

**Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry on Home
Schooling
August – November 2014**

FACS' Responses to Questions on Notice

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CHAIR: Thank you. It has been said there are about 56,000 children who are at risk who are not being seen to through the Family and Community Services system, for whatever reason. How many of those would be of school age and what would be the breakdown of where they attend school?

Ms CAMPBELL: I would not have those specific figures but I am happy to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Do we know that the majority of those 56,000 students who are at risk are school-aged children or are they from nought to—

Ms CAMPBELL: Nought to 17.

CHAIR: Is there a breakdown of whether they are at a school, what sort of school it is or whether they are homeschooled?

Ms CAMPBELL: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you take those questions on notice?

Ms CAMPBELL: I do not know whether we would have the breakdown around homeschooling and education, but we would certainly have a breakdown in terms of reports associated with different age groups.

Response

The total number of risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports in NSW for 2012/13 was 104,817, involving 64,470 children and young people.

Of this total, there were 39,533 school-aged children (ie those children 6 to 17 years of age): 9,560 received a 'face to face' assessment and 29,973 received a 'non face-to-face' assessment.

There are no aggregated data available on where children attend school and no data that provide a breakdown of public and private schools nor whether students are home schooled (also see response for Page 6 of the transcript for additional detail).

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Dr JOHN KAYE: Ms Campbell, thank you for your written submission to the Committee. What percentage of children are reported by teachers compared to other people in their lives?

Ms CAMPBELL: I could get the specifics, but certainly in New South Wales professional reporters make up about three-quarters of mandatory reporters, of which some would include teachers. Others would be police and health officials. That is, about 75 per cent of all mandatory reports made to the New South Wales helpline are professional reporters, of which there will be a percentage of educational reporters. I can take that on notice.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Take that on notice and get back to us. It is a significant percentage.

Response

FACS receives child and young person concern reports from both mandatory and non-mandatory reporters. Mandatory reporters are those people who are required to report a child if, in the course of their professional work in delivering health care, welfare, education, children services, residential services and law enforcement to families and/or children and young people, they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm. This is a requirement of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Over the past two years, three out of four ROSH reports were made by mandatory reporters. Specifically for 2012/13, 77.1 per cent of ROSH reports were from mandatory reporters and 22.9 per cent were from non mandatory reporters.

The highest reporting group has consistently been NSW Police, who made up 20.8 per cent of total ROSH reports in 2012/13. Reports from the mandatory reporters of the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and NSW Health accounted for 16.9 per cent and 14.4 per cent of ROSH reports respectively in 2012/13. Nearly one in four ROSH reports is made by non-mandatory reporters. Family continues to be the highest non-mandatory reporting group, contributing 11.9 per cent of ROSH reports in 2012/13.

In 2012/2013 reporting period, the percentage of all reports made by education, covering DEC and 'other education' categories was 19.2%. A breakdown of whether the reporter is a teacher is not available. The numbers and percentages of reports from mandatory reporters are noted in the following table:

Child and young person concern reports and ROSH reports by reporter type, NSW, 2012/13

Reporter type	ROSH reports No.	ROSH reports %
NSW Police	21,820	20.8%
NSW Health	15,140	14.4%
Other Health	1,609	1.5%
NSW DEC	17,751	16.9%
Other education	2,461	2.3%
Child care/preschool	2,401	2.3%
FACS	4,818	4.6%
Non government organisation	9,799	9.3%
Other mandatory	5,056	4.8%
Total mandatory	80,855	77.1%

Source: KiDS - CIW annual data, reported in Community Services Annual Statistical Report 2012/13

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The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Turning to the second page of your submission—and I note that Dr John Kaye asked you some questions about this and I think the Chair did as well—there are some common concerns about the merits of homeschooling and the isolation of children. Why is it that home protection authorities in this State do not collect data on neglect incidence for families where there is homeschooling? Was there a conscious decision at some point not to collect that data or has it just never been thought of?

Ms CAMPBELL: It has not ever been collected is my understanding.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That is non-responsive. The question was essentially why, one way or the other, not the fact that it is not. What are the thought processes that have gone on?

Ms CAMPBELL: I do not think there is strong evidence between homeschooling and abuse and neglect.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If you do not collect the data of course there is not strong evidence one way or the other, is there?

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Thanks, Mr Khan.

CHAIR: I am sure the other barrister will be fine.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you please answer the Hon. Trevor Khan's question?

Ms CAMPBELL: I can only guess that the reason we have not collected it is because in terms of collecting that sort of information, many of our children and young people in out-of-home care would be in the public sector—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Again, that is not responsive to my question. I am happy for you now to take this on notice. What I want to know is why your agency does not collect this data.

Ms CAMPBELL: Okay.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When was that decision made and by whom?

Ms CAMPBELL: Okay.

Response

KIDS (Key Information and Directory System) is a FACS computer system for recording client information. This system was introduced in 2003. A field exists in KiDS that allows recording of education "Facility Type". The possible values include "Home School". There is, however, no recording direction that staff must record education "Facility Type" when documenting a report at the Child Protection Helpline. The reliability of the data is unknown but is expected to be poor.

FACS is currently working on a major 'Frontline Systems Replacement' initiative as part of the 'Safe Home for Life' Reform to better meet the needs of the children and families and workers.

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The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: *Pausing there, I do not wish to interrupt but will try to speed this up. You record the fact that a child who has been notified to your agency is enrolled in a school, whether that school is a public or a private school?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *Yes.*

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: *You record that information?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *It comes through in a report to the department.*

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: *And the individual name of the school is also recorded?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *That is correct.*

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: *It then leaps off the page, does it not, that it is remarkable and astounding that you do not record the data for homeschooled children who might be notified?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *I am happy to take that on notice.*

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: *Would you agree with me it is an interesting omission that you record it for children at school but not for children who are homeschooled?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *It may be that the data is collected in an individual record, but in terms of what we report on, we do not report on at home. We would have individual information if we received a report from whomever, about a child or young person, we would obviously follow up to find out whether they are in school, what kind of educational arrangements, because we need to make an assessment as to whether that child is either getting homeschooling or in public education, so we would catch it on an individual record and I am happy to take it on notice if that can be aggregated.*

Response

See previous response. Individual schools are not identified in the data collection though this information may be recorded on individual files. FACS does not in a structured way record data on whether schooling is public or private, although this information may be recorded on individual files

Aggregated data on home schooling is not available.

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The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: *Can I just ask whether you would collect any data on the number of children who are in out-of-home care placements and what proportion of those children were homeschooled? Would you collect that?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *At an individual record we would. I am happy to take that on notice to see if the system can actually identify what percentage. I would say most children in out-of-home care would be in either a public or private school.*

Response

The number of children and young people in out-of-home care who are home schooled is not readily available. There is a field in KiDS in the education applet called "Facility Type" where this information may be captured, however, the data quality is not reliable and the field may not be filled in consistently. The information may be recorded on individual files.

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The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I was thinking about professionals—sorry, I should have made that clear—that you referred to earlier who make 75 per cent of the reports. So are police the only professional authorised persons that a child in a homeschool setting is likely—

Ms CAMPBELL: It could be a doctor, it could be a nurse; it could be a range of other professionals that may be delivering services locally. If a child or young person who is being homeschooled has gone to the doctor, the doctor may pick up some issues; the child may disclose something and then the doctor is required to make a report if it meets a particular threshold.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: If it was an authorised person would you be likely to capture that in the report?

Ms CAMPBELL: We would know the identity of a mandated reporter, yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you think it would be something you would be able to extract from your data or would it be too difficult?

Ms CAMPBELL: I do not know. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: If you could have a look?

Ms CAMPBELL: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What is the rate of notification in New South Wales for child protection notifications?

Ms CAMPBELL: Depending on the counting rules I think it is 7.2 or 4 per cent of the population. I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Australian Government's Institute of Family Studies figure is 34 per 1,000 children. I do not know what the figure for New South Wales would be.

Ms CAMPBELL: I am happy to take that on notice.

Response

The breakdown of mandatory reporters by agency and the percentage of ROSH reports for 2012-2013 is noted in response to page 4 of the transcript and also provided below.

The rate of ROSH reports per 1,000 of the NSW population 0-17 years was 39.1 per cent for 2012/13.

Child and young person concern reports and ROSH reports by reporter type, NSW, 2012/13

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The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I want to clarify to be absolutely sure that when you investigate complaints of child abuse regarding children of school age, do you record which school those children go to?

Ms CAMPBELL: Yes, we do.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Do record those who are in homeschooling?

Ms CAMPBELL: We would recall it on individual files, yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: So every child of school age, whether it is a complaint of child abuse, will have recorded in the file which school they go to or whether they are involved in homeschooling, is that correct?

Ms CAMPBELL: Yes, if that information is known when the reporter contacts the helpline.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: So you should be able to take a defined period of time—and I know you have 56,000 cases—and you can ascertain within that period of time how many of those complaints relate to children engaged in homeschooling? You can do that?

Ms CAMPBELL: As I have said before, I am happy to take that on notice to see what we can capture.

Response

As noted in previous responses, KiDS does not document school attended in structured data and there is no reliable data on the numbers of students who are home schooled.

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The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: *So you should be able to do an assessment for a defined period of children in homeschooling. We should be able to get statistics of percentages, should we not?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *Well, that is what I am happy to take on notice to see that we can extract that from the system.*

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: *You may not be able to do 56,000 but you may be able to do them for complaints received over, say, a three-month period or a six-month period?*

Ms CAMPBELL: *Yes.*

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: *To make it easier to do.*

Ms CAMPBELL: *I am certainly happy to take that on notice.*

Response

As noted in previous responses, the number and percentage of students who are home schooled is not readily available and data is considered not to be reliable.