para. 2). As described in the Definition and Target Population of the Guidelines (2006), these findings reflect the likelihood that schools had referred students who had "been identified … as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1) or were "assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 5).

All stakeholder groups, across the majority of centres (excluding Ashwood), also commented that suspension centre staff were using appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. It was likely that the particular skills and approaches of suspension centre staff enabled good relationships to be developed with students, their families, and schools. In turn these factors could have increased the likelihood that students engaged with suspension centre practices and could have increased the likelihood that families trusted information and referrals provided by suspension centre staff. There was some evidence that suspension centres provided "professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students" (see Footnote 2, para. 4) and these practices enabled aspects of the Purpose and Goals to be met. From stakeholders' responses it appeared that the centres were operating according to the Operational Guidelines-Staffing aspects of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 10) in that head teachers appointed to the centres had "experience in teaching students with disruptive behaviours". It also appeared from my observations that a "teachers aide special" was

"employed at the centre … [when] the structured program was operating" (see Appendix R Table R10 general observations on visits to suspension centres).

Stakeholders' responses also reflected that aspects of the Operational Guidelines-Management and Operational Guidelines-Resourcing of the Guidelines were being implemented in practice, in ways that could enable the success of the centres. In relation to practices that reflected the Operational Guidelines-Management, for example, one regional management committee member (student services officer, Abberfield) revealed that the school education director; principal of the site the centre was located at; principal of the managing school; and head teacher met regularly. This resembled the description of a "regional management committee" as outlined in the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 8). The practice of management meetings was described as beneficial because stakeholders learnt information about the centre and spread messages about the centre in a positive way across the region. It was noted, however, that "community groups" were not referred to as part of the regular meetings. It also seemed that one suspension centre might have had processes in place that reflected some type of "implementation plan" with the student services officer at Listerfield saying that data seemed to reflect that it was "after about three years that the centres make a difference and are more effective". This might provide some evidence for implementation of the following aspect of the Operational Guidelines-Management in the Guidelines: that "The committee will develop an implementation plan and oversight the management of resources …" (see Footnote 2, para. 8). It was also observed that head teacher positions had been established at "managing schools" as identified in the Guidelines at Operational Guidelines-Resourcing (see Footnote 2, para. 9) in some centres to good effect. The principal at Mitcham, for example, described providing support to the head teacher, with the head teacher being given the opportunity to relieve as assistant principal of the school.

Stakeholders' comments and my observations revealed that suspension centres were operating in a variety of ways which perhaps reflected the flexibility available in the Guidelines (see

Appendix R Table R10 General observations on visits to suspension centres). The first General Operating Principle in the Guidelines (2006) states, for example, that the "model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). Comments from the principal at Blackburn may also have indicated that stakeholders felt the Guidelines provided some flexibility for local implementation to help enable the success of the centres. The principal stated "the centre is context specific and caters to kids with a broad socio-economic and cultural mix" and that they had "made the centre mould to the kids". He further said that in the beginning, when the centre was being established, that "the pressure was on to make it a generic suspension centre, however we needed to take it in a direction to suit the local context". He said that the school knew what was best for the community and that while they recognise "there are Guidelines to follow" they also know "what kids need and what the community will accept … the program needs to be local". A variety of practices were also described which showed how the centres were operating, according to local need, to enable the success of the centres. The centres were located in a variety of locations across NSW: in settings within mainstream schools; on sites of other specialist behaviour support services; adjoining school sites; or within community centres. Each of the centres catered to different age groups of students from Year 1 to Year 9 with one of the centres catering only to primary school students (see Appendix S Table S11 Numbers of students by year group who undertook phases of the research). Stakeholders commented on programs and practices at the centres which varied from centre to centre and I observed in visiting the centres and talking to stakeholders varied practices relating to how the centres operated (see Appendix R Table R10 General observations on visits to suspension centres). Some centres operated for two hours per day, others operated all day, and one centre operated on site for four days, with suspension centre staff visiting schools that referred students to the centre on the fifth day. Stakeholders also referred to other models of practice that were distinct. At Abberfield, for example, the student services officer and principal

said that suspension centre staff provided an "outreach service" to one school in the region where staff went and visited the school. The stakeholders thought that this worked well and solved the problem of the school not being able to access the centre owing to lack of transport services. At Heatherdale, the student support coordinator noted that with funding that had been "left over at the end of one semester", the region had set up an "outreach program in [two areas] which also had areas of high suspension for a semester". He said that "the schools appreciated" and "liked the service". Clearly, stakeholders had established and operated suspension centres in various ways that appeared to enable the success of the centres from stakeholders' perspectives and reflected the broad nature of the General Operating Principles stated in the Guidelines.

One stakeholder commented on practices used to refer students to suspension centres that were similar to statements at Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance in the Guidelines. The student services officer at Heatherdale said that something she thought was working well at the centre was "the tight processes in place [which were] good". She referred to principals emailing or faxing Appendix 5 of the *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures* to the centre when they referred students. She also explained that there was a "placement panel process" where regional student services staff liaised with the head teacher and principals of referring schools when referrals indicated that students had behaviours that were severely disruptive. Such practices are reflective of the statements in the suspension centre Guidelines (2006) "The principal completes Appendix 5: Notification of suspension/considering expulsion as per *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures*" and "Prior to students attending the centre a risk assessment must be coordinated by the principal of the student's school, in liaison with the head teacher of the suspension centre" (See Footnote 2, para. 7).

In relation to one of the points in the Guidelines (2006) at Operational Guidelines-Transition, there was some evidence that students were supported in a variety of ways when they returned to their schools. Students, their parents, and mentors, for example, described supports such as:

changes to students' medication regimes; contact with a specialist person at the school; communication of issues to school staff; having students on monitoring cards; rewarding the student; and support programs to help the students' transition into various school environments such as the playground. These supports were described as enabling factors for the success of the centres. However, these supports did not reflect some of the services outlined in the Guidelines (2006) which state that "students returning to school after suspension will be supported through the continuum of available support services including mentoring, support teacher behaviour and school counsellors" (see Footnote 2, para. 12).

That suspension centre practices reflected parts of the Guidelines (2006) and were described by stakeholders as having positive outcomes for students, raises interesting questions such as: Are suspension centres, as an alternative to suspended students being at home, or left unsupervised within the community, of more benefit to students and school communities than the outcomes of suspension alone? Carter (2008), for example, found that students with frequent school absences are at risk of academic failure owing to exposure to fewer academic opportunities than students "who attend school more regularly" (para. 11). Would the same findings be applicable for students suspended from school who access a support such as a suspension centre? From this research, it was revealed that students received some academic support, with comments reflecting that students were being helped with and/or were learning skills related to academic activities at the centres. Another question is whether the fact that suspension centres give students a place to go while they are on long suspension from school, with a majority of students benefiting from the placement, is enough of an outcome. While this research showed that suspension centres met aspects of the Purpose and Goals outlined in the Guidelines (2006), an area of interest relating to enabling successful outcomes for students in the longer-term is determining whether or not the skills students learnt at the centres and the positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning were sustained when students returned to their schools beyond the four week period identified in

this research. Some researchers such as Hemphill and Hargreaves (2009) reveal how there may be particular issues within schools that could inhibit gains students made at the centres being transferred to their schools. These issues include school suspension rates; a school's ability to administer discipline fairly; and teachers' attitudes. The researchers found that these factors are "more important influences on suspension than students' behaviour" (p. 6). Therefore, longitudinal research relating to the outcomes for students and school communities would be of benefit.

That parts of the Guidelines were not being successfully implemented in practice was apparent in comparing stakeholders' responses to the Guidelines. Parts of the Guidelines (2006) the responses referred to that were inhibiting factors for the success of centres included aspects of the Definition; Purpose; General Operating Principles; Goals; Target Population; Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance; Operational Guidelines-Program; and Operational Guidelines-Transition.

Stakeholders describing that a small number of students with "severe and entrenched behaviours and/or significant learning and/or behaviour needs" had no positive changes in their behaviour or learning between day one or two of their suspension centre placements and four weeks after their placements showed these students were less likely to have been assisted to meet some of the Goals outlined in the Guidelines (2006). These include to "reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences"; "reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours"; and "build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school; and re-integrate to positive work habits" (see Footnote 2, para. 4). It would also follow that such students were less likely to have been assisted "to make a successful re-entry to schooling" (see Footnote 2, para. 2) as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines. Such findings may, however, also relate to the fact that schools had referred students who were less likely to "benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (para. 1) and

were less likely to have been "assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school" (para. 5) as described in the Definition and Target Population of the Guidelines (2006). Exploring and understanding why principals referred such students to the centres is important in enabling practices for the success of the centres and the welfare of the students themselves. Research in Britain, relating to learning support units may be useful to consider in helping to address this issue. An evaluation of learning support units found that having processes in place to clearly assess referrals to the units, as well as having processes in place to follow up with schools who referred students inappropriately, led, over time, to schools being clearer about what was expected of them in regards to appropriate referrals (Braun & West, 2003, p. 23).

Comments were also made relating to the need to have more primary school students accessing suspension centres, and to the fact that sometimes there were few students in some of the centres. Two regional management committee members at one centre also said that the centres needed to do more to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students. In terms of primary school students needing to access the centres and few students in some suspension centres, stakeholders' responses might reflect the ways in which local areas have interpreted the Definition and Target Population outlined in the Guidelines: that is, it could be that stakeholders identified students who were "… likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible" (see Footnote 2, para. 1) or who might be "assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 5). Such practices may also be reflective of one of the General Operating Principles in the Guidelines (2006) that "the model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department (para. 3). It would be useful to clarify stakeholders' comments that there need to be more primary school students accessing the centres; that there were sometimes few students in some suspension centres; and

that the centres needed to do more to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students to facilitate the effective use of suspension centres.

A recurring theme was that head teachers, teachers aides, parents, and student services officers revealed that schools needed to provide ongoing support to students who were placed at suspension centres. Comments showed that aspects of Operational Guidelines-Referral in the Guidelines (2006) were not being implemented effectively which may have inhibited the success of the centres. This included that "prior to students attending the centre a risk assessment must be coordinated by the principal of the student's school, in liaison with the head teacher of the suspension centre" and that "the home school retains responsibility for the student and managing the suspension process" (see Footnote 2, para. 7). Some stakeholders felt that schools needed to maintain some contact and ongoing responsibility for students while they were at suspension centres and provide support to students when they returned to their schools. Their comments also revealed practices were not reflective of the Guidelines (2006) general Operating Principles, Operational Guidelines-Program, and one aspect of the Operational Guidelines-Transition. Head teachers, teachers aides, parents, a student services officer, and one student, for example, described that often a student's school did not "remain responsible for the management of the student and provision of the learning program" (para. 11); that "students who attend the centres [did not] remain the responsibility of the home school" and that "strong links [were not] maintained throughout the period in the suspension centre" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). Finally, that head teachers in almost all of the centres spoke of the fact that mentors were "difficult to find" for students, and that mentoring at one suspension centre (Ashwood) was not effective might have inhibited the success of the centres. Stakeholders described that they had experienced difficulties in linking students "to a mentor teacher while in the suspension centre program" and in "the mentor teacher … [supporting] the student's return to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 12). The

responses revealed that such practices may have inhibited "successfully returning students to school" as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, para. 2).

Practices occurring in suspension centres that were not in the Guidelines

A number of practices were revealed, that were not in the Guidelines: that the centres were catering to students on the "verge of suspension"; that students visited one centre (Ashwood) after using a "time out" card from the classroom; that a head teacher was the "mentor"; and that one centre planned on trialling a "homework centre" in the afternoons and implementing "an anger management program for local school students".

At Ashwood, the head teacher and student support coordinator described that the centre catered to students who were on the "verge of suspension" or who were visiting the centre after using a "time out" card from the classroom (provided to them after they had been at the centre and had returned to school). The Guidelines (2006) state in the Definition and Target Population that suspension centres are for students who are on "long suspension" from school (see Footnote 2, paras. 1 & 5). The section, Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance, also states that students are referred to the program "as part of the suspension resolution process" and that the student's entry is "preceded by the completion of a school counsellor's suspension report" (see Footnote 2, para. 7). At Listerfield, stakeholders described that they were aiming to trial or implement practices for students who may be "at risk of suspension from school" such as running a homework centre where students could get help with their homework and an anger management program "for local school kids". These practices might have reflected one of the General Operating Principles in the Guidelines (2006), that "the model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). Again, however, such practices were not reflective of the Definition and Target Population of the Guidelines (2006).

The student support coordinator at Ashwood also raised concerns about the head teacher and the ways in which the centre was being used. She said that "the head teacher sees himself as a counsellor which is problematic …" and also pointed out that the head teacher was the "mentor", not a teacher at the student's school, which she said was "limiting". Head teachers at two other centres (Blackburn and Listerfield) also commented on difficulties in linking students to a mentor teacher while they were at the suspension centres, commenting that the mentors were often the deputy principal or principal of the school. These practices were not reflective of the Guidelines (2006) which state at Operational Guidelines-Transition that "the student will be linked to a mentor teacher while in the suspension centre program. The mentor teacher will support the student's return to school" (see Footnote 2, para. 12).

Various other practices that were not outlined in the suspension centre Guidelines were suggested by stakeholders to enable the success of the centres. These practices included the need to engage relevant external services to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students; the need to cater effectively to the unique and often isolated role of head teachers; and the need for some monitoring or evaluation of the centres. In relation to the need to engage relevant external services to support particular groups of students and their families, it is noted that the Target Population in the Guidelines (2006) is broad, requiring only that students have been "placed on long suspension" and "are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension" (see Footnote 2, para. 5). This research did not aim to identify the number of different cultural groups or number of students from different cultural groups placed at suspension centres. However, it would be useful for future research to identify such information, as the enabling factors for the success of different cultural groups placed at the centres could be distinctly different. Such information might also have implications for the types of professional learning and

support provided to suspension centre staff in implementing strategies and practices to best support particular groups of students.

Other practices raised by stakeholders that were not outlined in the Guidelines were professional learning for suspension centre staff and monitoring or evaluation of the centres. The importance of monitoring and evaluation is described by researchers who cite the lack of formally evaluated alternative education programs in countries such as the United States where a number of such programs have been implemented (Cable et al., 2009, p. 10). The lack of formally evaluated programs also seems to be an issue in Australia. In 2004 De Jong and Griffiths (2006), as part of a survey of programs that exhibited best practice in addressing student behaviour issues in Australia, found that 16 of the 52 programs surveyed across all education jurisdictions were alternative education programs and that only 20% of the programs surveyed indicated that they had been formally evaluated (p. 35). Similarly, it appears that few of the supports put in place by the NSW government over the past 10 years to help manage students with disruptive behaviour have been formally evaluated. In 2003 the Hon. Patricia Forsythe asked the then Minister for Education, Dr Andrew Refshauge, the following in relation to his announcement of new suspension centres, behaviour schools and tutorial centres to help manage students with disruptive behaviour.

> Since those schools were first established in the past, it would be at least two years, has any longitudinal study been undertaken on students who have been taken out of their normal schools and have been attending these schools as to their long-term position back in their normal schools?

Dr Refshauge replied “I am not specific about that. I will certainly look and see if there is, and report back to you”. The Hon. Patricia Forsythe then said “I mean, in other words, is it working?” Dr Refshauge in response, said

> As far as the specific question you asked, it is a little bit confined as far as is it working. Yes, there are general assessments that it is. As far as more rigorous external assessments, I am not sure. I will come back to you on that…. (General Purpose Standing Committee Number 1, pp. 26-27)

Clearly, it would appear, from stakeholders' comments and from research cited in the preceding chapters that it may be beneficial for the suspension centre Guidelines to outline professional learning for suspension centre staff as well as monitoring or evaluation of the centres.

Aspects of the Guidelines that were apparently not practised or not identified by stakeholders' responses

Stakeholders' responses did not refer to some parts of the Guidelines (2006) including aspects of the Purpose; General Operating Principles; Goals; Facility; Operational Guidelines-Referral and Attendance; Operational Guidelines-Management; and Operational Guidelines-Staffing (see Footnote 2, paras. 2-10). The fact that aspects of the Guidelines were not referred to by stakeholders was not a constraint on this research, however, because the aim was not to identify how all aspects of the Guidelines had been implemented in practice. Rather, this research aimed to establish stakeholders' perspectives relating to suspension centres practices, to identify the enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of the centres, from stakeholders' perspectives. In examining stakeholders' responses to the research questions, I aimed to discover the differences between "espoused educational policy" and "policy in use" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995). This research did not aim to ascertain, for example, whether suspension centres helped to "prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours" as outlined in the Goals or whether the centres increased "the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students" as outlined in the Purpose of the Guidelines (see Footnote 2, paras. 2&4).

Parts of the General Operating Principles were not reflected in stakeholders' responses, including whether all of the centres were "established under the auspices of the Regional Student Services Executive and managed by regional school and student services executive"; if the "centre and its expectations … mirror[ed] the home school and its expectations"; whether "the length of stay [was] no more than twenty days"; or if students were "referred back to their home school principal if their behaviour [was] such that it threaten[ed] the safety of other students, or [was] seriously disruptive whilst they [were] in the centre" (see Footnote 2, para. 3). Various parts of the Guidelines (2006) at Operational Guidelines including aspects related to Referral and Attendance, Management, and Staffing were also not referred to. This included whether "attendance and progress reports [were] provided to the home school by the centre" or whether "a "suspension resolution meeting" [was] convened by the principal of the student's home school within five days of the student commencing at the centre …" (see Footnote 2, para. 7). Most of the Operational Guidelines-Management were also not revealed in stakeholders' responses, including whether "the principal of the managing school (if different from the chair) attend[ed] regional management committee meetings; whether the principal ensured "… that the head teacher of the suspension centre [had] appropriate plans in place in the event of a serious incident", or whether "the principal of the site at which the suspension centre [was] located … provided appropriate support in the event of a serious incident" (see Footnote 2, para. 8). Finally, one aspect of the Operational Guidelines-Staffing was not referred to, that is, whether there were instances of suspension centres relocating after the period of the head teachers' two year appointment and whether or not the head teachers chose to relocate with the centre (see Footnote 2, para. 10).

The fact that none of these issues were raised by stakeholders suggests that they were not areas or issues that stakeholders felt strongly about or that impacted significantly on the outcomes of the centres.

Limitations of the research and cautions

Qualitative research has long been associated with concerns related to validity and interpretation (Atweh, et al., 2008; Clough, 1992; Groundwater-Smith, 2004). In this research, as with other qualitative research, there is the possibility that aspects of data completion and the data collection method might have inadvertently affected the research validity. Firstly, with data completion, surveys might have been completed by stakeholders at different times from those intended. That is, the questionnaire survey might have been completed by parents, mentors, and students earlier or later than at day one or two of students' placements at the centres and four weeks after their placements. Students had also been at the centres for various lengths of time prior to stakeholders completing the semi-structured survey interviews which might have influenced how well stakeholders could answer the research questions. I sought to minimise the likelihood that data completion methods inadvertently affected this research by reminding head teachers of suspension centres to implement the surveys at the intended times. I also contacted head teachers to ensure that the surveys were completed as close to four weeks after students had finished their suspension centre placements as possible, by checking that the surveys had been returned. Data was carefully triangulated across the two research phases with a wide variety of stakeholders to identify themes or common responses and storylines so that the researcher reported on stakeholders' responses that were revealed most often.

Secondly, in terms of the data collection method, a constraint on this research could have been whether some stakeholders were willing to reveal their personal views. Researchers such as Levin (2000), for example, cite the benefits of involving students directly in research which affects them because they have "unique perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful" (as cited in Atweh et al., 2008, p. 11). Other researchers, however, note some difficulties in involving students in research because researchers have found that some students, particularly boys, can be "intimidated or embarrassed talking about their school experiences to someone who was, a) a

teacher, and b) representing a University" (Smyth et al. 2001) and this may be further complicated where the interviewer is female (Fielding, 2004) (as cited in Harrington 2006, p. 175). In this research the majority of the students, in responding to the semi-structured survey interviews, said that they could think of nothing that needed to be improved with suspension centres. Students' responses might have reflected their reticence to reveal their personal views because they may not have wanted to be seen as disloyal to suspension centre staff by suggesting areas for improvement. In minimising such constraints on this research, I was mindful of establishing a trusting relationship with the students prior to conducting the interviews and was sensitive in asking clarifying questions relating to students' responses.

Finally, the researcher acknowledges that some caution is necessary relating to generalising the findings in this research more broadly as the wording in the Guidelines reflects that the centres are flexibly located (for a period of up to two years) and operate within the broad structure provided by the suspension centre Guidelines. Therefore, the Guidelines themselves, present some flexibility in how the centres can be established and operated. It is also important to recognise that suspension centres will mostly likely evolve and change over time and it is important to recognise that the findings in this research reflect practices at a particular point in time and may not therefore, be relevant over a longer period of time.

Recommendations for practice and research

In outlining "the differences between 'espoused educational policy' and 'policy in use' in relation to suspension centres" (Cohen, 2000; Schön, 1995) stakeholders' responses identified practices that appeared to be enabling or inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres. In discussing the implications of stakeholders' responses, in light of related research, some clear directions were provided, as a result of this research. The following recommendations are outlined for practice and research to best enable the success of suspension centres.

Recommendations for research

Recommendation 1: *That research should be conducted to determine whether the positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning are sustained beyond the four weeks pertinent to this research.*

Further longititudinal research would be useful to establish whether the positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning are sustained beyond the four week period pertinent to this research and the impact of specific strategies which enhance the likelihood that this will happen. Such research would facilitate the likelihood that positive changes in students' behaviour and/or learning at suspension centres could be supported in different contexts and over a longer period of time. (Chapters Four and Five, Phases One and Two refers)

Recommendation 2: *That the Department of Education and Communities devise a mechanism for policy and practice to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of suspension centre practices.*

Stakeholders' responses revealed the need for some structure for monitoring and evaluating suspension centres and research supports the importance of this in identifying the effectiveness of programs that aim to assist in improving student behaviour. The terms "monitoring" and "evaluation" should be explicitly stated in the Guidelines. Consideration should also be given at state office as to how these terms can be embedded in overarching policies such as the Student Welfare Policy and Guidelines associated with supporting the management of disruptive student behaviour. The terms should be explained in practical terms and guidance provided to regional and suspension centre staff on how monitoring and evaluating suspension centres can be best achieved. (Chapter Four, Phase One refers)

Recommendation 3: *That the Department of Education and Communities revise and refine processes to identify and respond to the referral of students who are "less likely to benefit".*

The Department should establish more clearly how suspension centres fit within a range of supports for students with disruptive behaviour in policies and guidelines to further enable the success of the centres. The Department should also establish whether suspension centres have processes in place to assess referrals to the centres, as well as to follow up with schools that referred students who were unlikely to benefit from the suspension centre placement. (Chapter Five, Phase Two refers)

Recommendations for practice

Recommendation 4: *That a range of practices need to be implemented to support the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff.*

This research found that suspension centre staff were using appropriate approaches and had good skills in managing students with disruptive behaviour. Providing a range of opportunities for suspension centre staff to share good strategies and practices would be beneficial. Such practices would support suspension centre staff in what was described as their "unique and often isolated roles" as well as help to disseminate effective practice for this relatively new model of support for students with disruptive behaviour.

The suspension centre Guidelines should also clearly state the need to address the professional learning needs of suspension centre staff. (Chapter Four, Phase One refers)

Recommendation 5: *That the Department of Education and Communities explore the role of mentoring in supporting students' successful transition from suspension centres to their schools.*

Stakeholders revealed that mentors were "difficult to find" for students and that the "mentoring" practices adopted in suspension centres were not always effective. It was also

described that schools needed to provide ongoing support for students placed at suspension centres to facilitate the success of the centres. To support students to make a successful transition back to their schools, it would be beneficial to review practices at Listerfield suspension centre where mentoring was revealed to be working well. It would also be useful to scope the ways in which other centres have tried to implement mentoring practices; the barriers to successful implementation; and alternative strategies that may have been successfully implemented to support students in this way. (Chapter Four, Phase One refers)

Recommendation 6: *That practices should be implemented to facilitate more effective and regular communication between schools, suspension centres, regional support staff, and state office staff who oversee suspension centres.*

Stakeholders identified that communication needed to be improved between suspension centres; schools; regional personnel; and state office personnel to enable issues to be identified and addressed. As some stakeholders said that regional management committee meetings helped to identify and address issues, it would be useful to explore how management committees have operated in these centres and scope the ways in which they could be used to enhance the success of the centres. (Chapter Four, Phase One refers)

Recommendation 7: *The Department of Education and Communities should explore how suspension centres are meeting the needs of particular groups of students.*

Stakeholders' responses revealed that they thought more primary school students needed to access the centres; that sometimes there was under-utilisation of some centres in comparison to the number of students actually suspended from relevant schools; and that the centres needed to do more to support particular groups of students and their families, such as Aboriginal students.

It would be useful to explore why suspension centres predominantly catered to high school students and why there were few students in some suspension centres, at specific times. It would also be useful to explore further the composition of students referred to the suspension centres, specifically how many Aboriginal students or students from other cultural groups. The enabling and inhibiting factors for the success of suspension centres for different cultural groups might be distinctly different from those of other students. Furthermore, exploring this issue might have implications for the types of professional learning and support provided to suspension centre staff to ensure that strategies and practices are put in place to provide the best support for particular groups of students placed at suspension centres. (Chapter Four, Phase One refers)

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Appendix

Contents

Appendix A

Guidelines for the establishment and operation of suspension centres (2006)

Definition

The suspension centre is an intervention for students who are on long suspension and have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible.

Purpose

The new suspension centres will

- form part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs);
- increase the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students; and
- assist students to make a successful re-entry to schooling.

General operating principles

- The model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department.
- The suspension centre will be established under the auspices of the Regional Student Services Executive and managed by regional school and student services executive.
- Students who attend the centres remain the responsibility of the home school and strong links will be maintained throughout the period in the suspension centre.
- The centre and its expectations will mirror the home school and its expectations.
- The length of stay will be no more than twenty days.
- Students will be referred back to their home school principal if their behaviour is such that it threatens the safety of other students, or is seriously disruptive whilst they are in the centre.

Goals

The goals of the centre will be

- to assist students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences;
- to reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours;
- to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits, and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours;
- to provide skills development opportunities and support for the parents/caregivers of the students; and
- to provide professional development opportunities and support for the teachers of the students.

Target population

Students who

- have been placed on long suspension; and
- are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension.

Facility

- The program will be located in a setting determined at the local level. This may be separate from schools accessing the program.
- The number of students in a suspension centre program at any one time is six.

Operational Guidelines

Referral and attendance

- As part of the suspension resolution process, students will be nominated by the principal to participate in the suspension centre program.

- The principal completes Appendix 5 – Notification of suspension/considering expulsion as per *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students: Procedures (2011)*.
- Prior to students attending the centre a risk assessment must be coordinated by the principal of the student's school, in liaison with the head teacher of the suspension centre.
- The student's entry into the suspension centre must be preceded by an interview with the student's parents/caregivers and the completion of a school counsellor's suspension report.
- The suspension report will be short and should focus on information that will inform intervention strategies e.g. key relationships/supports for the students.
- The expectations and role of the school, the student and parents/caregivers will be clearly communicated to all parties.
- The home school retains responsibility for the student and managing the suspension process. Attendance and progress reports will be provided to the home school by the centre.
- The student is marked "absent" on the roll of their home school. The head teacher of the suspension centre keeps data on student attendance whilst the student is at the centre.
- A "suspension resolution meeting" must be convened by the principal of the student's home school within five days of the student commencing at the centre as per *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students: Procedures (2011)*.

Management

- The region will establish a management committee chaired by a principal with representation from relevant departmental, school and community groups.
- The committee will develop an implementation plan and oversight the management of resources, including funding.

- A managing school must be designated by the regional director.
- The principal of the managing school (if different from the chair) will attend regional management committee meetings.
- The principal of the managing school is responsible for ensuring that the head teacher of the suspension centre has appropriate plans in place in the event of a serious incident.
- The principal of the site at which the suspension centre is located is responsible for providing appropriate support in the event of a serious incident. This principal (if different from the chair and managing school) will also attend management committee meetings.

Resourcing

- The managing school will receive funding to support the establishment and operation of the suspension centre.
- The head teacher position will be established at the managing school.

Staffing

- The head teacher appointed to the centre will have experience in teaching students with disruptive behaviours.
- The teacher managing the centre will be substantively appointed as a head teacher for a period of two years. If the centre relocates at the end of this period and the teacher does not wish to relocate with the centre, the teacher will have nominated transfer status at head teacher level or equivalent.
- A teachers aide special must be employed at the centre whenever the structured program is operating.

Program

- The home school will remain responsible for the management of the student and provision of the learning program.

Transition

- The student will be linked to a mentor teacher while in the suspension centre program. The mentor teacher will support the student's return to school.
- Students returning to school after suspension will be supported through the continuum of available support services including mentoring, support teacher behaviour and school counsellors.

(NSW Department of Education and Communities, Behaviour services: Guidelines for resource utilisation, 2007, pp. 17-20)

Appendix B

Definitions of reasons for long suspension

Physical violence: Which results in injury, or which seriously interferes with the safety or well being of other students and staff (including sexual or indecent assault).

Use or possession of a prohibited weapon, firearm or knife: When the student

- uses or possesses a weapon which is listed in Schedule One of the Weapons Prohibition Act. Prohibited weapons include laser pointers, or similar articles with a power output of more than one milliwatt. Prohibited Weapons do not include harmless children's toys such as plastic imitation guns that are clearly intended to be toys;
- uses a knife or possesses a knife (without reasonable excuse as defined by the Summary Offences Act 1988);
- uses or possesses a firearm of any type (including live ammunition and replica firearms).

Possession, supply or use of a suspected illegal substance: This does not include alcohol or tobacco, but does include supplying other students with illegal drugs or restricted substances such as prescription drugs.

Serious criminal behaviour related to the school: This includes malicious damage to property (school or community), or against the property of a fellow student or staff member on, or outside of the school premises. If the incident occurred outside the school or outside school hours, there must be a clear and close relationship between the incident and the school.

Subject to factors outlined in 6.3.1, principals may also impose a long suspension for

- *use of an implement as a weapon.* When a student uses an implement as a weapon to assault or injure another person (including use of an offensive implement, which is any implement made or

adapted to cause injury to another person);

- *persistent or serious misbehaviour*. This includes, but is not limited to
  - repeated refusal to follow the school discipline code;
  - threatening to use a weapon in a way that might seriously interfere with the safety and wellbeing of another person;
  - making credible threats against students or staff; and
  - behaviour that deliberately and persistently interferes with the rights of other students to learn or teachers to teach including bullying, harassment and victimisation.

If short suspensions have not resolved the issue of inappropriate behaviour, or the misbehaviour is so serious as to warrant a long suspension, the principal may impose a long suspension of up to and including 20 school days. In determining if a student's behaviour is serious enough to warrant a long suspension the principal must consider

- the safety of students and staff;
- the merit and circumstances of the particular case;
- factors such as the age, individual needs, any disability; and
- developmental level of students.

(NSW Department of Education and Communities, Suspension and Expulsion of School Students-Procedures, 2011, pp. 8-9)

Appendix C Table C4

Schwab's Table of Intervention

	A. Teachers (Head teachers of centres)	B. Students + parents (Student accessing + parent of)	C. Subject matter (Curriculum/hidden curriculum)	D. Milieux (Context of teaching & learning)
1. Teachers (Head teachers of suspension centres)	A. Difficulty in attracting teachers to the head teacher position; succession planning; maintaining useful knowledge/networks when centre moves. B. Isolation of role; access to relevant professional learning; sharing knowledge state-wide.	A. Individualised, intensive support helps build effective relationships; opportunities to discuss student progress are greater as parents often drop off/pick up - but how are these gains maintained? B. Concerns of students/parents accessing centres not identified.	A. Teachers may be unclear on how much time should be spent on academic and social curriculum (i.e. addressing the cause behind suspension). B. Access to additional resources; schools not providing suitable academic work for students.	A. Can be isolated from professional support if centre is located off a school site/ principal of managing school not accessible; role in facilitating support for transition back to school and ongoing role. B. Difficulties in accessing available supports/isolation.
2. Student + Parents (Student accessing centre + parent of)	A. Teachers able to build a good working relationship with; care that centre is not seen as "preferable to school"; students referred multiple times. B. Students mostly compliant and returned before 20 days; parent engagement is positive.	A. How can gains within the centre be effectively transferred to the student's home school? B. Some parents/students not wanting to accept suspension centre referral.	A. Should centres be providing remedial work?; capacity to facilitate effective learning outcomes for students in a short time; what factors inhibit provision of suitable curriculum? B. Work not suitable for students.	A. Does the flexible model suit parent/student needs?; how is resourcing allocated within centres? B. How can teachers aides work most effectively within the centre?; the role of mentoring.
3. Subject-Matter (Curriculum & hidden curriculum)	A. What is the language/discourse used?; what are the activities and practices within the centres?; what are the social relationships and organisation? B. How much and nature of.	A. How do both see the role of centres in catering to/identifying/supporting learning needs? B. No clear indication of students/parents concerns.	A. and B. To what extent does the curriculum of current behaviour services (behaviour schools, tutorial centres) influence?; is there a need to articulate expectations related to curriculum in policy outline?	A. Do what extent do resources, structures, facilities support student engagement?; does a two hour a day model work? B. Expectations of the regional management committee and student's school.

4. Milieux (Context of teaching & learning)	A. Do teachers have/need particular expertise? What are the influencing factors on teacher practice?; role of teacher in raising awareness amongst school principals. B. Isolation of role and lack of clear direction.	A. Do students and parents have a clear understanding of the purpose of the centres? B. No data available on how both view the centres and usefulness of supports post visit.	A. Who decides what curriculum should look like? B. What should provisions of mentoring support look like?; the role of school learning support teams and regional behaviour teams.	A. What are the types of supports being provided in the centres?; does this cater to student/school need?; is resourcing adequate? B. What will happen with the centres if the funding commitment only goes to 2006/2007?

Appendix D

Breakdown of suspension centres by type

Suspension centre	Mainstream school site / other school or adjoining school Site	Predominately high school/primary school focus	Metropolitan/ nonmetropolitan/rural	Region (centre selected)	Pool
1.	School site	High school	Metropolitan		
2.	School site	High school	Metropolitan	**Northern Sydney**	**1**
3.	School site	High school	Metropolitan	*(Abberfield)*	
4.	School site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
5.	School site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
6.	School site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
7.	School site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
8.	School site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
9.	School site	High school	Rural		
10.	School site	High school	Rural	**Riverina**	**2**
11.	School site	High school	Rural	*(Ashwood and Blackburn)*	
12.	School site	High school	Rural		
13.	School site	High school	Rural		
14.	School site	Primary school	Non-metropolitan	**Illawarra/South East** *(Mitcham)*	**3**
15.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
16.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
17.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Non-metropolitan	**Hunter/Central Coast**	**4**
18.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Non-metropolitan	*(Listerfield)*	
19.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Non-metropolitan		
20.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Rural		
21.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Rural	**Western NSW**	**5**
22.	Other school/adjoining school site	High school	Rural	*(Heatherdale)*	

Appendix Ea

Phase one survey interview focus area questions: Head teacher and teachers aide

Suspension Centre Not identified	Student range: Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

1. Background/Context Questions:
    - How long have you been working at the suspension centre? What are the hours of operation?
    - Where were you working before you were at the suspension centre?
    - What is your understanding of why students are placed at the suspension centre?
    - Do you have contact with the students' schools while they are attending the centre?
    - Do you contact students' homes while they are attending the centre? For what types of things?
    - What do you spend most time on at the centre? (Learning/physical activities/behaviour skills?)
    - Are you able to comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attend the centre?
2. What is currently happening at the suspension centre?: (Including referral to the centre/placement process; day-to-day activities in the centre; outcomes for students; transition back to school)
3. What are the best things that are happening/what things do you think should be maintained?
4. What things need to be improved?

Appendix Eb

Phase one survey interview focus area questions: Parent

Suspension Centre Not identified	What year is your child in at school? Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	Is your child male or female? Please circle: Male / Female
1. Background/Context Questions: • How long has your child been at their current school? How often do they usually attend? • How long has your child been at the suspension centre? How often do they attend the centre? • What is your understanding of how your child has been placed here? • Does the suspension centre contact you? For what types of things? • What does the centre spend most time on? (Learning/physical activities/behaviour skills?) • Are you able to comment on any changes in your child since they started attending the centre?		
2. What is currently happening at the suspension centre?: (Including referral to the centre/placement process; day-to-day activities in the centre; outcomes for students; transition back to school)		
3. What are the best things that are happening or what things do you think should be maintained?		
4. What things need to be improved?		

Appendix Ec

Phase one survey interview focus area questions: School education director; student support coordinator; student services officer; principal

Suspension Centre Not identified	Student range in suspension centre: Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

1. Background/Context Questions:
    - How long have you been in your current role?
    - Where were you working prior to your current role?
    - How long have you been overseeing the suspension centre program? What are the hours of operation of the centre?
    - What is your understanding of why students are placed at the suspension centre?
    - Do you have contact with the suspension centre? How often?
    - Describe the nature of your contact with the suspension centre.
    - What do students spend most time on at the centre? (Learning/physical activities/behaviour skills?)
    - Are you able to comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attend the centre?
2. What is currently happening at the suspension centre?: (Including referral to the centre/placement process; day-to-day activities in the centre; outcomes for students; transition back to school)
3. What are the best things that are happening/what things do you think should be maintained?
4. What things need to be improved?

Appendix Ed

Phase one survey interview focus area questions: Student

Suspension Centre Not identified	What year are you in this year? Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	Are you: Male / Female (Please circle)
1. Background/Context Questions: • How long have you been at your current school? How often do you usually attend? • How long have you been at the suspension centre? How often do you attend the centre? • What is your understanding of why you have been placed at the suspension centre? • Do you have contact with your school teachers or a mentor while you are attending the centre? • Do suspension centre staff contact home? For what types of things? • What do you spend most time on at the centre? (Learning/physical activities/behaviour skills?) • Are you able to comment on any changes in yourself since you started attending the centre?		
2. What is currently happening at the suspension centre?: (Including referral to the centre/placement process; day-to-day activities in the centre; outcomes for students; transition back to school)		
3. What are the best things that are happening/what things do you think should be maintained?		
4. What things need to be improved?		

Appendix Ee

Phase one survey interview focus area questions: Community representative

Suspension Centre Not identified	Student range in suspension centre: Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

1. Background/Context Questions:
    - What is your current role?
    - How long have you been part of the regional management committee for the suspension centre program?
    - What are the hours of operation of the centre?
    - What is your understanding of why students are placed at the suspension centre?
    - How often does the regional management committee meet?
    - Do you have contact with the suspension centre? How often?
    - Describe the nature of your contact with the suspension centre.
    - What do students spend most time on at the centre? (Learning/physical activities/behaviour skills?)
    - Are you able to comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attend the centre?
2. What is currently happening at the suspension centre? (Including referral to the centre/placement process; day-to-day activities in the centre; outcomes for students; transition back to school)
3. What are the best things that are happening/what things do you think should be maintained?
4. What things need to be improved?

Appendix F

Results: Phase one focus area question one (Behaviour changes in students)

Question 1: Are you able to comment on any changes in students' behaviour over the period of time they attended the suspension centre?

Northern Sydney Region: Abberfield

- Head teacher

The head teacher said that he has had "good anecdotal feedback on the centre from homes and schools".

- Teachers aide

Yes has noticed changes in some of the students. "Some of them take on board what is happening at the centre and remember what they are taught at the centre/show these skills. Some of the students don't."

- Principal

Said that students from her school had attended the centre when the centre operated at various locations. She said that two of the placements were very successful but one boy and one girl placed at the centre were not so successful. She further stated that the placements that were not successful were not a reflection on the program.

- Student
  - S3: When asked if he was able to comment on any changes in his behaviour over the period of time he has attended the centre, S3 said that he has noticed changes in his behaviour since being at the centre. He is "not getting into as much trouble with the police or at home".

S3 further stated during the interview that he thinks he will "go okay back at school".

  - S4: When asked if she was able to comment on any changes in her behaviour over the period of time she has attended the centre, said that she hasn't noticed any real

changes in her behaviour since starting at the centre but that she "behaves more while here" [at the centre].

When S4 was asked why she behaved more at the suspension centre, she couldn't articulate why. However, when asked what were the best things happening at the centre, she stated that she feels that the head teacher understands her. He said that she feels that when she goes back to school she "will know the skills and start behaving".

- S6 (Note: The head teacher informed me that the boy is operating at Stage 1 level. He is a diagnosed IM student who has been placed at the centre as a special regional request. There are no specialist placements for him elsewhere. Is schizophrenic and currently off his medication).

When asked if he was able to comment on any changes in his behaviour over the period of time he has attended the centre, S6 said that he is not getting into fights since coming to the suspension centre. He further stated that he thinks it will "sort of help" when he gets back to school.

- Parent
  - S3: When asked if she was able to comment on any changes in S3's behaviour over the period of time he has attended the centre, his mother said that she does not think there has been any changes in his behaviour. She stated "He is not a problem at home … but it's hard to judge what he is doing away from home".
  - S4: The mother of S4 said that her daughter had recently been expelled from school after the suspension centre placement. She noted that she was not invited to the school to discuss her daughter's expulsion which she thought was poor.

The mother felt that a significant difficulty with her daughter was the fact that she returned from the suspension centre after three weeks for the return to school meeting on the second last day of term. She said that, as the head teacher of the centre and the school didn't see a lot of point

in her going back to school for the following final day of term, she went back to the suspension centre.

The mother felt that the two week break for school holidays then contributed to her daughter forgetting the skills she had been taught at the centre (she didn't get the opportunity to immediately put them to use in the school environment).

She said that she doesn't blame the teachers but her daughter heard via her friends, who are still at the school, that some of them said they were glad that she was no longer at the school.

S4's mother also said that the deputy principal told her that the class her daughter was in was the worst class the school had had in years. He stated that you could usually expect five or six bad kids in a class but that her daughter's particular class had over 20 bad kids. He also apparently stated that he felt that if "he expelled her daughter and another boy in the class that the rest of the students would fall into line".

She further stated that she felt that the school didn't give her daughter a chance going back there saying, "It was the 'same old' with the teachers who hated her [the daughter]".

The mother also said that previously the school waited 2 ½ weeks on the previous long suspension before sending school work home for her daughter to do which she feels "is slack". She was also disappointed that the school (deputy principal) said he'd send a letter home re: placement in a behaviour school but has not despite the parent's inquiry (at the time of the interview they were into the second week of the school holidays). The mother contacted the principal of the behaviour school who said that it was "up to the school to refer and do the paperwork". The mother stated that she is worried now that her daughter will not be able to start day 1 of the new school term.

Appendix G

Phase two questionnaire survey: Student; parent; mentor

Suspension Centre Not identified	Student range: Please circle: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

1. Describe your/your child's/the student's behaviour at school/home:

2. Have there been any noticeable changes in his/her behaviour or learning recently? Explain this.

3. Do you think you/your child/the student will/did benefit from the suspension centre placement? Explain.

Appendix H Table H5

Results: Phase two questionnaire parent (Question one: Describe your child's behaviour at school/home)

Region/suspension centre		Parent pre	Parent post
Northern Sydney Region (Abberfield)	S1	Explosive, argumentative, aggressive, anxious, self-harm. Tries to dominate his sisters and wants his own way. Doesn't like to compromise.	At home he is absolutely out of control and has always been this way.
	S2	Impulsive, aggressive, lacking focus, lying and stealing.	Because he was having a hard time at school, his behaviour at home was not the best but we could see that he was trying to put the strategies he had learned in place when his sister was annoying him.
	S3	Generally at home he is a good kid. The issues we have with him are mainly based around him not always going to school and his effort at school. He is actually quite bright but doesn't seem interested. Also he sometimes hangs around people we would rather he didn't and has got into some trouble. Apart from that the relationship is good and he knows that his family love and support him. He has so much potential (he is a talented sportsman) and we just want him to be happy.	(Note: Completed by telephone) Says her son is an intelligent and nice kid who has totally gone off the rails in the last 12 months. He has been going out with the wrong kids. Mother has tried contacting a local adolescent centre to organise some "major counselling" for her son. However, it is very hard to get him in as they are very busy. Could be a month which she is worried about (i.e. would like the counselling to happen soon).

			Stated that she would like to take him right away for a year (to Queensland or somewhere) to get her son away from the kids who are a bad influence on him in the area here. Does not think there have been any changes in his behaviour. He is not a problem at home … but it's hard to judge what he is doing away from home.
	S4	She tends to be a little outspoken, disrupting both the teacher and class in progress. She swears and will walk out of class and around the school when she should be in class. Won't or refuses to wear full school uniform. She will play with her mobile or I-pod disobeying what the school rules are.	Has been at the school 1 ½ years (now in Year 8). Has had some truancy. Attendance at the centre was excellent and she attended for 3 weeks.
	S5	He is rather quiet at home, still disrespectful to me though (on occasions). He is passionate about motorbikes and his dog. I would like to know how he is feeling.	(Note: Completed by telephone) His behaviour at home and school is generally not bad. He is not a violent kid but was suspended for violence after getting into an argument which escalated about his girlfriend with another boy. He is not a violent kid, it was a one-off. At home he sometimes does not do what he is told but there are no issues. He is quiet but he mixes with the wrong crowd and gets egged on by his friends. He works well 1:1 so the

			centre was great. Can't recommend it highly enough. Sent the head teacher a card when her son finished at the centre to express gratification. Has noticed changes in her son since attending the program. Today he puts things into practice that he learned at the centre such as removing himself from situations; backing off and then talking about things when he has calmed down. They go day-by-day but parents reinforce to son not to mix with the wrong kids (which is hard to tell kids at his age). Grandmother and mother initially met the head teacher and had every confidence in him right from the start.

Appendix I

Numbers of stakeholders who undertook the research at each suspension centre

Region/ suspension centre	Student (Male/ Female)	School year	Phase 1 Student	Phase 1 Parent	Phase 1 School education director	Phase 1 Student support coord	Phase 1 Student services officer	Phase 1 Principal	Phase 1 Head teacher	Phase 1 Teachers aide	Phase 2 Student	Phase 2 Parent	Phase 2 Mentor
Northern Sydney Region - Abberfield	S1 (M)	7	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	S2 (M)	8	✓								✓	✓	✓
	S3 (M)	9	✓	✓								✓	
	S4 (F)	8	✓	✓							✓	✓	
	S5 (M)	9	✓	✓								✓	
	S6 (M)	6	✓										✓
Riverina Region - Ashwood	S1 (M)	7	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
	S2 (M)	7	✓	✓								✓	✓
Riverina Region - Blackburn	S1 (M)	7	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓ ✓*			✓
	S2 (F)	9	✓	✓									
	S3 (F)	8	✓									✓	✓
Illawarra and South East Region - Mitcham	S1 (M)	5	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	S2 (M)	6	✓	✓									
	S3 (M)	4	✓	✓								✓	
	S4 (M)	4	✓								✓	✓	✓
	S5 (M)	2	✓	✓							✓	✓	
Hunter/ Central Coast Region – Listerfield	S1 (F)	6	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓*			✓
	S2 (M)	8	✓	✓							✓		✓
	S3 (M)	4	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓
	S4 (M)	5	✓								✓	✓	✓
Note: 1 community representative also completed phase 1 for Listerfield													
Western NSW Region - Heatherdale	S1 (M)	9	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓
	S2 (M)	6	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓
TOTALS	22(M) 18 (F) 4		22	14	5	5	4	5	7	8	10	15	15

Appendix J Table J6

Phase one research sub-questions one: What are the best things happening or and what do you think should be maintained?

Generative themes	Storylines (Note: Need to explain the significance of the theme. State the range of story lines taken up by key people)
Theme 1: Students' learning**:** Students learn academic and behaviour skills at suspension centres Relevant parts of the Guidelines: Definition The suspension centre is an intervention for students who … have been identified by their school as likely to benefit from a structured program to assist their successful return to schooling as soon as possible. *(Also see themes 2 and 3 from phase 2)* Goals The goals of the centre will be: • to assist students to reflect on and understand their behaviour and its consequences • to reinforce and develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours • to build capacity and understanding in students on how to re-engage at school, re-integrate to positive work habits and prevent recurrence of the inappropriate behaviours	*'Seeing kids connect to school'* Parents • "… he is getting some form of education" (S5, Mitcham) • "Schools need to have a section like they have here at the suspension centre where kids can go and still learn while they are suspended. Otherwise the kids are out on the street and when they are questioned by a truancy officer they just state that they are on suspension" (S1, Heatherdale) Head teachers • Seeing kids connect with school and feeling safe, secure and happy. That the kids are willing to give school and teachers a go (Note phase 2 theme 1 schools not giving kids a go). Do a lot of role modelling with students at the centre using scenarios focused on situations they find stressful. Remarkable achievements (Girl who had been through the program and is now mentoring another primary school student at the centre). "The students start nervous and angry and have no self-respect or connection with the school. They leave with confidence that

Note: Need to separate comments opposite primarily into behaviour/work habits / re-engagement and make general comments that the stakeholders' comments generally support the 'definition' and 'goals' as outlined in the Guidelines.	there have been issues [at their school] but that they have a plan to be able to deal with things. They have a voice" (Listerfield) • "Academic/emotional/behaviour stuff" (Blackburn) • "Most students stay an average of 10 days and less than 10% are re-referred … A good result for some kids with some horrendous home lives … 30-40% of the kids have family members in juvenile justice facilities of jail" (Ashwood) Note: "The kids are not on the street during suspension which is good. Many have a diagnosis and need an intervention." (Mitcham retraining teacher) Teachers aides • "Being able to place them back at school where they can succeed and students achieving goals" (Former teachers aide Listerfield)
	• "One-to-one time when students achieve something that they have been trying for a while" (Mitcham and Heatherdale) • Gives suspended kids a place to go (Abberfield) Regional: Student support coordinators, student counselling and welfare • Recidivism is not high. "Students generally have longevity back at their school and are not referred back to the centre." (Listerfield) Regional: Student services officers

	• They are positive about the things their child has learnt over the four weeks in the program (Mitcham) *Helps with school work* Parents • Staff talk to the kids and teach them (S1, Ashwood) • "Gets them back into education … getting them to do their school assignments". (S1, Heatherdale) Students • "The centre tries to help you get through school … helps with school work." (S1, Abberfield) • "… has learned Maths a bit better" (S2, Blackburn) • "Head teacher helps with reading and spelling and is fair." (S2, Ashwood) Head teachers • Helping kids with overdue assignments and assessments (Heatherdale) Teachers aides • Students can get help with their school work if they need it (Abberfield) *"Teaching behaviour skills"* Parents "Teaches students to go to school to learn and also to control their anger" (S2, Blackburn)

Appendix K Table K7

Phase one research sub-question two: What things need to be improved?

Generative themes	Storylines (Note: Need to explain the significance of the theme. State the range of story lines taken up by key people)
Theme 1: Improved communication and oversight of the program Greater oversight of suspension centres is needed with a particular focus on communication between the suspension centre and schools, regional and state office. Relevant parts of the Guidelines: Purpose The new suspension centres will – form part of a range of behaviour services for students who are disruptive (school discipline plans, behaviour team support to schools, withdrawal programs); and – increase the capacity of schools to deal successfully with disruptive students. General operating principles – The model to be implemented will be determined locally within the guidelines provided by the Department. – The suspension centre will be established under the auspices of the Regional Student Services Executive and managed by regional school and student services executive.	"Improved communication needed" Head teachers • "Letting schools know that the suspension centre is here and what service it provides." (Heatherdale) • What is the role of the head teacher i.e. should they be presenting to staff meetings etc? The head teacher can do some "capacity building" with schools but other staff in schools and region are specialist and so it is more appropriate that they be doing this. (Links to above 1) • Communication … especially with Sydney (state office). "It feels like you are running your own show. It is good if there is a check on data and what's happening in the centre to keep you on track." (Blackburn) Regional: School Education Director • Catering to Indigenous students and having their needs met. Involvement of local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (Mitcham) Regional: Student services officer

Operational Guidelines Management – The region will establish a management committee chaired by a principal with representation from relevant departmental, school and community groups. – The committee will develop an implementation plan and oversight the management of resources, including funding. – A managing school must be designated by the regional director. – The principal of the managing school (if different from the chair) will attend regional management committee meetings. To note: Stakeholders' comments indicate that having a supervision/monitoring structure for the centre is needed to identify and resolve some of the issues. Relevant parts of the Guidelines: Target population Students who: – have been placed on long suspension – are assessed by the school as having the potential to benefit from an intervention to successfully return them to school following a long suspension.	• Principals see the centre as a "stepping stone" to a behaviour school placement. Overall the schools have improved with this. They are more aware of the role of the suspension centre and are not now "suspending kids to get them to the centre". (Abberfield) Note: Benefits of communication Head teachers • Getting more appropriate placements to centre due to getting the message out to principals about purpose of the centres (early intervention). The centre is not so much seen as a last "tick a box" to get the student to a behaviour school setting". (Abberfield) "Could also table a report on how the centre is going." (Note: Use as a subset to "more use of the centre") Head teachers • "Supervision structure of the suspension centre" (former head teacher Heatherdale) Regional: Principals of managing schools • There is no opportunity for promotion for the head teacher unless they are well supported at the school (Mitcham)

Appendix L Table L8

Analysis of questionnaire survey results: Category of response one stakeholders reporting no positive changes in students' behaviour or learning

Abberfield S1	Pre (Day 1 or 2 at suspension centre)	Post (4 weeks post suspension centre)
Question 1 Describe behaviour at home/ school	Parent pre Explosive, argumentative, aggressive, anxious, self-harm. Tries to dominate his sisters and wants his own way. Doesn't like to compromise.	Parent post At home he is absolutely out of control and has always been this way.
	Mentor pre Defiant behaviour and aggression towards teachers and students. Extreme emotional reaction to student comments and is disruptive for teachers. Often disengaged in class time and distracted.	Mentor post Very erratic, especially with male teachers. He is fine with me, but has called other teachers paedophiles and has been overtly oppositional to male teaching staff.
	Student pre At school it's hard to be good. The bullies keep pushing you around and not leaving you alone. At home I am not good sometimes because my sister keeps bugging me.	Student post It was really good because I was good and got rewards like playing guitar.

Question 2 Any noticeable changes in behaviour/ learning?	Parent pre He started this year at high school. His organisation skills improved right from the start and the family was very impressed. But he has slowly gone downhill. He has become aggressive and explosive and threatened to kill himself and we have noticed he avoids eye contact with some people.	Parent post No there haven't. At home he is still very angry and defiant. We are seeking a referral to psychiatric services.
	Mentor pre His behaviour has worsened at school over the past few weeks. His reactions are more severe and aggressive towards teachers and students. He leaves class more often as well as leaving the school grounds when situations are tough.	Mentor post I have noticed that he is trying more in class and trying to concentrate. But he will react overtly to incidents such as student comments and discipline.
	Student pre My learning is bad because in primary school I got more help. I keep getting worse.	Student post No not really.

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Appendix M

Participant information sheet

The University of New England, Armidale
Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies
ARMIDALE NSW 2351

< Insert participant mailing address here >

Re: Exploring the operation of suspension centres

Dear potential participant

I am currently a student at the University of New England, Armidale and undertaking research as part of the requirements of a Doctor of Education degree. The research aims to explore the operation of suspension centres, their achievements and outcomes for students and their school communities.

I have drawn, at random, the suspension centres and people associated with the centres to participate in this research. The input of regional officers, school and suspension centre staff, students, parents and community representatives will enable the collection of comprehensive information and help to inform the future directions and development of suspension centres and the Guidelines that govern them. This will help to ensure that the program can best meet the needs of students.

You are under no pressure to participate in the research. The participant (you) is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the activity at any time without prejudice. If you agree to participate in the research, your participation will involve the following.

- Having an informal interview with me. The questions I will ask you are not lengthy and should take no more than 20 minutes to answer. There are no right or wrong answers. It is just your honest opinion that I am interested in.
- < Insert for students; parents/carers; teacher/mentor only> Answering three questions on day one or two of entry to the suspension centre and the same questions in week four of the students return to school.

I would like to assure you that the focus of the research is on how the suspension centres are operating, not on the circumstances of individuals. All of the discussions will be confidential and no individual will be identified in the final report. Information that you provide to me will be stored in unidentified form in a locked filing cabinet in my home. This information will be destroyed after five years.

If you agree to speak to me and answer some questions, I will show you a copy of my record of our conversation so that you can check that it is accurate and that your responses are recorded in unidentified form.

Please note, that I have a duty of care to report conduct that is illegal, or improper conduct as per New South Wales Department of Education and Training policies and procedures.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the procedures. Please feel free to contact me via email at Alison.benoit@yahoo.com.au or on telephone number (02) 9244 5514.

It is unlikely that this research will raise any personal or upsetting issues, but if it does, you may wish to contact your local Community Health Centre which exist in most towns and suburbs. They provide different services, including counselling, crisis support and information on local health and welfare agencies. < Insert name of local counsellor, address and phones numbers for each suspension centre participating in research >. i.e. South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service, Community Health Centre Nowra, 5 Lawrence Avenue, Nowra NSW 2541, Phone: 4422 8111.

It is anticipated that the research will be completed by < Insert date four months after commencement >. A copy of the report will be provided to you/will be made available at the suspension centre, should you wish to have a copy.

The research has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. --------, Valid to --/--/----).

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services

University of New England

ARMIDALE NSW 2351

Telephone: (02) 6773 3449 Facsimile: (02) 6773 3543

Email: Ethics@une.edu.au

The research process will be overseen by two University of New England, Armidale academics who are supervisors of my research. Their contact details are:

Dr David Paterson
Senior Lecturer, Education
Faculty of The Professions
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Phone: 02 6773 3846
Email: dpaters1@une.edu.au

Dr Ingrid Harrington
Lecturer, Education
Faculty of The Professions
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Phone: 02 6773 5068
Email: iharring@une.edu.au

Please keep a copy of this information for your records.

Yours sincerely

Alison Benoit

University of New England, Armidale

Appendix N

Letter to potential participants/consent form

This text will be sent as a letter to parents/carers of potential student participants along with the Participant Information Sheet. The parent/carer will indicate their willingness to be involved in the research and also provide consent for their child under the age of 18 to be involved by signing the Consent Form at the bottom of the letter and return it in a reply paid envelope to the researcher, or drop the form into the suspension centre.

This text will also be read to student participants, where their parents/carers have consented to their involvement at the start of the interview at the suspension centre. Student participants will also be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet to read and keep. Students will then be asked to sign the Modified Student Assent Form.

School of Education
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Australia

Phone: 61 2 6773 4221
Fax: 61 2 6773 2445
Email: education@une.edu.au
www.une.edu.au/education

Letter to potential participants

< Insert potential participant mailing address here >

Dear parent/carer

I am undertaking some research as part of a higher education degree with the University of New England, Armidale. The focus of the research is to explore the operation of suspension centres, their achievements and outcomes for students and their school communities.

I will be visiting a number of suspension centres and arranging to speak with a range of people associated with the centres, such as your son/daughter during < insert month, 2009 >. I will also be speaking with regional New South Wales Department of Education and Training officers with responsibility for overseeing the program; Principals of schools which oversee the suspension centres; head teachers and teachers aides of suspension centres; students attending suspension centres and their parents; and a community or other agency representative who sits on the suspension centres regional management committee.

In designing the research, I have drawn, at random, the suspension centres and people associated with the centres to participate in this research. The input of people associated with the suspension centre will enable collection of comprehensive information. This information can help to inform the future directions and development of suspension centres and the Guidelines that govern them, to ensure that the program can best meet the needs of students.

I would like to assure you that the focus of the research is on how the suspension centres are operating, not on the circumstances of individuals. All of the discussions will be confidential and no individual will be identified as part of the research report. Participation in the research is voluntary and individuals/you can decide to withdraw from participation at any time.

A Participant Information Sheet about the research is attached. If you have any questions about the research or the process please do not hesitate to ask me. I can be contacted via email at Alison.benoit@yahoo.com.au or on telephone number (02) 9244 5514.

If you agree to your son/daughter participating in the research, after reading the Participant Information Sheet on the sheet attached, please sign the attached form at the bottom of this letter and return it in the reply paid envelope provide, or drop the form into the suspension centre.

Yours sincerely

Alison

Alison Benoit

Principal Researcher

University of New England, Armidale

Consent Form

I have read the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to my son/daughter (< insert name > _____) participating in this activity. I understand that the participant (my son/daughter) is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the activity at any time without prejudice. I am aware that the data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name is not used.

Parent/carer signature Date

Principal researcher signature Date

Appendix O

Modified student assent form

Re: Exploring the Operation of Suspension Centres

What I will have to do to help with this research has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the research.

Student participant signature Date

Principal researcher signature Date

School of Education
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Australia
Phone: 61 2 6773 4221
Fax: 61 2 6773 2445
Email: education@une.edu.au
www.une.edu.au/education

Appendix P

Copy of script: Participant information

Where letter or telephone is an initial form of contact, for the semi-structured interview, the following text will be used. Participants will also be provided with the Participant Information Sheet.

Note: Where participants are under 18 years of age, parent/carer consent will be required.

< Insert participant mailing address here >

Dear participant or parent/carer

A researcher associated with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training is currently exploring the operation of suspension centres, their achievements and outcomes for students and their school communities.

I/The researcher, Alison Benoit, from the Department's Student Welfare Directorate will be visiting a number of suspension centres and arranging to speak with a range of people associated with the centres, such as yourself/your son/daughter during < insert month, 2009 >. I/Alison will also be speaking with regional New South Wales Department of Education and Training officers within with responsibility for overseeing the program; Principals of schools which oversee the suspension centres; head teachers and teachers aides of suspension centres; students who are attending suspension centres and their parents; as well as a community or other agency representative.

I/Alison have drawn, at random, the suspension centres and people associated with the centres to participate in this research. The input of regional officers, school and suspension centre staff, students, parents and community representatives will provide for the collection of comprehensive information and help to inform the future directions and development of suspension centres and the Guidelines that govern them, to ensure that the program can best meet the needs of students.

I would like to assure you that the focus of the research is on how the suspension centres are operating, not on the circumstances of individuals. All of the discussions will be confidential and no individual will be identified when the results are presented to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

Participation in the research is voluntary and individuals/you can decide to withdraw from participation at any time.

The questions are not lengthy and should take no more than 20-30 minutes to answer. There are no right or wrong answers. It is just your/your son/daughter's honest opinion that we are interested in. All responses will be treated confidentially.

< Include this text if parent/carer permission is required > Alison/the researcher would like to speak to your son/daughter at the suspension centre. This should take no more than 20-30 minutes. A copy of the questions that Alison will ask your son/daughter is attached.

Your son/daughter will also be given a questionnaire to complete about how they feel about things at school when they get to the suspension centre and after they have been back at their school for 4 weeks.

If you agree to your child's participation, could you please sign the attached permission form and return it to the suspension centre head teacher, or use the reply paid envelope to return the form to Alison.

If, you have any questions about the research, the process, or to clarify the questions, please ask me/Alison. Alison is also contactable via email at Alison.benoit@det.nsw.edu.au or on telephone number (02) 9244 5514.

Yours sincerely
Alison
Alison Benoit

< Include this text if parent/carer permission is required >

Please return this signed permission form to the head teacher of your son/daughter's suspension centre, or return it to Alison Benoit using the stamped reply paid envelope.

I give permission for my son/daughter (< insert name > _____) to participate in an interview with Alison Benoit. I understand that the questions relate to exploring the operation of suspension centres, their achievements and outcomes for students and their school communities.

I also give permission for my son/daughter to complete a questionnaire to complete about how they feel about things at school.

I am aware that the focus of the research is on how the suspension centres are operating, not on the circumstances of individuals. All of the discussions will be confidential and no individual will be identified when the results are presented to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

Participation in the research is voluntary and individuals can decide to withdraw from participation at any time.

Signed: _____

(< insert name > _____)

Appendix Q Table Q9

Phase two research: Number of stakeholders responding by category of response

Categories of responses and storylines	Parent responses	Mentor responses	Student responses
Theme one Stakeholders reported no positive changes in the students' behaviour or learning Storyline: – "We are seeking a referral to psychiatric services"	3	2	1
Theme two Stakeholders reported some positive changes in the students' behaviour and/or learning Storylines: – "He is able to identify strategies" – "Changed attitude/behaviour"	7	7	4
Theme three Stakeholders reported significant positive changes in the students' behaviour and/or learning Storylines: – "He seems to understand and use the strategies he was taught in the centre" – "Interventions were put in place"	5	7	5
TOTAL RESPONSES	15	16	10

Appendix R Table R10

General observations on visits to suspension centres

Region/Suspension centre	General observations on visit
Northern Sydney Region- Abberfield	• The suspension centre is located within a 50 km radius of the Sydney CBD within a behaviour school. The school is in a residential area with bus services at the door. The nearest small shopping centre is approximately 2 km away. • The behaviour school is a small setting of approximately three to four classrooms set up in a rectangular formation. The classrooms and staff room are located around the perimeter with a quadrangle with seating and trees in the middle. Access is via the front of the building which goes into the administration area. One door, off this area provides access to the rest of the school. The head teacher greets students as they arrive at the centre through the administrative area (Note: There is a different starting time for the students at the suspension centre versus students attending the behaviour school). • It was noted that there is another entry point at the front, right hand side of the building. The suspension centre students leave through this door at 11:30 am to ensure that they do not have to walk passed other classrooms. • There is a basketball court located on the other side of the building, accessed via a locked door in the area of the rectangular building directly opposite the suspension centre room. • The suspension centre is located on the side of the building nearest to the main road in the corner of the building. Between the administrative area and the suspension centre is a room for the school counsellor (who

	works there one or two days per week) and an administrative room. • The suspension centre room has a cluster of desks in the middle of the room where the students do written work with five computers located on the outside of the room. The room is visually appealing with colourful charts and posters displayed. • It was observed during the visit that there is some incidental interaction between students in the suspension centre and the behaviour school. When I was interviewing S2 in the counsellor's room, another male student walked passed. S2 and the other student spoke to each other. When I asked S2 if he knew the student he said that they hang out together sometimes and that the other student had just got out of "Juvie" (sic) (a juvenile justice setting). The interaction lasted about 15 seconds and a teacher from the behaviour school called the other student back to where he was supposed to be (he had been removed from the classroom and presumably been told to stand outside the room). • Half way through the student's session at the suspension centre, the head teacher and teachers aide escorted the students (there were a full cohort of 6 students in the centre) to the basketball courts where they kicked a football around. On the way across to the door to access the courts, a student was sitting in the middle of the school classrooms area (the quadrangle). This student, a male, and the head teacher spoke to each other. The head teacher said to me that he was a student who had previously been in the suspension centre. • The principal of the behaviour school appeared to be actively moving around the school during my visit. She said to me that she sat on the regional management committee meetings for the suspension centre. She also noted that the practice of moving the centre every year within the region was not necessarily a good thing. She

	said that she felt that the centre should stay in the same location for at least 2-3 years, so that its effect on catering to disruptive students/the benefits for the schools referring students to the program could be more fully evaluated. • It was also observed, that whenever the head teacher left the students for short periods of time, some of the other students would test the teachers aide. For example, when coming back from the basketball court, the head teacher stopped to talk to one of the students who had started to get a bit stroppy. The head teacher had the key to the suspension centre room and we had to wait near the door that gave access back into the area where the behaviour school classrooms where one of the students (S6) kept wanting to go through the door, despite the teachers aide telling him they all had to wait for the head teacher. It was only that the behaviour school principal, I believe, happened to come passed and stop to talk that prevented the boy going ahead.

Appendix S Table S11

Numbers of students by year group who undertook phases of the research

Year	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Total
Number of students	1	0	3	2	4	4	4	4	0	22