

The Senate

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Education and Employment  
References Committee

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The issue of increasing disruption in  
Australian school classrooms

Interim Report

December 2023

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# Terms of reference

The issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms, which is disadvantaging students and contributing to poor literacy and numeracy results for young people, denying them the learning of essential foundational skills to reach their full educational, economic and social potential, with specific reference to:

(a) the declining ranking of Australia in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) disciplinary climate index, making Australian classrooms amongst the world's most disorderly;

(b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention;

(c) teachers' views on whether or not they are sufficiently empowered and equipped to maintain order in the classroom and what can be done to assist them;

(d) the robustness, quality and extent of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms;

(e) the loss of instructional teacher time because of disorder and distraction in Australian school classrooms;

(f) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning, compared with their peers in more disciplined classrooms;

(g) the stagnant and declining results across fundamental disciplines as tested through National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) attributing to poorer school-leaving results and post-school attainment;

(h) how relevant Australian state, territory and federal departments and agencies are working to address this growing challenge;

(i) how leading OECD countries with the highest disciplinary climate index rankings are delivering orderly classrooms to provide strategies on how to reduce distraction and disorder in Australian classrooms; and

(j) any related matter



# List of recommendations

## Recommendation 1

5.15 The committee recommends that Education Ministers fast-track implementation of the recommendations from the Teacher Education Expert Panel, encompassed in:

- Priority Reform 1: Strengthening ITE Programs to Deliver Effective Beginning Teachers; and
- Priority Reform 3: Improving the Quality of Practical Experience in Teaching.

## Recommendation 2

5.21 The committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority strengthen the focus on behaviour within the Australian Curriculum by specifically introducing a 'Behaviour Curriculum'.

## Recommendation 3

5.29 The committee recommends that government and non-government education authorities are required to invest in the professional development of teachers, so that they are supported by the latest evidence-based teaching skills to manage classroom behaviour.

## Recommendation 4

5.30 The committee recommends that Education Ministers, as part of the next National School Reform Agreement, require evidence-based instructional models, such as explicit instruction; formative assessment; mastery learning; and spacing and retrieval, which have been proven effective at creating a learning climate that manages disruptive behaviour in classrooms and provides the best possible learning conditions, to be implemented.

## Recommendation 5

5.31 The committee notes the lead taken by the NSW Minister for Education and recommends that future school buildings are funded and constructed on the basis that they will deliver the best learning environments for students, such as traditional classrooms, as opposed to open-plan classrooms.

## Recommendation 6

5.37 The committee recommends that state and territory governments explore more effective integration between education and healthcare services so schools can have timely access to student support services, including

psychologists, social workers, and behaviour specialists, to help identify and manage disruptive behaviour.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**5.42 The committee recommends that Education Ministers commission an annual national survey of students and staff on behaviour in schools, including school learning climate, behavioural culture and policies, and the frequency and impact of classroom disruption and schools' responses.**

#### **Recommendation 8**

**5.46 The committee recommends that the National School Reform Agreement Ministerial Reference Group consider including strategies for addressing disruptive classroom behaviour as one of the priorities for the next National School Reform Agreement.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

**5.47 The committee urges the National School Reform Agreement Ministerial Reference Group to fast-track the implementation of the National Unique Student Identifier for school students, an initiative of the current National School Reform Agreement.**





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 28 November 2022, the Senate referred the issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee (committee), to inquire and report on the following matters:

- (a) the declining ranking of Australia in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) disciplinary climate index, making Australian classrooms amongst the world's most disorderly;
- (b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention;
- (c) teachers' views on whether or not they are sufficiently empowered and equipped to maintain order in the classroom and what can be done to assist them;
- (d) the robustness, quality and extent of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms;
- (e) the loss of instructional teacher time because of disorder and distraction in Australian school classrooms;
- (f) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning, compared with their peers in more disciplined classrooms;
- (g) the stagnant and declining results across fundamental disciplines as tested through National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) attributing to poorer school-leaving results and post-school attainment;
- (h) how relevant Australian state, territory and federal departments and agencies are working to address this growing challenge;
- (i) how leading OECD countries with the highest disciplinary climate index rankings are delivering orderly classrooms to provide strategies on how to reduce distraction and disorder in Australian classrooms; and
- (j) any related matter.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 The committee was to report by the first sitting day in July 2023. On 22 March 2023, the Senate granted the committee an extension of time to report until 16 November 2023.<sup>2</sup> On 18 October 2023, the Senate agreed to further extend the reporting date to 6 December 2023 to allow the committee to gather further evidence and conclude its deliberations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, No. 24, 28 November 2022, pp. 721–722.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, No. 39, 22 March 2023, p. 1136.

<sup>3</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, No. 75, 18 October 2023, p. 2136.

## Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.3 In accordance with its usual practice, the committee advertised the inquiry on its website and wrote to relevant stakeholders and other interested parties inviting them to make a written submission by 31 March 2023.
- 1.4 The committee received 83 submissions, as well as additional information and answers to questions on notice, which are listed at Appendix 1.
- 1.5 The committee held five public hearings:
  - Brisbane – Thursday, 20 April 2023;
  - Perth – Wednesday, 7 June 2023;
  - Sydney – Friday, 4 August 2023;
  - Canberra – Friday, 15 September 2023; and
  - Canberra – Tuesday, 7 November 2023.
- 1.6 A list of witnesses who appeared at these hearings is available at Appendix 2.
- 1.7 The committee conducted site visits to Dawson Park Primary School and Westfield Park Primary School on 6 June 2023 (Perth, Western Australia); and Marsden Road Public School on 4 August 2023 (Sydney, New South Wales).
- 1.8 Links to public submissions, *Hansard* transcripts of evidence and other information published by the committee for this inquiry are available on the committee's [website](#).

## Acknowledgements and references

- 1.9 The committee thanks those individuals and organisations who contributed to this inquiry by providing submissions and giving evidence at public hearings. In particular, the committee thanks the Western Australian and New South Wales education departments for their assistance and for appearing at public hearings.
- 1.10 The committee would also like to thank the schools that facilitated committee site visits of their campuses. These visits provided the committee with a vital on-the-ground perspective about evidence-based approaches to managing behaviour in Australian classrooms.
- 1.11 References in this report to the *Hansard* transcripts for public hearings are to the proof *Hansard* transcripts. Page numbers may vary between proof and official *Hansard* transcripts.

## Structure of this report

- 1.12 This report comprises five chapters, including this introductory and background chapter, with the remaining chapters as follows:
  - Chapter 2 describes the impact of disruptive classroom behaviour on teachers and whether they are adequately supported and equipped to maintain order in the classroom.

- Chapter 3 explores the consequences of disruptive behaviour for students, including the loss of instructional time and the subsequent impact on student learning outcomes.
- Chapter 4 examines possible approaches and strategies that would reduce distraction and disorder in Australian classrooms.
- Chapter 5 outlines the committee's conclusions and recommendations.

## The issue of classroom disruption

1.13 This section provides an overview of the evidence received in relation to the definitions and characteristics of disruptive behaviour, the prevalence of disruption in Australian classrooms, and how Australia compares in an international context. The final section discusses some of the suggested causes for increasing levels of disruptive behaviour in classrooms.

### What constitutes disruptive student behaviour?

1.14 The issue of classroom disruption and problematic student behaviours are complex and often intertwined with issues of student engagement, classroom management, disciplinary practices, and socioeconomic factors.<sup>4</sup>

1.15 There is no clear definition of what constitutes classroom disruption, and a range of terminology has been used by stakeholders.<sup>5</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses a practical definition of the disciplinary climate, measuring it 'by the extent to which students miss learning opportunities due to disruptive behaviour in the classroom'.<sup>6</sup>

1.16 Generally, disruptive student behaviours have been described as varying from low-level disruptions to more challenging behaviours. The most common low-level disruptions can include students:

- talking unnecessarily and calling out without permission;
- being slow to start work or follow instructions;
- showing a lack of respect for each other and staff;
- not bringing the right equipment; and
- using mobile devices inappropriately.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, [pp. 5–6]; Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 6; Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education, *Submission 18*, [pp. 2–3]; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 2; Australian Secondary Principals' Association, *Submission 22*, p. 2; Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, [p. 5]; Name Withheld, *Submission 65*, p. 2; The Autistic Realm Australia, *Submission 61*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, 2019, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), *Below the Radar: Low-level Disruption in the Country's Classrooms*, Report No. 140157 (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014), p. 4.

- 1.17 More challenging behaviours, such as those that pose a risk to the safety or well-being of the student or others, can include property destruction, verbal abuse or threats, physical assaults, leaving school grounds without permission, tantrums, or in some cases substance abuse.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.18 While challenging behaviours, particularly violence and aggression, tend to gain widespread attention, most disorderly and disruptive behaviour in Australia is considered as low-level. For example, the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia noted that:
- ... disruptive behaviour in Australian classrooms predominantly consists of low-level behaviours including disengagement, work avoidance and idleness, and other behaviours that are minor in nature and high in frequency.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.19 Similarly, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) observed:
- Research indicates that most behavioural concerns are minor infringements such as noncompliance or talking out of turn, and it's the extreme frequency of these issues that places a substantial strain on teachers. Although less frequent, more serious student behaviours are also challenging for teachers, and one study estimates almost 10 per cent of teachers work in schools where these occur on a weekly basis.<sup>10</sup>

### **Prevalence of classroom disruption in Australia**

- 1.20 Just as classroom disruption can take various forms, there are also multiple ways that disruption in Australian schools can be measured. This includes surveys of school staff and teachers and data on disciplinary exclusions, such as suspensions and expulsions. Information collected by the OECD as part of its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>11</sup> and Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)<sup>12</sup> also provide important information on the extent of disruptive behaviour in Australian classrooms.

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, R., Mansell, W., & Baggaley, M. (2018), Challenging behaviour in the classroom: A review of theoretical and empirical studies. *International Journal of Special Education*, 33(1), 15–28. See also, Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 2; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 44*, [p. 2] (citations omitted).

<sup>10</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, *Submission 23*, p. 2 (citations omitted).

<sup>11</sup> The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in member and non-member nations, evaluating educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance in mathematics, science, and reading. It was first performed in 2000 and then repeated every three years, with the latest set of data released on 3 December 2019.

<sup>12</sup> The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is the largest and most in-depth international survey about teachers and their working conditions. Now in its fourth cycle, the number of countries or jurisdictions participating in TALIS has increased from 24 in 2008, to more than 50 across 6 continents in 2024.

### *Surveys of school staff and teachers*

- 1.21 Several recent surveys of school leaders and teachers in Australia have provided insight into the prevalence of disruptive behaviours, including the incidence of more challenging behaviours.
- 1.22 The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, conducted by the Australian Catholic University (ACU), reported an increasing trend in offensive behaviour.<sup>13</sup> The ACU survey revealed that 37.1 per cent of school leaders reported being exposed to threats of violence from students, while 7.8 per cent reported being exposed to unpleasant teasing, and 30.6 per cent reported being exposed to cyber bullying.<sup>14</sup>
- 1.23 Similarly, findings from Monash University's 'Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work in 2022' report showed an increase in the number of teachers feeling unsafe at work, from 18.9 per cent in 2019 to 24.5 per cent in 2022. Monash University noted that the 'concerning increase in the percentage of teachers feeling unsafe at work was primarily attributed to student behaviour with teachers reporting abusive, aggressive, violent, and threatening behaviour'.<sup>15</sup>
- 1.24 In addition, the 2021 annual survey of school staff conducted by the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union indicated that 41 per cent of teachers who reported increased work-related stress attributed the increase to student behaviour and, of those who saw themselves leaving public school education in 10 years or less, 40.1 per cent blamed student behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

### *Suspensions and expulsions data*

- 1.25 The use of exclusionary discipline in schools, such as suspensions and expulsions, can provide insight into the prevalence of challenging behaviour in classrooms. However, several stakeholders noted the need for more consistent reporting of data on the number of suspensions and expulsions across school sectors and jurisdictions, particularly in relation to the impact of exclusionary discipline on students with disability.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission 4*, p. 1. See also, Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, pp. 2–3; NSW Primary Principals Association, *Submission 36*, [p. 3].

<sup>14</sup> S-M., Kidson, P., Marsh, H., & Dicke, T. (2022) *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey*, Sydney: Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, pp. 53–55.

<sup>15</sup> Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Education Union, *State of our Schools Survey*, pp. 2 and 4.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Dr Sarah Bernard, *Submission 73*, [p. 2]; The Autistic Realm Australia, *Submission 61*, p. 8; Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 4. See also, Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 8.

1.26 The Parliamentary Library (the Library) noted that 'just as there is a wide range of behaviour that can be considered disruptive, there is considerable variation across Australia in how the grounds for suspension and/or expulsions are specified'. Nevertheless, the Library observed that:

... it is apparent from the available data that school suspensions and expulsions are most prevalent in the middle years of secondary school (Years 8 and 9), and more prevalent for boys and students facing disadvantage and/or marginalisation.<sup>18</sup>

1.27 Many participants pointed out that students with a diagnosed or imputed disability are overrepresented in suspension and exclusion data.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Square Peg Round Whole WA collated suspension data across all states and estimated that 'nationally, students with disability are 2 to 4 times more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities'.<sup>20</sup>

1.28 Further discussion of the impact of exclusionary discipline on certain student cohorts is discussed in Chapter 3.

### *Disciplinary climate – PISA 2018*

1.29 The most recent survey data from the OECD's PISA 2018 questionnaires considered several dimensions of school climate, including student disruptive behaviour (which covered bullying), disciplinary climate, and student truancy and lateness.<sup>21</sup> In the 2018 survey, Australian students were asked about the disciplinary climate in English classes.

1.30 The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) published Australia's 2018 PISA results and discussed the findings in relation to disciplinary climate.<sup>22</sup> Some of key points from ACER's analysis of the results showed that on average:

- Australian students reported similar levels of disciplinary climate in their English classes to students in New Zealand, and a less favourable disciplinary climate than the OECD average;

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<sup>18</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 9 (citation omitted).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Australian Association of Special Education Inc, *Submission 35*, pp. 1–2; Disability Advocacy NSW, *Submission 39*, pp. 3–4; Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Square Peg Round Whole WA, *Exclusionary discipline – Students with Disability*, additional information received 6 June 2023. p. 1. See also, QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education, *Submission 20*, p. 2; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, pp. 5–8; Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 20; Disability Advocacy NSW, *Submission 39*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> OECD, *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, 2019, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019). *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results, Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), p. 89.

- almost half (43 per cent) of Australian students reported that there is noise and disorder in most English classes; and
  - Australian students' reports of disciplinary climate deteriorated between PISA 2009 and 2018, with, for example, a reported five per cent increase in students who don't listen to what the teacher says in most English classes.<sup>23</sup>
- 1.31 As part of PISA, principals were also asked about the extent to which they perceived that student behaviour hindered learning. On average, 50 per cent of principals of Australian schools reported student learning was hindered to some extent or a lot by students not being attentive.<sup>24</sup>
- 1.32 In April 2023, PISA released a policy profile on education in Australia as part of the Education Policy Outlook series, which provided further analysis of these findings, as well as the current strengths, challenges, and policy priorities for the education system in Australia.<sup>25</sup> The OECD's report found that:
- Australia continues to perform at or above OECD average in PISA, although performance has been in steady decline across reading, mathematics and science since first participation in 2000. While other national and international assessments show improvements for younger students, performance of older students is more mixed.<sup>26</sup>
- 1.33 The OECD also reported that Australian students 'view their teachers positively and teachers themselves have comparatively high levels of job satisfaction'. However, it also noted that 'learning environments are comparatively less favourable in terms of disciplinary climate, intimidation or bullying, and student truancy'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019). *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results, Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, ACER, pp. 88–89.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019), *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results, Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, ACER, p. 101.

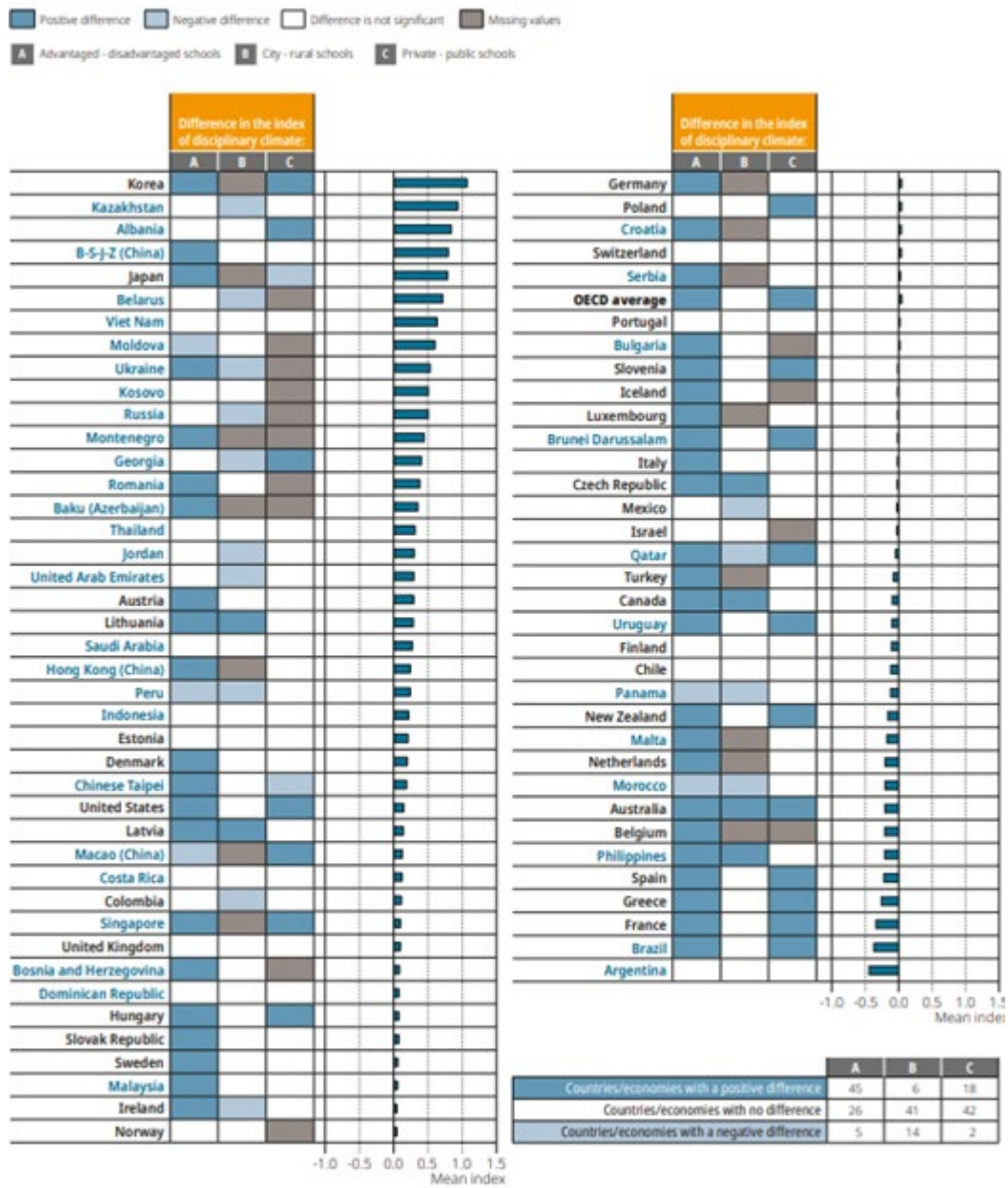
<sup>25</sup> OECD (2023), Education policy outlook in Australia, *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 67, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ce7a0965-en> (accessed 8 October 2023). The policy papers series is prepared by the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills and helps countries compare their education policies and experiences and learn from each other through large scale assessment and surveys and comparative policy analysis.

<sup>26</sup> OECD (2023), Education policy outlook in Australia, *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 67, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ce7a0965-en> (accessed 8 October 2023).

<sup>27</sup> OECD (2023), Education policy outlook in Australia, *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 67, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ce7a0965-en> (accessed 8 October 2023).

**Figure 1.1 Index of disciplinary climate, by school characteristics**

Based on students' reports



**Note:** Higher values in the index indicate a more positive disciplinary climate. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the index of disciplinary climate.  
**Source:** OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Tables III.B1.3.1 and III.B1.3.5.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives, 2019, p. 68.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 13.

## TALIS 2018

1.34 The OECD's TALIS also collects information about the learning environment and working conditions of teachers and principals across the world and asks teachers about the disciplinary climate in the classroom.<sup>29</sup>

1.35 ACER's analysis of Australian results for TALIS 2018 noted that, despite often being characterised as noisy and disruptive, there were no differences in these areas between Australia and the OECD.<sup>30</sup> However, TALIS also considered school safety, with Australian principals reporting a higher frequency of incidents than on average:

- 37 per cent of Australian principals reported that intimidation and bullying among students occurs at least weekly in their schools, compared with 14 per cent of schools across the OECD; and
- 12 per cent of Australian principals reported that intimidation and verbal abuse of teachers and staff by students occurs at least weekly, compared with three per cent of principals across the OECD.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 1.2 Disciplinary climate internationally and for Australia**

	Percentage of teachers who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the following statements about their target class							
	When the lesson begins, the teacher has to wait quite a long time for students to quieten down		Students in the class take care to create a pleasant learning atmosphere		The teacher loses quite a lot of time because of students interrupting the lesson		There is much disruptive noise in the classroom	
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
<b>Australia</b>	26	(1.1)	70	(1.3)	29	(1.2)	25	(0.9)
OECD average-31	28	(0.2)	71	(0.2)	29	(0.2)	26	(0.2)
TALIS average-48	26	(0.2)	73	(0.2)	27	(0.2)	24	(0.2)
<b>High-performing PISA countries</b>								
Alberta (Canada)	24	(1.8)	76	(2.2)	26	(2.0)	26	(2.4)
Estonia	18	(0.9)	69	(1.2)	17	(1.1)	19	(1.1)
Finland	32	(1.4)	59	(1.3)	32	(1.5)	33	(1.4)
Japan	11	(0.9)	85	(0.9)	8	(0.7)	12	(0.9)
Singapore	32	(0.9)	67	(0.8)	33	(0.8)	31	(0.8)

Source: Sue Thomson and Kylie Hillman, *TALIS 2018: Australian report (Volume I): teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*, (ACER, 2019), p. 60.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019), *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results, Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, ACER, pp. 88–89.

<sup>30</sup> Sue Thomson and Kylie Hillman, *TALIS 2018: Australian report (Volume I): teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*, (ACER, 2019), p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Sue Thomson and Kylie Hillman, *TALIS 2018: Australian report (Volume I): teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*, (ACER, 2019), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 14.

### **How does Australia compare to other education systems?**

1.36 It was broadly acknowledged by inquiry participants that the latest PISA and TALIS data showed a concerning decline in the disciplinary climate of Australian classrooms.<sup>33</sup>

1.37 The Department of Education (department) noted that the PISA 2018 data shows that Australia is one of only four countries in which students do not report a favourable disciplinary climate:

The other countries in this category are New Zealand, Finland and Canada. In Australia, almost half of the students reported noise and disorder in most English classes. A third of students said a teacher has to wait a long time for students to quieten down, and a third said students don't listen to what the teacher said. The teacher survey pretty much said the same thing.<sup>34</sup>

1.38 Likewise, the Centre for Independent Studies told the committee:

On that index Australia performs 69<sup>th</sup> out of 76 countries. That puts us effectively at the bottom of the ladder, particularly when we look at other developed economies and school systems. That ranking has more or less declined between the two windows in which it's been recorded. It's also not an outlier. We also have measures that do international comparisons in primary school, and that's recorded in the trends in international maths and science study, better known as TIMSS. That also demonstrates significant opportunities in the area of disruption, disorder and general approaches towards classroom behaviour.<sup>35</sup>

1.39 Other submitters questioned the utility of making international comparisons.<sup>36</sup> For instance, QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education argued substantial cultural differences and educational methods needed to be considered when comparing countries, and the PISA data 'cannot be used to make strong claims about student behaviour, behaviour management practices, or initial teacher education in any of the participating OECD countries'.<sup>37</sup>

1.40 Some participants also noted that it can be difficult to isolate attributes of a country's education system, and various features of some education systems

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, p. 3; Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 1; Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *Submission 41*, pp. 2–3; Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 46*, pp. 2–3; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Mr Glenn Fahey, Director of Education, Centre for Independent Studies, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, University of Tasmania School of Education, *Submission 54*, p. 6–7; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*; p. 15; Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education, *Submission 20*, [p. 1].

may not work in other country-specific contexts.<sup>38</sup> For example, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth noted:

Australian classrooms are often characterised as busy and vibrant places, with lessons that promote interaction between students and teacher. The education systems that remain in some countries are not representative of Australian culture and not reflective of the accepted standards of educational practice.<sup>39</sup>

1.41 Some participants suggested that more focus was needed on ensuring that adequate funding and resourcing was available to support all students, particularly those in disadvantaged cohorts.<sup>40</sup>

### **Causes of increasing disruption**

1.42 There were a variety of reasons offered for why Australia was experiencing increasing levels of disruptive behaviour in classrooms.<sup>41</sup> Monash University's Faculty of Education pointed to research suggesting the:

... aetiology of challenging behaviour is multifaceted and the development of disruptive and challenging behaviour can be influenced by a range of biological, social, environmental, and educational factors.<sup>42</sup>

1.43 This aligns with reasons put forward by submitters who nominated a range of causes for classroom disruption, including but not limited to:

- inadequate teacher training and/or classroom management;
- student disability and the structure of classroom settings;
- socioeconomic factors; and
- bullying and/or family trauma.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, University of Tasmania School of Education, *Submission 54*, p. 6–7; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*; p. 15; Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 2; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, *Submission 32*, pp. 2–3 (citation omitted).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, pp. 17–19; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*; pp. 15–16; Transforming Education Australasia, *Submission 15*, [p. 2]; QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education, *Submission 20*, [pp. 1–2]; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, p. 5; Office of the Children's Commissioner Northern Territory, *Submission 55*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Ms Olivia Grant, *Submission 72*, pp.1–3; Name Withheld, *Submission 8*, p. 1; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 6; Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 44*, [p. 2]; Jo Rogers, *Submission 77*, p. 1; University of Tasmania School of Education, *Submission 54*, p. 7; Children and & Media Australia, *Submission 56*, p. 1; Food Intolerance Network, *Submission 6*, p. 3; Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 2; Schofields Public School P&C Association, *Submission 48*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Monash University's Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, New South Wales Primary Principals Association, *Submission 36*, [p. 2]; Australian Council of State School Organisations Ltd, *Submission 11*, p. 2; Office of the Children's

- 1.44 Members of the Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education identified student trauma, high student teacher ratios, and a lack of allied professional staff in the classroom and school, as potential contributors to disruption in Australian classrooms.<sup>44</sup>
- 1.45 Similarly, MacKillop Family Services (MacKillop) submitted that disruptive behaviours 'are often connected to disruption that has been or is being experienced outside the classroom'. MacKillop noted that:
- ... 72 per cent of children have been exposed to at least one adverse childhood experience such as bullying, family violence, sexual abuse, racism, neglect, death of a parent, parental mental health or substance use issues, food or housing insecurity or environmental disaster.<sup>45</sup>
- 1.46 Autism CRC explained that 'students, including students with disabilities, may have difficulty communicating their needs and may express frustration if these needs are not understood or addressed'. Its submission stated that this could 'lead to the interpretation of behaviours as being disruptive rather than communicative'.<sup>46</sup>
- 1.47 The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented argued that:
- ... gifted students may lack access to appropriately differentiated learning opportunities due to a poor classroom disciplinary climate and that gifted students may themselves become bored and create disruptions because of lack of delivery of appropriately advanced, differentiated learning opportunities.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Improved national data***

- 1.48 Several inquiry participants called for improved national-level data to fully understand the issue of classroom disruption, particularly the amount of time spent by teachers and leaders managing student behaviour.<sup>48</sup>
- 1.49 For example, the Chief Behavioural Adviser for the New South Wales Government, Dr Donna Cross, outlined the need to improve the quality and consistency of national data around classroom behaviour:

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Commissioner Northern Territory, *Submission 55*, p. 2; National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 59*, p. 5; Name Withheld, *Submission 67*, p. 9; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, p. 6; Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 46*, pp. 2–3; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 1].

<sup>44</sup> Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education, *Submission 18*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>45</sup> MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Berry Street Victoria, *Submission 38*, p. 14; Dr Greg Ashman, *Submission 5*, [p. 12].

The amount of data that we have around behaviour and children's behaviour in the classroom is quite limited and, sadly, with limited data we have an inability to benchmark, to monitor how children are performing to intervene with precision and using resources effectively to address it. We also have limited ways to evaluate how effective what we are doing is in the workplace. I believe we need to have a much more systematic data collection process so that we can understand how to respond to each of those, and particularly how to measure the effectiveness of policies and practice we have in place and be more targeted with its delivery and have a much fuller understanding of students' lives.<sup>49</sup>

- 1.50 Similarly, AERO observed that there is 'no current, accurate data on the specific amount of management time this requires of teachers and leaders'.<sup>50</sup> In order to address this, AERO pointed to overseas models:

There's a really great example from the UK right now, where they've just released a report on their National Behaviour Survey, which essentially tells the experiences of teachers, school leaders and, partly, students in schools. That will be used now to inform where they take policy reform actions in the future. So that's certainly something we could learn from in terms of data collection.<sup>51</sup>

- 1.51 Professor Tom Bennett told the committee that the National Behaviour Survey in the United Kingdom has been a highly successful initiative:

... we've just started having a national behaviour survey where we have a statistically weighted, and therefore representative, sample of teachers and students telling us nationally what they think about behaviour at a national level, which has given us some fairly sobering feedback. But it's a good baseline, because until you know what's going on you can't see if things are getting better or worse. And that's been one of the biggest problems we've had in behaviour—it's almost impossible to know if it's getting better or worse. You can't always just lean into the OECD. They're not the universal arbiters of such matters. We have to know for ourselves what is happening within our schools. I have quiet confidence that we're having a large impact, but it's kind of a ripple impact; it's very hard to discern at this point.<sup>52</sup>

- 1.52 Professor Bennett described the rationale for the National Behaviour Survey as:

... an annual national survey of students and staff throughout the sector, with data weighted by demographic in order to be representative... The

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<sup>49</sup> *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 8. See also, Mr Glenn Fahey, Director of Education, Centre for Independent Studies, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, answer to question on notice, 15 September 2023 (received 13 October 2023).

<sup>51</sup> Ms Sarah Richardson, Program Director, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 32. See also, Mr Glenn Fahey, Director of Education, Centre for Independent Studies, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Professor Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Adviser, Department for Education, United Kingdom, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 November 2023, p. 3.

reason we decided to survey primarily staff and students is because they are the recipients and inhabitants of the culture we wanted to evaluate ...

The four categories we selected to investigate were:

- School behaviour culture and policy – what are the whole school systems?
- School environment and experience – what does it feel like being inside these systems?
- Frequency and impact of misbehaviour – what actually happens?
- Responding to behaviour – how does the school deal with incidents?

... The research was conducted through a series of survey waves, carried out through the existing panel surveys conducted by the Department for Education – the School and College Panel (SCP) and the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel (PPLP)... The termly survey data was collected from multiple respondent groups (school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents) to allow for triangulation of views and was weighted to be nationally representative of teachers, schools and pupils (for England), which was vital to the credibility of the survey as an accurate summary of views at a national scale.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Professor Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Adviser, Department for Education, United Kingdom, *Conduct Becoming: The importance of the Behaviour Curriculum*, The Centre for Independent Studies, October 2023, p. 10.

# Chapter 2

## Impact on teachers

- 2.1 This chapter examines the impact of challenging student behaviour on the ability of teachers to maintain order in the classroom and the effect this has on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention.
- 2.2 The chapter also looks at the impact of key stressors for teachers in relation to classroom disruption, including supporting students with increasingly complex needs, growing teacher workloads, workforce shortages, and a lack of preparation for early career teachers.

### **The ability of teachers to maintain order in classrooms**

- 2.3 A range of participants highlighted the increasing demands placed upon teachers in relation to the management of student behaviour, particularly the ability of new and early career teachers to maintain order in the classroom.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.4 Associate Professor Rebecca Collie from the University of New South Wales argued that the impact of disruptive behaviour was an increasing concern for many teachers.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Professor Collie observed that:

Teacher working conditions (including demands, such as disruptive student behaviour) appear to be getting worse over time. In our study of over 3000 Australian teachers using data collected as part of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey in 2013, my colleagues and I identified that 34 per cent of teachers could be considered struggling at work due to their experiences of poor working conditions, including heightened levels of disruptive student behaviour that make it difficult to teach effectively.<sup>3</sup>

- 2.5 Similarly, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) noted that dealing with misbehaviour has been a concern for teachers for some time:

A 2014 study found it was the number one professional learning need among new teachers, and a priority area of need for more experienced teachers. Over a quarter of experienced teachers said they needed further professional development on this issue. AERO's own research points

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 5; Dr Greg Ashman, *Submission 5*, p.1; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, p. 2; MultiLit, *Submission 28*, pp. 3–4; MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, pp. 2–3; Square Peg Round Whole WA, *Submission 37*, pp. 2–3; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 4; Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 1].

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 2] (references omitted).

particularly to the lack of evidence-based classroom management practices being implemented in Australian schools.<sup>4</sup>

## **Impact on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention**

### **Teacher safety**

- 2.6 Various submitters reported that teachers are being subjected to increasingly challenging behaviours, including verbal and physical abuse from students and parents.<sup>5</sup> For example, MultiLit argued that teachers 'in disorderly classrooms may experience escalating behaviours of concern including verbal and physical aggression from students, significant disruptions to their lessons, student disengagement and declining academic outcomes leading to stress, anxiety, and even physical injuries'.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.7 One teacher from a regional public school in a low-socioeconomic area told the committee:
- We have had multiple instances of physical abuse of staff members over the past 3 years. Our former principal was not supportive, our region was not supportive. Staff have been hit. Staff have had furniture thrown at them; staff have had the windows next to their heads punched in. Staff are harassed. They have had their cars keyed. They have had their wallets stolen. They have had students punching the walls of their classrooms. Staff have been forced frequently to deal with vaping, drug use and alcohol use on school grounds. Staff have been forced to deal with drug selling and distribution on school grounds.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.8 The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) pointed out that teachers and school staff 'need to feel safe and supported to undertake their role of teaching and supporting students academically, socially, and emotionally'. The NCEC noted that when 'confronted with disruptive behaviours, aggression, or violence from students, this is compromised'.<sup>8</sup>
- 2.9 In a similar vein, WAESPAA noted that 'staff are sometimes fearful of students and request not to work with them, which is difficult to manage at school level'. WAESPAA went on to describe the impact on staff:

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Mr K. J. Brown, *Submission 83*, p. 1; MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, pp.2–3; Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, pp. 1–2; QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education, *Submission 20*, p. 2; NSW Primary Principals Association, *Submission 36*, p. 3., Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 46*, p. 5; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 60*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 81*, [p. 1].

<sup>8</sup> National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

They take leave, including sick leave and workers comp leave and despite having access to the Employee Assistance Program they often become disillusioned and frustrated. Staff feel they unable to teach the rest of the class properly when one or more students in the class has extreme behaviours, and express concerns that other students are missing out on their learning programs due the requirement that they manage the behaviour of particularly disruptive students.<sup>9</sup>

- 2.10 This appears to align with the results of a 2022 Monash University survey of over 5000 Australian teachers which found that the 'increase in the percentage of teachers feeling unsafe at work was primarily attributed to student behaviour with teachers reporting abusive, aggressive, violent, and threatening behaviour'. The Monash University Faculty of Education explained:

Disorderly classrooms that are characterised by abuse, aggression, or threatening student behaviours, can impact teacher work satisfaction and retention, particularly when teachers feel unsupported in managing these challenging situations. Teachers also felt pressure from needing to make difficult decisions about protecting other students impacted by other student behaviour. Often, this involves potentially putting themselves at risk and exposing themselves to abuse from parents.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Box 2.1 Case Study: one teacher's experience<sup>11</sup>**

The experience of myself has been that of where teachers are often held squarely responsible for the acts of disorder within the class. I have been sexually assaulted and harassed by a student, I have had chairs thrown at me, children become so angry with me they have struck me. Almost weekly, my colleagues and I are handling more and more violent and hostile students, frequently being called names, and the blame will often land on the teacher. We are made to call the parents and let them know of their child's hostile behaviour and are often then exposed to hostility from the parents.

...

Working in a school with high levels of economic and educational disadvantage (65 per cent of our clientele are in the bottom quartile), I have seen teachers being refused stress leave because of being caught in violent brawls, having classes where children are plain vicious to each other, as well teachers with on-going PTSD from witnessing extremely violent fights.

<sup>9</sup> Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, [p. 1].

### **Job satisfaction and long-term staff retention**

2.11 Participants told the committee that disruptive classroom behaviour was contributing to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction and early exit from the profession.<sup>12</sup> For example, WAESPAA argued that 'teachers, and support staff, are burnt out from dealing with extreme behaviour within education support settings, where the demands of the job are very high and extremely physical'. WAESPAA argued:

People don't want to keep working when they are always being hurt or are mentally exhausted, particularly when stress and mental health issues impacted other areas of their lives. There can often be a high turnover of staff due to this which leads to lots of new staff being sought which also changes dynamics in a class as they are unfamiliar with students - often causing students to become more [anxious] etc and so the cycle continues.<sup>13</sup>

2.12 Likewise, results from a 2021 survey of Victorian government school staff showed that, of the teachers who reported increased work-related stress, 41.1 per cent attributed the increase to student behaviour.<sup>14</sup> Of those teachers who saw themselves leaving the Victorian government school system in 10 years or less, student behaviour was the second highest reported reason (40.1 per cent), behind excessive workloads (87 per cent).<sup>15</sup>

2.13 In addition, Independent Schools Australia (ISA) explained that its state-based associations of independent schools (AISs) reported 'there may be a link between poor student self-regulation, classroom disruption and teacher retention or burnout'. ISA noted that:

Further feedback from AISs also states that job satisfaction may diminish when teachers are unable to perform their role effectively if there are continual behavioural disruptions.

Some AISs noted that at times, teachers may feel guilty about the amount of time they may require to address student behaviour at the expense of student learning. Significant teacher workload may also mean a lack of time to follow up student behaviour effectively or for highly effective teachers to observe and/or mentor less experienced teachers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Parents Victoria, *Submission 31*, p. 2; MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, p. 3; Square Peg Round Whole WA, *Submission 37*, p. 2. Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 2. See also, Anna Sullivan, Bruce Johnson, Larry Owens and Robert Conway, 'Punish them or engage them? Teachers' views of unproductive student behaviours in the classroom', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 39, no. 6 (June 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Education Union, *State of Our School*, Survey Results, Survey of Victorian Public-School Staff, Conducted Feb – March 2021, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Education Union, *State of Our School* Survey Results, Survey of Victorian Public-School Staff, Conducted Feb – March 2021, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 3.

2.14 MultiLit noted that 'poor student behaviour and low student engagement and motivation overwhelms teachers and leads to less satisfaction in their role, resulting in many teachers choosing to leave the profession or seek alternative careers' which it argued 'create instability in schools, making it challenging to maintain a consistent educational environment for students'.<sup>17</sup>

2.15 In addition, the ACU highlighted the increasing impact that disruptive behaviour is having on teachers' health and wellbeing:

The Australian Principal Occupational Health and Wellbeing report this year showed that the top five sources of stress for school leaders now include supporting student mental health and wellbeing, ranked No. 4, and supporting teacher mental health and wellbeing, ranked No. 5. This is the first time that these two sources have appeared simultaneously, with the reported average above seven on a one-to-10 scale, and the trend suggests that this will not quickly dissipate. This is showing in a decline in what we refer to as 'positive protective factors', such as commitment to the workplace, and job satisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

2.16 The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) pointed to the findings of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) survey, which indicated that 'intentions to remain in the teaching profession have declined from 2020 to 2022, with classroom factors being a key reason'. Preliminary workforce data for 2021–22 published through the ATWD Key Metrics Dashboard showed that in 2022:

- the proportion of the teacher workforce saying they intend to leave prior to retirement was greater (35 per cent) than the proportion who planned to remain until retirement (31 per cent); and
- 65 per cent of classroom teachers who expressed an intention to leave cited classroom-related factors as a reason, up 10 percentage points from 2020.<sup>19</sup>

2.17 However, AITSL also noted that 'intentions to leave do not necessarily correlate with actual attrition, but rather are an indication of where teachers are feeling stress in their jobs'. AITSL explained:

Just 5 per cent of the workforce has any intention to leave within the next year, and only 1.25 per cent of teachers who registered in the year after graduating from an initial teacher education program discontinued their registration each year for the first seven years.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, pp. 2–3. (citation omitted).

### **Box 2.2 Case Study: government secondary college<sup>21</sup>**

Staff have reported regular verbal abuse in the classroom. A workplace is intended to be a safe place. However, school staff have faced targeted swearing, threats of physical harm including mentions of killing staff and hurtful references of a highly personal nature. While suspensions ensue, a government school has limited means to prevent the return of students who repeat the behaviours, and the cycle continues.

This ongoing cycle has the ability to impact on the confidence and emotional wellbeing of staff. When these events occur repeatedly it is not uncommon for staff to be absent or resign. It minimizes individual self-esteem while at the same time creating a public image of lack of control. Anecdotally we know that students tell their families 'nothing is done' when in reality, the teacher has worked extensively behind the scenes to maintain confidentiality and restore order.

Teachers report feeling tired, frustrated and helpless which may have contributed to the 2022 Staff Opinion Survey which showed that the perception of psychological safety has declined in the past two years.

## **Maintaining order in classrooms – key stressors for teachers**

### **Supporting students with increasingly complex needs**

2.18 Dealing with increasingly complex student needs without appropriate supports or resources was identified as a key stressor for teachers.<sup>22</sup> For example, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations (AFMLTA) indicated that:

Teachers consistently report, including in recent teacher survey research conducted by the AFMLTA, that the challenge lies in teaching in increasingly complex classrooms where increased demand is placed on teachers to plan for and accommodate students with specific behavioural and learning needs, as well as the demand for teachers to take care of student well-being, often when not trained, nor supported. There are many effective and passionate educators who are up for this challenge, and supportive school and systemic structures will provide the opportunity for the challenge to be overcome.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 65*, [p. 3].

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 2; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, pp. 2–3; Dr Greg Ashman, *Submission 5*, [pp. 2–3]; Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, p. 3; Parents Victoria, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations, *Submission 2*, [p. 1].

2.19 WAESPAA argued that students 'with extreme behaviours due to disability, and lack of self-regulation strategies are placed into classrooms/school without the adequate resources to assist classroom staff'. WAESPAA stated:

Limited understanding of the use of sensory specific areas and sensory regulation skills can just add to the dysregulation of students. Limited access to therapy support within school – all reliant on the NDIS and limited, to no additional funding for professional development and additional staff does not help.<sup>24</sup>

2.20 Likewise, the ACU reported that one of the consistent messages from its latest Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing survey was that when principals 'reach out for support for the increasing number of students with high-level needs, resources are not provided in a way that is seen to be reflective of dealing with those issues'.<sup>25</sup>

2.21 Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion argued that the lack of provision of reasonable adjustments for students with disability 'can lead to escalations in behaviour that would otherwise be avoided if reasonable adjustments appropriate to their needs were in place'.<sup>26</sup>

2.22 To this end, many participants called for better resourcing of schools and teachers to support students with complex needs, including autistic students, students with ADHD, and students with specific learning disorders and neurodevelopmental conditions.<sup>27</sup>

2.23 For instance, QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education (QUT) highlighted the need to 'support teachers to work with students in classrooms who (as examples) are emotionally dysregulated due to the trauma in their lives, who are homeless or living in poverty, or who are experiencing mental health concerns, or disability or both'. QUT argued that this would require evidence-based adjustments and supports, with 'responsibility shared across the education ecosystem'.<sup>28</sup>

2.24 Several participants indicated that the ability of teachers to manage student behaviour is impacted by increasing teacher workloads—particularly low-level

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<sup>24</sup> Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 1. See also, Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, p. 2; The Autistic Realm Australia, *Submission 61*, p. 24; Square Peg Round Whole WA, *Submission 37*, pp. 3–4. Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, [p. 5].

<sup>28</sup> QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education, *Submission 20*, [p. 3].

administration—and a crowded curriculum.<sup>29</sup> For example, Square Peg Round Whole WA noted:

Untenable workload, including lack of time for administration and planning, and teachers being overwhelmed by data entry, recording and administrative tasks. We were also told that the meeting attendance impact was significant and added more stress to an already overwhelmed schedule, directly impeding both on face-to-face teaching time and the ability to provide engaging and quality instruction that helps contribute to student engagement and classroom order.<sup>30</sup>

2.25 The ACU also observed that workloads of teachers and principals was being significantly affected by the increase in low-value administrative tasks:

Those tasks are all, in micro, valuable in some regard, but in macro they create an additional task in the time available. No change has been occurring to the sheer number of days and hours that schools have, but more and more is loaded onto their plate. Nothing is taken off the plate. When there is driver education, sex education, consent education, all of those things fit into the same quantum of time. The net result is that there is less time to focus on issues related to the curriculum. It would not be any surprise that teachers are saying, 'I just can't do all of that work.'<sup>31</sup>

2.26 In a similar vein, APTA indicated that:

The impact of student behaviour on instructional time could be lessened if administrative tasks were reduced so teachers can focus on delivering lessons that can promote engagement and success. Research (indicated in the recent National Teacher Workforce Action Plan) notes that teachers spend significant time on administrative tasks. The NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy noted that two-thirds of teachers spend over 20% of their time on non-teaching related work.<sup>32</sup>

2.27 Ms Olivia Grant, Specialist for Literacy Across the Curriculum at Cranbourne Secondary College, noted that 'untenable workload and burnout, felt from education graduates all the way to principals. At all levels, we are constantly stretched beyond capacity, leaving insufficient time to effectively and consistently manage student behaviour. Behaviour management is only effective when it is consistently and fairly applied'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 2; Ms Olivia Grant, *Submission 72*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Square Peg Round Whole WA, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ms Olivia Grant, *Submission 72*, pp. 2–3.

## Workforce shortages

2.28 Multiple submitters identified the shortage of qualified teachers and support staff as a significant contributing factor to the increasing challenge of managing disruptive classroom behaviours.<sup>34</sup>

2.29 For example, APTA noted that 'frequent collapsed classes are leading to high levels of disruption and has removed the much-needed structure and routine required by students'. APTA indicated that:

Instances across the country have been reported by associations of multiple classes being placed into common areas where students are subject to minimum supervision is commonplace and detrimental to student learning and engagement. Not only do students miss out on vital learning during the lesson, but the lack of structure also makes it difficult for students to focus and engage in other lessons throughout the day. Teachers being asked to provide minimum supervision to multiple classes simultaneously provides a very unsafe working environments, with the lack of engagement in learning leading to undesirable behaviours from students.<sup>35</sup>

2.30 In addition, Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations observed that teachers are having to teach outside their subject area, because many high schools have difficulty finding qualified teachers. It argued that this 'lack of knowledge and confidence shown in these circumstances can lead to a quite an unruly classroom, where little learning takes place, and where bad habits are formed'.<sup>36</sup>

2.31 Similar views were expressed by the NSW Secondary Principals' Council (NSW SPC), which noted that classroom disruption was both a result of—and direct contributor to—teacher shortages:

Staff shortages, and staff teaching outside their field of expertise, supercharges disruption because collapsed classes supervised by inappropriately qualified teachers drive disruption up and intensifies disorderly behaviour, which drives teacher departure from more challenging school settings and the teaching profession generally.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, pp. 1–2; Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 18; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 1]; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 3; Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, pp. 4–5; Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 46*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations, *Submission 51*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 1].

### **A lack of adequate preparation for early career teachers**

- 2.32 Multiple participants pointed out that many beginner teachers found themselves poorly equipped to manage disruptive student behaviour and often struggled to maintain order in classroom settings.<sup>38</sup>
- 2.33 Indeed, several participants indicated that initial teacher training (ITE) did not prepare new teachers adequately to deal with increasingly challenging student behaviours. For example, one teacher observed that their double degree in teaching contained 'no behaviour management preparation or strategies'. They also noted that 'the only behaviour management experience we had was in placements, which were either thrown in the deep end and told to swim or had no behaviour management issues in private school placements'.<sup>39</sup>
- 2.34 Another senior teacher argued that there was 'no use having university level knowledge of science and maths if the skills for good behaviour management are not taught, including functional behaviour analysis, the impacts of disability on behaviour, as well as the wider ethics of behaviour management'.<sup>40</sup>
- 2.35 The Australian Education Union (AEU) noted that beginner teachers 'with three or less years' experience have consistently told the AEU that they do not believe their [ITE] sufficiently prepared them for the complex realities of the classroom':
- In our 2021 survey the main areas where new educators were underprepared were teaching students whose first language is not English (62 per cent), dealing with difficult behaviour (55 per cent), teaching students with disability (47 per cent) and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (43 per cent). More than a third (35 per cent) of new educators said that their ITE was not helpful in preparing them to manage classroom activities, and in under resourced schools this increased to 41 per cent.<sup>41</sup>
- 2.36 The Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA) argued that this 'means we've got pre-service teachers coming out into our system that aren't prepared to support the students who are actually in their classrooms'.<sup>42</sup>
- 2.37 The experience of new teachers can also be dependent on the school they join. The Australian Catholic University (ACU) pointed out that in comparison to

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 3; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 11*, p. 4; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [pp. 1–2]; Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 81*, [p. 3].

<sup>40</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, [p. 3].

<sup>41</sup> Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 8.

other jurisdictions, we 'have a situation in this country where we put some of our most inexperienced teachers into some of the most challenging schools'.<sup>43</sup>

- 2.38 These experiences were echoed in the final report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel, which found that 'too many beginning teachers have reported that they felt they needed to be better equipped for the challenges they faced in the classroom on starting their teaching careers'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Government, *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, July 2023, <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/resources/strong-beginnings-report-teacher-education-expert-panel>, p. 6 (accessed 8 October 2023).



# Chapter 3

## Consequences for students

- 3.1 This chapter provides an overview of the impacts of disruptive behaviour and its management. This includes considering some negative impacts, including the loss of instructional time due to disruption, effects on learning and educational outcomes, and what impacts exclusion and suspension can have on disruptive students.

### **Loss of instructional time because of disorder and distraction**

- 3.2 Many submitters noted that disruptive student behaviour reduces the amount of instructional time available for student learning.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) noted:

Disruptions in classes are leading to students receiving less instructional teacher time. With numerous classes being collapsed and/or combined to ensure there is supervision, quality instructional time to students is being lost. Senior classes are losing their specialist teachers to ensure that junior classes are supervised. With Australia's education system falling further and further behind, schools will be unable to lift the standards of achievement, if they are focusing more on behaviour management than teaching and learning.<sup>2</sup>

- 3.3 The Australian Council of State School Organisations argued that 'disruptions in the classroom squander important instructional time and may potentially lead to long-term behavioural issues for students'.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.4 The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) told the committee that even low levels of disruptive behaviour can have significant negative consequences:

Even seemingly low-level disruption, such as students tapping on a desk, students being distracted or distracting their peers can amount to significant lost time in learning, and every minute is really valuable within classrooms. As far as quality of time goes, the engagement of students in learning is critical to their retaining of new information. Because attention is such a precious resource and a very limited resource, any disruption to attention and focus really limits students' ability to recall information effectively.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [pp. 2]; Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations, *Submission 2*, pp. 2–3; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 11*, p. 7; MultiLit, *Submission 28*, pp. 5–6; New South Wales Primary Principals Association, *Submission 36*, p. 6; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited, *Submission 11*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Glenn Fahey, Director of Education, Centre for Independent Studies, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 2.

- 3.5 Monash University noted that it can be difficult to quantify the exact loss of instructional time due to classroom disruption, but noted 2006 research that had measured:

...how frequently and for how long student disruption or other factors interrupted instructional time in the classroom. The authors found that student disruption accounted for 72 per cent of the student-initiated interruptions to instructional time. In some observations, student disruption occurred for nearly the entire time.<sup>5</sup>

- 3.6 In addition, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicated that Australian teachers reported spending 78 per cent of classroom time on teaching and learning, while spending 15 per cent of class time managing student behaviour during an average lesson.<sup>6</sup>

- 3.7 Ms Olivia Grant, Learning Specialist for Literacy Across the Curriculum at Cranbourne Secondary College, shared her first-hand experience on the amount of time spent managing disruptive behaviours:

Often, a teacher or an education leader will spend many non-teaching minutes at school following up on disorderly behaviours or attending to other related administrative tasks, and then they must squeeze professional learning, preparation of lessons, assessment and reporting in at home, outside paid hours. As an example, I routinely work 3-4 nights a week as well as on weekends to (try to) keep up, and I have needed to do this my entire career. I know many, many colleagues in the same boat.<sup>7</sup>

- 3.8 This was also drawn out by a teacher making a name withheld submission to this inquiry, who noted the 'significant loss of teacher time within classes addressing disruptive behaviours and awaiting support to remove the child'. In addition, they suggested:

...it is not only teacher time dealing with the direct incident, it is also the writing up of Chronicle entries detailing the incidents, contacting parents via phone or email explaining the incident, completing restorative conversations with the student; all completed during planning time or personal time.<sup>8</sup>

- 3.9 The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) raised concerns that the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative showed an increasing level of disruption over recent years:

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<sup>5</sup> Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Thomson, S., & Hillman, K. (2019) *The Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018. Australian Report Volume 1: Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). See also, *The Y WA, Submission 52*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ms Olivia Grant, *Submission 72*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 81*, [p. 3].

- 30 per cent of classroom teachers reported spending more than 10 hours per week counselling or supervising students, compared with 8 per cent in 2018,
- 61 per cent of senior leaders reported spending more than 10 hours per week interacting with students (non-teaching), compared with 50 per cent in 2021; and
- 59 per cent of senior leaders reported spending more than 5 hours per week engaging with parents, compared with 49 per cent in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

## Learning outcomes and student achievement

3.10 Several participants highlighted the association between orderly learning environments and student achievement.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Department of Education drew out the findings of OECD's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey:

Because PISA runs every three years...we know that this situation has worsened over time, and this is a concern. Analysis of PISA results shows that there is a positive association between students' perception of their classroom disciplinary climate and their academic performance, even after accounting for socioeconomic status.<sup>11</sup>

3.11 Other stakeholders have noted that the performance of Australian students has been steadily declining in all assessment areas, since the initial PISA assessment in 2000 (See Figure 3.1).<sup>12</sup> The results also show an increased proportion of low performers and decreased proportion of high performers in each domain, while the proportion of students who attained the National Proficient Standard declined in all domains surveyed (See Figure 3.2).<sup>13</sup>

3.12 The Western Australia Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO) observed that students 'who reported a better disciplinary climate in their classrooms scored an average of 55 points higher (about one and two-thirds of

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership *Submission 82*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Name Withheld, *Submission 65*, [p. 4]; Western Australia Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 6; Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, pp. 2–3; MultiLit, *Submission 28*, pp. 5–6; Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 4; The Y WA, *Submission 52*, p. 3; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, *Submission 82*, p. 1.

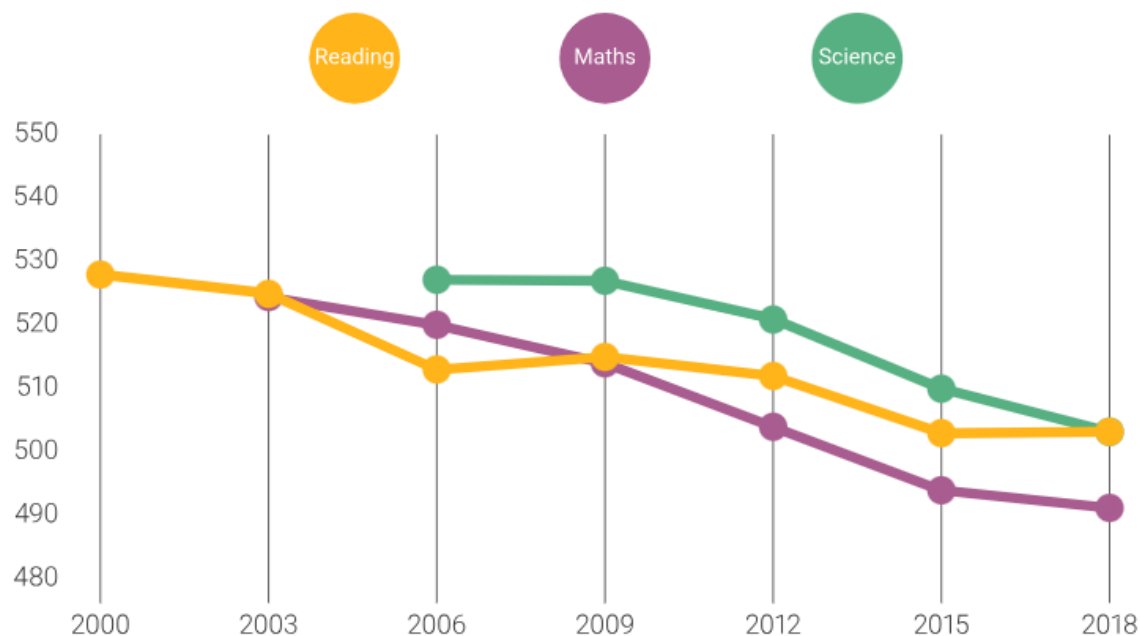
<sup>11</sup> Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 34. See also, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 17. See also, Jo Rogers. *Submission 77*, p. 2; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 17. OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 69.

a year of schooling) in reading literacy performance than those who attended classes with a worse disciplinary climate'.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 3.1 Australian achievement in PISA since 2000**



Source: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), 'PISA 2018: Australian students' performance', ACER Discover, 3 December 2019.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 3.2 Changes in performance over time for Australia**

Changes in...	Reading literacy (2000–2018)	Mathematical literacy (2003–2018)	Scientific literacy (2006–2018)
Average performance	▼ 26 points	▼ 33 points	▼ 24 points
Proportion of low performers	▲ 7 pp	▲ 8 pp	▲ 6 pp
Proportion of high performers	▼ 4 pp	▼ 9 pp	▼ 5 pp
Proportion of students who attained the National Proficient Standard	▼ 10 pp	▼ 13 pp	▼ 9 pp

pp = percentage points

Source: Sue Thomson et al., *PISA in Brief 1: Student Performance*, (Melbourne: ACER), p. 7.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Western Australia Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 3. See also, Sue Thomson, Lisa De Bortoli, Catherine Underwood, Marina Schmid, *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results. Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, (Melbourne: ACER, 2020), pp. 88–100.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Dr Shannon Clark, Marilyn Harrington and Dr Emma Vines, *Classroom disruption*, Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 16 November 2023, p. 17.

3.13 Associate Professor Rebecca Collie observed 'that schools with comparatively more struggling teachers had significantly lower student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science (when compared with schools with fewer struggling teachers)'.<sup>17</sup> She further noted:

Disruptive behaviour also has ramifications for students' later outcomes. In a study of over 150,000 NSW children in the first year of school, we found that almost 20 per cent displayed patterns of heightened disruptive behaviour. These students went on to attain significantly lower levels in their NAPLAN tests in grade 3 and grade 5.<sup>18</sup>

3.14 Ms Jo Rogers, a former Primary and Special Education Teacher, argued that 'disruption in Australian school classrooms is a consequential symptom of a long-standing problem of school illiteracy and innumeracy that has compounded to a crisis'. She argued that 'illiteracy and innumeracy are caused by following the less effective teaching ideologies of whole language/balanced literacy and child discovery/inquiry-based learning in Teacher Education and English and Mathematics Curricula'.<sup>19</sup>

3.15 One teacher commented that disorderly 'behaviours create unsettled and unsafe spaces where students cannot learn'. This was compounded by other factors, including that 'students come from trauma backgrounds, and the inconsistency of both staff in the classroom (due to the turnover rate) and the inconsistency of other students' behaviours and emotions.'<sup>20</sup>

3.16 Independent Schools Australia (ISA) also argued that:

Some students with poor self-efficacy may disengage from learning and display disruptive behaviours if they believe they are unable to manage their schoolwork. Academic decline may lead to further disengagement, creating a negative cycle of classroom disruption. In contrast, ACER research has shown that students with higher self-efficacy performed at a higher level in reading literacy. Higher performance may therefore lead to greater student engagement and less classroom disruption, creating a positive classroom climate.<sup>21</sup>

### **Impact on specific student cohorts**

3.17 Several participants observed that responses to disruptive behaviours, such as suspensions and exclusions, disproportionately impacted certain student

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<sup>17</sup> Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 2].

<sup>18</sup> Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 3] (citations omitted).

<sup>19</sup> Jo Rogers, *Submission 77*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 81*, [p. 3].

<sup>21</sup> Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 6.

cohorts, including students with a disability, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.<sup>22</sup>

3.18 Square Peg Round Whole refer to research on the disproportionate effects of current behaviour management policies around disruptive behaviours, such as suspensions and expulsions, on children with disabilities—some of whom may come from traumatic circumstances—and Indigenous children.<sup>23</sup>

3.19 Mackillop Family Services highlighted impacts of trauma on children, and how these could potentially manifest in the classroom:

Research shows that groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, children who identify as LGBTIQ and children in out-of-home care are disproportionately impacted by trauma... Our experience indicates that the impact of childhood experiences of adversity or trauma can manifest as disruption in settings such as schools.<sup>24</sup>

### **Students with disability**

3.20 Multiple participants outlined how current classroom environments can impact the learning experience of students with disability, particularly where there is a lack of supports for these students.<sup>25</sup> For example, the Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) pointed out that:

Students with a diagnosed or imputed disability are overrepresented in students presenting problematic behaviours. Australia and CSPD have seen an increase in students with presentations of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), learning disorders and other cognitive and social-emotional challenges. Recent statistics from Beyond Blue suggest as many as 13.9 per cent of Australian children (4–17) are diagnosed with a [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] mental or behavioural disorder.<sup>26</sup>

3.21 Independent Schools Australia (ISA) also commented:

Some [Associations of Independent Schools (AISs)] noted that when a student with disability shows disruptive behaviours, some teachers may be reluctant to address behaviours for fear of parent criticism or being open to

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Name Withheld, *Submission 69*, p. 2; Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese, *Submission 58*, pp. 2–3; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, pp. 5–7; Advocate for Children and Young People NSW, *Submission 53*, [p. 2]; Dr Sarah Bernard, *Submission 73*, [p. 1].

<sup>23</sup> Square Peg Round Whole Advocacy Group, *Submission 49*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Mackillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 6; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*; p. 4; Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese, *Submission 58*, pp. 2–3; ADHD Australia and Macquarie University, *Submission 62*, p. 3.; Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, [p. 2]; Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, [pp. 1–2]; Ms Carol Barnes, *Submission 71*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese, *Submission 58*, pp. 2–3 (citations omitted).

discrimination allegations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). AIs noted that some parents and carers of students with disability may not disclose information about the student's disability at the time of enrolment. This may mean that adjustments that should be in place to support the student may be absent, which can lead to disruptive behaviours.<sup>27</sup>

- 3.22 WAESPA argued that 'it becomes increasingly difficult when you're in a mainstream school when you're looking at the disability resourcing that comes with the student and it doesn't match up to the level of need that student is actually demonstrating'.<sup>28</sup>
- 3.23 The AEU's 2021 'State of Our Schools' survey found that '89 per cent of public-school principals surveyed said they have had to divert funds from other parts of school budgets in the last year because they do not have the resources to provide adjustments for students with disability'.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.24 A Senior Teacher from a low SES high school argued that 'as it currently stands, teachers in low SES schools do not have adequate access to supports for children with disability'.<sup>30</sup>
- 3.25 The Institute of Special Educators gave an overview of issues that stemmed from teachers not being adequately equipped to support students with a disability:
- Many students with disability do not reach their full potential, partly because regular classroom teachers do not have the skills and knowledge to provide appropriate adjustments to curriculum, teaching, and the environment. Poor academic achievement, including poor literacy skills, and disengagement from schooling is linked to problem behaviour, as are difficulties with communication and language. Thus, comprehensive intervention to address both academic and behaviour problems will be needed by many students.<sup>31</sup>
- 3.26 Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (QAI) argued that 'students with disability are losing days, weeks and months of their education, with disproportionate suspensions, exclusions and cancelled enrolments, both formal and informal'. QAI noted 'students with disability need support, not punishment'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, [pp. 1–2].

<sup>31</sup> Institute of Special Educators, *Submission 13*, [p. 2].

<sup>32</sup> Ms Sophie Wiggans, Systems Advocate, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 20 April 2023, p. 6.

3.27 The New South Wales Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) also pointed to the high prevalence of students with a disability receiving school suspensions:

While the most recent data for suspensions is not yet available, figures published in the Sydney Morning Herald in July 2022 indicated that of the 57,682 suspensions in 2021, 14,923 were students with disability. This means that approximately a quarter of all suspensions were administered to students with disability, and that of all students who had disability, more than 10 per cent experienced suspension. For comparison, 4 per cent of students generally experienced suspension... the overrepresentation of students with disability in suspension data is an indication that more needs to be done to support students with disability in the classroom.<sup>33</sup>

3.28 In relation to students with ADHD, Dr Geoff Kewley indicated that many 'studies have shown that children with ADHD are much more likely to be suspended or excluded from school, to be disruptive within the school setting, and to leave school much earlier than other children'.<sup>34</sup> He argued:

ADHD consideration and reframing is potentially important to all educational submissions to the committee. This is because of the vulnerability it creates as these children biologically have less self-control than the norm. Whilst not an excuse, is an explanation. Failure to recognise this within the system – as largely unfortunately is still the case – will make it likely that the status quo remains, and that these children with a significant disability continue to struggle.<sup>35</sup>

### **Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds**

3.29 The gap between the performance of economically advantaged and disadvantaged students was commented upon by several submitters, including the AEU, which argued the 2018 PISA survey showed that:

- students from socio-economically advantaged households outperformed students from disadvantaged households in reading;
- 24 per cent of students from advantaged households were top performers in reading, compared to only 6 per cent of students from disadvantaged households; and
- only 13 per cent of students from disadvantaged households scored in the top quarter of reading performance within Australia.<sup>36</sup>

3.30 Similarly, ISA indicated that a study in South Australia in 2014 'found that more than 60 per cent of teachers in low-SES schools reported disruption in class several times a day, compared to 10 per cent in high-SES schools'. It noted that

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<sup>33</sup> Advocate for Children and Young People, *Submission 53*, [p. 2] (citation omitted).

<sup>34</sup> Dr Geoff Kewley, *Submission 75*, [p. 1] (citations omitted).

<sup>35</sup> Dr Geoff Kewley, *Submission 75*, [p. 2].

<sup>36</sup> Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*, p. 3.

this 'may be related to problems at home, or the uneven distribution of experienced teachers in these locations'.<sup>37</sup>

3.31 Indeed, AERO highlighted that 'students cannot learn well in disorderly classrooms and when they are disengaged'. AERO pointed out that this was particularly the case 'for students in schools in low socioeconomic areas, who experience even more disruption and disengagement in their classrooms for a variety of reasons'.<sup>38</sup>

3.32 WACSSO highlighted the difficulty faced by some low socioeconomic families to provide modern learning resources for their children:

I'll use technology as an example. A child at home might not have access to good technology. The computer, if there is one at home, might be shared. The capacity of the parent or the caregiver to understand technology and what that child needs for support is also an issue. When we're talking even about basic things like second-hand uniforms, hand-me-downs and shoes, we're getting down into nitty-gritty about disadvantage. We're talking about a whole other level of how disadvantage and even poverty impacts a child's ability to engage in learning.<sup>39</sup>

3.33 The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP SA) similarly noted that most of the children who exhibit disruptive behaviours in classrooms are doing so because of underlying factors including children who are living in poverty and who often come to school hungry and are unable to concentrate.<sup>40</sup>

3.34 Likewise, the Office of the Children's Commissioner Northern Territory noted that 'many children and young people in the Northern Territory are dealing with a multitude of complex factors in their personal lives which affect their ability to appropriately engage in the classroom; including an estimated one in three children living in poverty'.<sup>41</sup>

3.35 However, Ms Manisha Gazula, Principal of Marsden Road Public School, detailed how the school's adoption of evidence-based teaching and learning methods such as explicit instruction had significantly lifted its students'

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<sup>37</sup> Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 7 (citations omitted).

<sup>38</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, *Submission 23*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ms Pania Turner, President, Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People (SA), *Submission 45*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Office of the Commissioner for Children Northern Territory, *Submission 55*, pp. 2–3.

NAPLAN results.<sup>42</sup> Ninety per cent of students at the school come from a non-English speaking background.<sup>43</sup>

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

3.36 Several participants drew attention to the disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students affected by disruptive behaviours, particularly through suspensions and exclusions.<sup>44</sup>

3.37 The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation provided an overview of some issues shaping the educational experiences of many students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds:

Whilst most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developing typically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are at higher risk of developmental and behavioural problems. In the Australian population overall, about 20 per cent of children start school without the necessary developmental skills for success. This figure is estimated at 40 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, recognising there are higher rates of disability. Moreover, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are known to have high rates of undiagnosed conditions such as [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder] and other neurological conditions.<sup>45</sup>

3.38 Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion similarly noted that in Queensland:

...despite only constituting approximately 10 per cent of the school population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive approximately one quarter of all suspensions and exclusions.<sup>46</sup>

3.39 Dr Sarah Bernard similarly noted that many 'marginalised students, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and students with disability, are overrepresented in school suspensions in Australia'.<sup>47</sup>

3.40 The Commissioner for Children and Young People SA also reflected on the impacts of exclusionary practices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people:

In many cases, exclusion reflects a systemic failure to provide the supports, infrastructure and resources required to ensure every child, regardless of their circumstances and what is happening at home, can access their education. Exclusionary practices disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children in out-of-care,

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<sup>42</sup> Marsden Road Public School 2022 *Annual Report*, 2 May 2023, pp. 5-6 and 26.

<sup>43</sup> Marsden Road Public School 2022 *Annual Report*, 2 May 2023, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Name Withheld, *Submission 68*, [p. 1]; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 7; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>45</sup> National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 59*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion. *Submission 21*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Dr Sarah Bernard, *Submission 73*, [p. 1.]

children living with disability and children experiencing poverty or homelessness.<sup>48</sup>

### Contact with the criminal justice system

3.41 Several submitters pointed to the issue of students who are suspended or excluded from school being more likely to encounter the criminal justice system.<sup>49</sup> For instance, Dr Kewley observed that evidence indicated that 'children who are excluded from school are much more likely to end up in the youth justice system and have other adverse long-term outcomes'.<sup>50</sup>

### Other students

3.42 Some evidence noted that disruptive behaviours also impacted on the learning environments of and educational outcomes for fellow students. For example, Square Peg Round Whole submitted:

...the **impact on all students** of these outdated behaviour management approaches is significant because disruptions in the classroom are not sustainably addressed, students are traumatised by witnessing incidents of classmates being treated disrespectfully, handled roughly, restrained and excluded, and the environment is not safe and conducive to learning.<sup>51</sup>

3.43 The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) also noted the impact of disorder and distraction on gifted students:

In an Australian study by Taylor (2016), behaviour was identified by teachers as one of the things that impacted the provision for gifted students. In fact, 10 per cent of teachers indicated behaviour of other students was a factor that affected the provision of education and behaviour of gifted students was cited by 3 per cent of the surveyed teachers as a factor that affected the provision of education.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People SA, *Submission 45*, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Submission 21*, p. 9; Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p. 20; Dr Greg Ashman, *Submission 5*, [p. 8].

<sup>50</sup> Dr Geoff Kewley, *Submission 75*, [p. 2].

<sup>51</sup> Emphasis in original. Square Peg Round Whole, *Submission 49*, p. 6

<sup>52</sup> Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *Submission 41*, pp. 3–4.



# Chapter 4

## Addressing disruption

- 4.1 Many participants in this inquiry argued that evidence-based approaches are more effective in managing challenging behaviour than reactive approaches, which attempt to deal with behavioural issues after they occur. These practices could include promoting effective instructional environments, leadership within schools, equipping teachers with the necessary skills in evidence-based classroom management techniques, and providing better resources and supports for teachers in the classroom.
- 4.2 This chapter discusses these matters in greater detail.

### Promoting effective instructional environments

- 4.3 The inquiry found a range of evidence-based practices and frameworks that could better address the issue of disruptive behaviour in school classrooms. Many submitters argued that there is a clear link between highly effective instructional environments, leadership within schools, classroom management, and behavioural outcomes.<sup>1</sup>
- 4.4 The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) was of the view that the application of 'evidence-based whole-class teaching practices, along with the provision of additional support or extension for a smaller number of students, is fundamental to addressing the prevalent low-level disengagement and disruption caused by work-related difficulties in Australian schools'.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.5 Similarly, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) indicated that contemporary research into classroom management has 'consistently found that proactive evidence-based practices, which focus on teaching and reinforcing expected behaviours, are more effective than reactive approaches which focus on dealing with behavioural issues after they occur'.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.6 The National Catholic Education Commission concurred:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, MultiLit, *Submission 28*, pp. 1–2; Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, pp. 12–16; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, pp. 4–5; Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association, *Submission 3*, p. 3; Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 2; Australian Association of Special Education, *Submission 35*, [p. 4]; y Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, p. 3; Dr Robyn Wheldall, Director, MultiLit Pty Ltd, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, *Submission 23*, p. 3 See also, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, p. 2.

Maximising the use of evidence informed responses will equip teachers and schools with skills and strategies to manage classrooms and create learning environments best suited to equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make meaningful contributions to their communities and the nation as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

4.7 Several submitters supported evidence-based explicit instructional models as they have been shown to be effective in addressing disruptive behaviours in classrooms. AERO submitted that it has 'the most rigorous and relevant research to identify the evidence-based practices that have been proven to make a difference in the learning outcomes for students', including:

- explicit instruction;
- formative assessment;
- mastery learning; and
- spacing and retrieval.<sup>5</sup>

4.8 Despite the evidence backing these particular instructional models as being best practice, AERO noted that its own survey showed that 'teachers do not consistently understand or implement well-established evidence-based practices that create safe and supportive learning environments'. AERO determined that:

Classroom management is the least implemented among the evidence-based practices we've investigated. As an example, as a proportion, only 60 per cent of year 4 teachers and 38 per cent of year 8 teachers responding to our survey agreed that their school's rules were enforced in a fair and consistent manner. Our research shows that teachers are very keen to implement evidence-based approaches in their practice, but they lack time, and they lack confidence.<sup>6</sup>

4.9 To this end, AERO stated it had been commissioned by the Department of Education to develop a range of resources for the 'Engaged Classrooms' initiative that will be publicly available to 'anybody who is a teacher or school leader... The practices that we describe will form part of the core content curriculum for initial teacher education into the future'.<sup>7</sup>

4.10 AERO explained the rationale behind 'Engaged Classrooms' as the:

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<sup>4</sup> National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation, *Submission 23*, p. 1, Dr Jennfier Buckingham, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, Mrs Karen Yager, Vice President, Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, p. 25, MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p.6, Dr Helen Egeber, Senior Lecturer, Edith Cowan University School of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 29.

... understanding that behaviour needs to be explicitly taught and it can be treated like other elements of the curriculum with content that needs to be taught, practised and retrieved so that it becomes routine ... The project provides an important opportunity to translate the strong and established evidence into useful and practical resources for teachers and leaders. It has the potential to support the best approaches being implemented systematically across all Australian classrooms to help every young Australian learn and achieve success.<sup>8</sup>

- 4.11 Consideration of the physical learning environment is also important. The NSW Department of Education gave evidence stating that 'in our schools we would not have any school that is an entirely open-plan school'.<sup>9</sup> They further clarified that:

Open-plan classrooms are large learning spaces designed to accommodate between 2 – 4 classes of students without the ability to create smaller spaces through the use of operable walls. The majority of recently completed new and upgraded public schools in NSW have traditional classroom spaces that include breakout areas ... Current and future new and upgraded school projects will not include the construction of open-plan classrooms that cannot function as an individual classroom ...<sup>10</sup>

- 4.12 The Australian Psychological Society (APS) argued that cross-jurisdictional coordination was required to develop a national approach to assisting schools to select and implement evidence-informed resources and programs, noting:

... educators face a confusing and disjointed proliferation of poorly evaluated approaches, programs, and services, and often lack the resources and supports to select effective options suitable for their school context. There are numerous toolkits, planning templates and program databases across the various federal and state jurisdictions and educational sectors, which add to the confusion.<sup>11</sup>

### **Whole-school approaches to addressing behaviour**

- 4.13 The adoption of a whole-school approach to behaviour management that is underpinned by ongoing training and resources, was advocated by many

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<sup>8</sup> Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, pp. 28–29.

<sup>9</sup> Ms Leanne Nixon, Acting Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department of Education, New South Wales, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education, New South Wales, Answers to questions taken on notice, 4 August 2023 (received 30 August 2023), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 2.

submitters.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Dr Donna Cross, the Chief Behavioural Adviser for the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education, told the committee:

I think perhaps when people think about disruptive behaviour they only think about what can be done in a classroom environment without also thinking deeply about the ways that policies can be influenced, and the ways parents can be much more actively engaged in that process, how the physical environment can lead to disruptive behaviour, the importance of school climate and setting a climate that is building relationships between students and staff, staff and parents. And of course, the quality of the pedagogy and engagement of student voice as being elements within a whole-school approach; these each have a unique contribution to the ways that children behave in that environment but with a particular emphasis on relationships.<sup>13</sup>

4.14 Similarly, Dr Tim McDonald, the Chief Executive Officer of YMCA Western Australia, told the committee:

We know that students who are dysregulated in their emotional control thrive in predictable classrooms that have clear consequences and they know that they're followed through. So they know exactly where they stand. The teaching of behaviour is not going to stop violence, is not going to stop aggressive behaviour. Be clear on that. But will it lessen the disruptive behaviour that is prevalent in Australian classrooms? I believe it will. It will enable people to learn and to get that success from achievement.<sup>14</sup>

4.15 MultiLit recommended the adoption of:

... a whole-school approach to behaviour support where policies and procedures focus on preventative action to drive positive school culture and align practice with school values. Consistent approaches across classrooms ensures that there is predictability and fairness for students around behavioural expectations that are reinforced over time.<sup>15</sup>

4.16 The Y WA also argued that the 'teaching of behaviour is best coordinated across the school as a 'behaviour curriculum'. It explained that:

This curriculum development is purposeful and will take time. Students will not automatically 'know' how to behave because the teacher tells them on day one. Students will need time to develop the behaviours required and will need plenty of practice to ensure that they understand how to behave and for these behaviours to become habits. As in the teaching of subject concepts we want the students to become automatic (e.g., times tables) in

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Dr Greg Ashman, *Submission 5*, [pp.9–11]; Social Ventures Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 2; MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 3; Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*; Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Donna Cross, Chief Behavioural Adviser, New South Wales Government, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Tim McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, YMCA Western Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 3 (citations omitted).

their responses to reduce time thinking, the same automaticity is what we want from the students with how they behave and listen. We want students to have the habits of good learning behaviours as a result of the behaviours being taught, practiced, reviewed, re-taught and practiced some more.<sup>16</sup>

- 4.17 Similarly, Professor Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Adviser to the United Kingdom's Department for Education, underscored the importance of teaching behaviour in the classroom and in the school setting more broadly:

You keep teaching the behaviour and linking it to the value—here's the behaviour; link it to the value. It's not just simply plodding through the behaviours by lecturing to children. You have discussions about it. You check their understanding. You quiz them. You can do role plays. You can talk about the values you want to talk about, whether it be stoicism or motivation or integrity. You teach them how to share, what to do if they are sad and what to do if they need the bathroom. You teach them these behaviours that seem obvious to us, because we're good at them, but aren't obvious to children. You teach as if it was a subject. Once you've had that discreet package delivered, you then revisit it constantly, on a daily basis, on a conversational basis, particularly, for instance, in pastoral meetings and so on. But it becomes part of the common, everyday language.<sup>17</sup>

- 4.18 The committee observed first-hand that schools that perform well in classroom behaviour management have a strong commitment to, as well as knowledge of, explicit teaching practices. For example, the committee had the opportunity to see how the evidence-based Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) model was successfully applied in practice at Marsden Road Public School (See Box 4.1).

- 4.19 Some participants noted the importance of productive engagement and connections between parents/communities and schools.<sup>18</sup> For example, the ACU pointed out that the 'solution is not entirely in the hands of the teaching staff and school leaders'. The ACU argued:

Unless there is a partnership between families and the school, any young teacher is going to be floundering if they don't get the early mentoring and support. I note that in the Teacher Workforce Action Plan that is an item for support. That's to be applauded, because that will help them retain and translate their training into their school.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Box 4.1 Case study: Marsden Road Public School**

<sup>16</sup> The YWA, *Submission 52*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Professor Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Adviser, Department for Education, United Kingdom, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 November 2023, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 11*, p. 6; Country Education Partnership, *Submission 14*, [p. 1]. See also, Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 19.

Marsden Road Public School (Marsden Road) is a government primary school in south-west Sydney. It serves a low socioeconomic community, has a highly mobile student population, and more than 90 per cent of its students come from non-English speaking households.

Marsden Road has established and implemented a school-wide curriculum approach based on the NSW Department of Education's PBL model, including evidence-informed content and pedagogy, explicit, systematic, and sequential teaching of fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. This approach includes:

- detailed learning sequence for each subject;
- common assessment schedules, lessons plans, and shared classroom materials such as textbooks; and
- ongoing professional learning and support for teachers.

Through its Marsden Way Citizenship Program, the school also aims to foster moral and ethical values of respect, responsibility, and resilience in its students.

## Supporting teachers to manage disruptive behaviour

4.20 Multiple participants highlighted the need to ensure that initial teacher education (ITE) courses are including these best practice methods on classroom and behaviour management to better prepare new teachers for the challenges of disruptive behaviour in the classroom.<sup>20</sup>

### Initial teacher education

4.21 The inquiry heard calls from several stakeholders for a stronger, more consistent focus on behaviour management in ITE courses.<sup>21</sup> For example, Independent Schools Australia (ISA) argued that ITE programs need to better prepare teachers to work with students demonstrating challenging behaviours:

A greater focus in ITE programs and practicums on positive classroom management in diverse contexts may better prepare graduate teachers in developing positive classroom climates. AISs [Associations of Independent

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 4; Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Submission 3*, p. 3; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 1]; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*, pp. 10–11; MultiLit, *Submission 28*, pp. 4–5; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 2]; MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, pp. 3–4; Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 4; Ms Carol Barnes, *Submission 71*, p. 3.

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Schools] noted that teacher graduate preparedness for student behaviour management and classroom safety varies across the sector.<sup>22</sup>

- 4.22 Indeed, the Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) suggested this would require a greater focus on the practical aspects of teaching, rather than theoretical approaches:

Teachers need time in the classroom to gain experience in managing classroom behaviour and need to feel supported in what they are doing. While the very basics of classroom management can be taught in a lecture theatre, the classroom is where these skills will be developed. One could argue that there are not many teachers equipped to manage the current level of disruption being seen across many schools and that in some cases the classroom environment is beyond what should be expected of a classroom teacher in a mainstream setting.<sup>23</sup>

- 4.23 In addition, ADHD Australia and Macquarie University commented on the lack of teacher education and professional development around conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other disabilities:

The lack of ADHD teacher professional learning and the disempowerment that teachers feel leads to high rates of teacher burnout and teacher mental ill-health. Likewise, parenting stress is higher for ADHD than for autism, and often leads to burn-out and parent mental ill-health. Mental ill-health cost the Australian government \$11 billion in 2019 to 2020, and costs are set to increase dramatically by 2025. ADHD teacher training and professional development will not only have positive impacts on ADHD students, but also on teachers and parents.<sup>24</sup>

- 4.24 MultiLit pointed out that teacher training 'tends to focus on how to assess academic difficulties but fails to provide training on how to systematically assess and support challenging behaviour'. MultiLit observed:

Lack of training in a function-based approach to behaviour management (the 'why' a student may be engaging in certain behaviours) often leads teachers down a slippery path toward the overuse of reactive and aversive strategies. In addition, without understanding or identifying the function of the problem behaviour, teachers are more likely to inadvertently reinforce and strengthen problem behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

- 4.25 The Y WA agreed that classroom management was crucial for students and early career teachers and suggested that 'students are not uniformly taught the skills or abilities to establish positive learning environments'. It argued:

The students are often held captive by theory with little application to practice. It is unfortunate that the theory that is taught runs counter to the Science of Learning and therefore the ability to teach students behaviour.

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<sup>22</sup> Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> ADHD Australia and Macquarie University, *Submission 62*, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> MultiLit, *Submission 28*, p. 5 (citations omitted).

The concept of teaching behaviour or indeed that we need to see behaviour as a curriculum is not evidenced in ITE graduates or those on practicums that I have encountered in classrooms across several states.<sup>26</sup>

4.26 There was also support from some stakeholders for the embedding of trauma-informed positive education strategies in all Australian classrooms.<sup>27</sup> Some participants advocated for the introduction of compulsory, comprehensive, and ongoing training for educators on inclusion.<sup>28</sup>

4.27 However, Professor Bennett cautioned against reliance of these strategies in place of whole-school behaviour management approaches:

... many teachers and school leaders are required to operate on policies which centre trauma informed approaches, therapeutic approaches, restorative-practice-based approaches and so on. There are grains of truth and science in all of these approaches, but they are not whole-school behaviour management approaches. We often see that schools that attempt to treat misbehaviour as some kind of pathology of a child's mental state always—and I mean always—come a cropper. They always do badly.<sup>29</sup>

4.28 Many participants noted that the issues raised during the inquiry regarding ITE have been addressed by the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review, and/or supported the subsequent recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (Expert Panel).<sup>30</sup>

4.29 The Expert Panel's report included 14 recommendations to improve teacher training and better prepare teachers for the classroom, including:

- strengthening ITE to deliver confident, effective beginning teachers;
- drawing a stronger link between performance and funding of ITE;
- improving practical teaching experience; and
- enhancing postgraduate ITE programs for mid-career entrants.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Y WA, *Submission 52*, p. 5. See also, Dr Tim McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, YMCA Western Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Berry Street, *Submission 38*, p. 2; Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 3].

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 26*, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Tom Bennett, School Behaviour Adviser, Department for Education, United Kingdom, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 November 2023, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education Research Organisation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 29; Dr Jennifer Buckingham, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 7; Mr Glenn Fahey, Director of Education, Centre for Independent Studies, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Government, *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, July 2023, pp. 17–21.

4.30 In relation to introducing core content requirements for every initial teacher education course, the Department of Education (department) noted that:

AITSL is bringing advice back to the next education ministers meeting in October about how to fast-track implementation. If we let the normal accreditation cycles roll out, it will take up to 10 years to implement changes to initial teacher education programs across the country. The idea that ministers have come up with is that they want to fast-track that so that it's done by the end of 2025.<sup>32</sup>

### **Experience in the classroom**

4.31 Several participants called for improved partnerships between universities and schools to increase pre-service teachers' exposure to the management of difficult classroom situations.<sup>33</sup>

4.32 For example, the Australian Catholic University (ACU) recommended 'stronger and deeper partnerships between universities and schools to foster a closer relationship between theory and practice'. The ACU argued that this 'would enable opportunities for pre-service teachers to be exposed to expert teachers managing difficult situations, and students, in classrooms.'<sup>34</sup>

4.33 The ACU suggested various ways this could be achieved, including by expanding 'hub schools' to facilitate immersion of pre-service teachers, engaging pre-service teachers as paraprofessionals and/or learning support officers in schools, and using realistic simulations of school life and emerging technologies.<sup>35</sup>

4.34 Similarly, AITSL noted that:

... there is some excellent practice across the country, but we'd be keen to do work to make sure that teachers had more better-quality exposure to a variety of situations in schools, because we know classroom management is

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<sup>32</sup> Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 36. See also, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Advocate for Children and Young People, *Submission 53*, [p. 2], Dr Tim McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, YMCA Western Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 38, Dr Robyn Wheldall, Director, MultiLit, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 9, Mrs Karen Yager, Vice President, Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, p. 27, Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 9, Name Withheld, *Submission 66*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission 4*, p. 1. See also, Australian Catholic University, answers to questions taken on notice, 4 August 2023 (received 5 September 2023); Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations, *Submission 51*, p. 4.

one of those things that has a significant practical component. Perhaps you only really learn it once you've got experience in a classroom.<sup>36</sup>

### **Peer learning and mentoring**

4.35 Several participants highlighted the importance of peer learning and mentoring relationships within schools to support new teachers entering the profession and help them develop their skills.<sup>37</sup>

4.36 Indeed, Social Ventures Australia (SVA) observed that 'classroom management tends to be more of a problem for teachers earlier in their careers than for those with more experience'. As such, SVA argued that 'early career teachers may require tailored support—such as coaching and mentoring with more explicit learning about classroom behaviour strategies—to help them create a positive classroom climate while they develop their craft'.<sup>38</sup>

4.37 Similarly, Dr Cross, the Chief Behavioural Adviser to the NSW Government, noted that there tends to be a 'focus on the content of what teachers are teaching and less on how to manage and the quality of pedagogy in our classrooms'. Dr Cross argued that:

There needs to be much stronger induction and mentorship, expert teacher apprenticeships that are built around educators who are first in the workplace. Even the possibility of teachers in their first year being something like a learning support officer who supports other staff but at the same time is getting expert mentorship around that. I believe we need much more qualified special education educators within the school, and those in allied health who can support the mental health and development of children and building those skills and staff.<sup>39</sup>

4.38 When it came to the importance of practicum as an essential component of ITE, the ACU noted that 'peer learning is not a common practice in Australian teaching culture, as it is in other countries'.<sup>40</sup> The ACU went on to observe:

In Shanghai, for example, all teachers have mentors, and new teachers have several mentors who observe and give feedback on their classes. In many high performing East Asian countries, teachers regularly observe each other's classes, providing instant feedback to improve each student's

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<sup>36</sup> Mr Edmund Mission, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 47*, p. 5; Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership, National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2023, pp. 21–22, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, *Submission 2*, [p. 3], Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 3].

<sup>38</sup> Social Ventures Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Dr Donna Cross, Chief Behavioural Adviser, New South Wales Government, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 September 2023, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

learning. By contrast, registered teachers in Australia can spend their entire career without ever having their teaching observed by another teacher.

Teacher isolation, rather than peer observation, is the norm in Australia which undoubtedly is one of the reasons why universities struggle to find enough teacher supervisors for their preservice teachers.<sup>41</sup>

- 4.39 AITSL noted that it is currently developing national guidelines to support early career teachers and new school leaders, including mentoring and induction as part of the National Teacher Work Force Action Plan.<sup>42</sup>

### **Early identification and intervention**

- 4.40 Many submitters underscored the importance of early intervention to support students who may have behavioural issues when they enter schooling.<sup>43</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, this is particularly the case for student cohorts that are overrepresented in problematic behaviours.<sup>44</sup>

- 4.41 The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) argued that schools and teachers must be adequately resourced so that each student has a sense of belonging and the appropriate support in place to fully participate in their own learning. ARACY indicated that:

Within the classroom or formal education setting, it is imperative that each student feels included, has a sense of belonging, and has the appropriate support in place to fully participate in their own learning. ARACY firmly supports that all students, particularly those in priority cohorts such as First Nations' students, those with disability, and those who are neurodiverse, have a right to access a learning environment that supports their individual needs, and where additional support, if required, is provided. This, of course, speaks to the importance of adequately resourced schools, classrooms, and teaching staff.<sup>45</sup>

- 4.42 The APS strongly advocated for the 'implementation of evidence-informed whole school, multi-tiered approaches to addressing disruptive behaviour and other learning, mental health and wellbeing concerns in schools that are often comorbid with disruptive behaviour problems'. The APS argued that:

Improved educational outcomes are associated with sustained whole school approaches that have internally coordinated tiers of health promotion, targeted prevention, and early intervention support and connect with external and community support systems. Whole school approaches also

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<sup>41</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Submission 4*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>42</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Submission 82*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Australian Association of Special Education, *Submission 35*, [p. 2]; Schofields Public School P&C Association, *Submission 48*, [pp. 4–5]; Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Disability Discrimination Legal Service, *Submission 1*, p. 2 (citation omitted).

<sup>45</sup> Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, *Submission 32*, p. 3.

prompt schools to address policies, procedures and practices that can help to prevent disruptive behaviour occurring in schools and classrooms.<sup>46</sup>

- 4.43 A range of submitters, such as the Disability Discrimination Legal Service (DDLS), concurred and stressed that 'teachers ought not be expected to resolve issues that arise from complex disabilities'.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, many participants emphasised the importance of additional supports, such as behaviour specialists and other allied health professionals.<sup>48</sup> For instance, Monash University Faculty of Education indicated that many states and territories were developing additional coaching workforces to support teachers to implement evidence-based behaviour support practices:

In Victoria, the Department of Education has developed new roles for certified behaviour analysts, behaviour coaches, and inclusion coaches with specific expertise to help teachers and school leaders support students with higher needs and behaviours of concern, including students with disabilities. The New South Wales Department of Education has recently created new behaviour specialist roles. The Behaviour Specialist is a new, non-school-based position that will join the Delivery Support team. It is anticipated that Behaviour Specialists work with schools to support students with complex behaviours as well as offer a range of capacity-building resources. In Queensland, each state school region has a PBL principal advisor who provides professional development and coaching support to PBL schools.<sup>49</sup>

- 4.44 To this end, the Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) noted that it was one of the 'few jurisdictions in Australia to use an interdisciplinary team of leading and specialist teachers, social workers, and psychologists to support schools in their management of problematic student behaviour'. It explained:

In CSPD schools, teachers managing problematic behaviours associated with a disability are supported by an interdisciplinary team of psychologists, social workers, leading and specialist teachers to identify and manage the risks presented by students and to plan for students' management and learning adjustments.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Australian Psychological Society, *Submission 57*, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Disability Discrimination Legal Service, *Submission 1*, p. 4. See also, Institute of Special Educators, *Submission 13*, [p. 2]; Catholic School Parents Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 14; Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Submission 45*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, p. 5; Name Withheld, *Submission 68*, [p. 1]; Associate Professor Rebecca Collie, *Submission 16*, [p. 3]; Australian Association of Special Education Inc, *Submission 35*, [p. 4]; Dr Geoff Kewley, *Submission 75*, pp. 2–3; Name Withheld, *Submission 68*, [p. 1]; Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 10

<sup>50</sup> Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese, *Submission 58*, p. 3.

- 4.45 The committee observed firsthand the benefits of an integrated approach to preventing behavioural problems through screening and early intervention by an interdisciplinary team of specialists and teachers (See Box 4.2).

**Box 4.2 Case Study: Dawson Park primary School**

Dawson Park Primary School (Dawson Park) is an Independent Public School located in Perth. Dawson Park applies a four-pillar school-wide pedagogy to teach the curriculum, including teacher directed learning, explicit instruction, moving knowledge from short-term to long-term memory, and positive teacher-student relationships.

In July 2019, the school contracted a speech pathologist to better meet the needs of the students. The speech pathologist works alongside the school psychologist to help guide the team of education assistants (mainstream and special needs) to provide formal diagnostic and screening to proactively identify and address students' learning difficulties. Services provided or overseen by the speech pathologist include:

- pre-kindergarten speech and language screening through a parent questionnaire at enrolment so that children of potential concern are identified;
- screening of students for further intervention in kindergarten, pre-primary and at the end of the year in year 1 to 6; and
- weekly meetings with other members of the school's allied health team to discuss students at educational risk and new referrals.

The benefits of having a speech pathologist at the school has been the ability to screen and pick up children with conditions such as speech sound disorders, hearing concerns, and literacy concerns/oral deficits, to provide early intervention through therapy or to refer students to other professionals as needed.

- 4.46 However, participants also noted the shortages of experienced teachers and long waitlists for qualified professional, health, and school counselling services.<sup>51</sup> For instance, the Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators (WAESPA) noted that the lengthy wait time for medical diagnosis of conditions such as autism:

At the moment there's about a 12-month waitlist to get a paediatrician appointment. From there, if they've identified that possibly there are any ASD traits, it's about 24 to 28 months to get the diagnosis. That's three years of a child's life. They can be well into schooling before we get even a diagnosis. So all that early intervention is missed. I think we need to look at

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 11*, pp. 5–6; NSW Secondary Principals' Council, *Submission 29*, [p. 2]; Monash University Faculty of Education, *Submission 30*, p. 11; Australian Education Union, *Submission 33*, pp. 9–10.

something more like a functional needs model where we actually look at the needs of the student and really identify what's going on for that child, particularly in those early years, because the more early intervention we can actually do for our students, the better the outcome is going to be.<sup>52</sup>

- 4.47 The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) raised similar concerns about access to allied health practitioners—and noted that 80 per cent of parents are greatly concerned about their child's mental health and well-being:

Access to allied health practitioners is difficult, with wait lists for psychologists, speech pathologists, and occupational therapists as long as six, twelve, or even twenty-four months. ACSSO's position is that qualified and sufficient professional school counselling services are urgently needed, as the rise in the prevalence of mental health issues, the diagnosis of autism and other student disability diagnoses ... all have an impact on the additional support required for staff, students, and families in the classroom.<sup>53</sup>

- 4.48 Further, the South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP SA) called for more streamlined referral pathways:

Young people said they also want know more about what support is available to the both inside and outside of school, and for there to be clearer referral pathways. There appears to be a lack of coordination between education and mental health systems. Embedding a coordinated multi-sector response that provides for a continuum of supports and involve schools, community partners and different levels of government, as well as primary health care, including professional and peer workforce teams who are specialists in child and adolescent health.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ms Deborah Taylor, President, Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, pp. 9–10.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 11*, p. 7. Refers to results from ACSSO's 2022 National Survey.

<sup>54</sup> South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Submission 45*, p. 10.

## Chapter 5

### Committee View

- 5.1 Throughout the inquiry, the committee heard that student behaviour and engagement in Australian school classrooms is of growing concern to many teachers, school leaders, and parents. This is reinforced by recent international and domestic surveys of teachers and students, which point to a decline in the disciplinary climate in Australian classrooms.
- 5.2 Many teachers who made submissions to the inquiry reported being subjected to increasingly challenging behaviours, including verbal and physical abuse from students and parents. Multiple submitters said that managing disruptive classrooms impacts the psychological wellbeing of teachers, leaving them feeling overwhelmed. This, in turn, contributes to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction and early exit from the profession.
- 5.3 Evidence to the committee suggests that the causes of disruptive behaviour are complex and influenced by a range of biological, social, environmental, and educational factors. Further, the committee heard that many teachers feel they are not adequately equipped to manage disruptive and disorderly classrooms.
- 5.4 More generally, teachers reported that they are increasingly expected to manage students with complex needs without timely access to relevant supports—particularly qualified professional, health, and school counselling services. Increased workloads were also identified as affecting the ability of teachers to manage student behaviour effectively.
- 5.5 Crucially, disruption to teaching and learning means students receive less instructional time, which can significantly impact learning outcomes. The committee strongly believes that students should not miss out on education because they feel unsafe, nor should they miss out on learning because their lesson is disrupted or fall behind because their needs are not identified and supported. Several participants also noted the positive association between students' perception of their classroom disciplinary climate and their academic performance, even after accounting for socioeconomic status.
- 5.6 In the committee's view, effective evidence-based strategies for addressing classroom behaviour should facilitate calm, safe, and supportive environments where students and staff can succeed in safety and respect.

#### **Addressing the gaps in initial teacher education (ITE)**

- 5.7 Better equipping early career teachers to manage disruptive classroom behaviour was a recurrent theme of the inquiry. Participants called for more behaviour management training to be included in ITE courses. However, many

submitters strongly suggested that behaviour management skills must be developed and honed in classroom settings, not just learned from a course.

- 5.8 The committee notes that many issues raised during the inquiry regarding ITE have been addressed by the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review and the subsequent recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel, in its 'Strong Beginnings' report, released in July 2023.
- 5.9 The committee supports the recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel with respect to strengthening ITE programs, including establishing and embedding core content and mandating it in national accreditation. This core content should include best practice teaching methods of classroom management and behaviour.
- 5.10 The committee is concerned that implementing these recommendations will take several years. Accordingly, the committee urges Education Ministers to fast-track the implementation of the recommendations. This includes ensuring that core content for ITE programs include evidence-based methods and techniques on classroom management and best practice for teaching and learning.
- 5.11 To that end, the committee recommends that Education Ministers prioritise implementation of 'Priority Reform 1: Strengthening ITE Programs to Deliver Effective Beginning Teachers' from the Teacher Education Expert Panel report.
- 5.12 Further, the committee supports participants' proposals for the employment of preservice teachers within schools, whether through formal mentorship or placement programs, to better prepare them for managing challenging classroom environments. This would help preservice teachers gain experience while providing additional support within schools.
- 5.13 As such, the committee urges Education Ministers to fast-track implementation of 'Priority Reform 3: Improving the Quality of Practical Experience in Teaching' also from the Teacher Education Expert Panel report.
- 5.14 The committee also notes that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is developing national guidelines to support early career teachers and new school leaders, including mentoring and induction, as part of the National Teacher Work Force Action Plan. The committee trusts that the new guidelines will also support the effective transition from ITE into the workforce and better prepare teachers for the day-to-day challenges of classroom teaching.

### **Recommendation 1**

- 5.15 The committee recommends that Education Ministers fast-track implementation of the recommendations from the Teacher Education Expert Panel, encompassed in:**

- **Priority Reform 1: Strengthening ITE Programs to Deliver Effective Beginning Teachers; and**
- **Priority Reform 3: Improving the Quality of Practical Experience in Teaching.**

### **Introducing the 'Behaviour Curriculum' into the Australian Curriculum**

- 5.16 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) noted that the Australian Curriculum contains behaviour-related content, focusing on areas such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and social management.
- 5.17 However, several submitters argued that a more robust framework for the teaching of behaviour—one that outlines consistent expectations for student behaviour—is necessary.
- 5.18 While the committee recognises that the Australian Curriculum does not outline the pedagogical approach for delivering its content, the committee expects that the explicit teaching of behaviour should be a vital component of the Australian Curriculum. As such, the committee believes that ACARA should introduce a 'Behaviour Curriculum' that will explicitly teach behaviour to help students understand their school's behavioural expectations and values, allowing them to navigate their school's social environment successfully while ensuring that the best possible learning climate is achieved.
- 5.19 Introducing a 'Behaviour Curriculum' will enable a whole-school approach to addressing behaviour in classrooms, which affects the overall learning climate of the school. The committee recognises that the intent behind a 'Behaviour Curriculum' is not to dictate a list of unwanted behaviours but to represent the essential habits and routines that are conducive to learning in a school environment.
- 5.20 For example, staff at Marsden Road Public School receive specialist coaching in how to teach classroom behaviour and students and their parents have a clear understanding of the school's behavioural expectations and values. This is an example of the nurturing of essential habits and routines which support a positive learning environment. Less classroom disruption, in turn, supports improved learning which is key to student wellbeing and teacher satisfaction in the workplace.

### **Recommendation 2**

- 5.21 **The committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority strengthen the focus on behaviour within the Australian Curriculum by specifically introducing a 'Behaviour Curriculum'.**

## **Implementation of evidence-based pedagogy and practices**

- 5.22 Many submitters argued that there is a clear link between highly effective instructional environments, leadership within schools, classroom management, and behavioural outcomes. To this end, several participants suggested evidence-based practices and frameworks that could help address disruptive behaviour in school classrooms.
- 5.23 The committee heard that explicit instruction models have proven to be effective in addressing disruptive behaviours. The committee also observed first-hand that schools which perform well in classroom behaviour management tend to have a strong commitment to, and knowledge of, explicit teaching practices and the delivery of effective learning environments. For example, the committee saw how the evidence-based Positive Behaviour for Learning model was applied in practice at Marsden Road Public School. This included using explicit instruction, clear expectations of student behaviour, and teaching those expectations and types of behaviour.
- 5.24 The committee recognises the importance of proven teaching methods in the teaching of classroom behaviour, noting that some submitters told the committee many teachers did not feel well supported or have the resources to implement evidence-based teaching methods.
- 5.25 The committee notes that the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) will soon release the first tranche of materials from its 'Engaged Classrooms' initiative to support classroom engagement and professional learning for teachers and school leaders. AERO has also collated and translated the evidence on proven practices which improve student learning into practical guidance for teachers and other educators. The focus of this work is to ensure that teachers can easily apply the best evidence-based teaching strategies in their classrooms.
- 5.26 A number of submitters also emphasised the importance of positive family-school relationships in improving student behaviour, engagement, wellbeing, and self-regulation. It was noted that teachers and schools, working together with parents in managing behavioural issues, can significantly reduce disruptive behaviours in classrooms and foster a shared responsibility for improved student behaviour and academic success.
- 5.27 The committee heard from submitters that early career teachers should also have access to adequate professional learning opportunities on behaviour management that are ongoing, involve active participation, and align well with teachers' professional development goals.
- 5.28 Additionally, the physical learning environment should be conducive to supporting the implementation of these evidence-based teaching methods. While ultimately each school should be able to determine whether traditional or open-plan classrooms work best for them, consideration should be given to the

evidence and feedback from students, teachers and parents around classroom layout, with recent pushback, particularly in New South Wales, around the prevalence of open-plan classrooms.

### **Recommendation 3**

**5.29 The committee recommends that government and non-government education authorities are required to invest in the professional development of teachers, so that they are supported by the latest evidence-based teaching skills to manage classroom behaviour.**

### **Recommendation 4**

**5.30 The committee recommends that Education Ministers, as part of the next National School Reform Agreement, require evidence-based instructional models, such as explicit instruction; formative assessment; mastery learning; and spacing and retrieval, which have been proven effective at creating a learning climate that manages disruptive behaviour in classrooms and provides the best possible learning conditions, to be implemented.**

### **Recommendation 5**

**5.31 The committee notes the lead taken by the NSW Minister for Education and recommends that future school buildings are funded and constructed on the basis that they will deliver the best learning environments for students, such as traditional classrooms, as opposed to open-plan classrooms.**

### **Early identification and intervention**

5.32 Along with implementing evidence-based classroom practices, the committee heard of the need for early identification and intervention for students with complex needs.

5.33 Many submitters underscored the importance of early intervention to support students with behavioural issues when they enter schooling rather than leaving this until later when the cumulative impacts of years of disruptive behaviour can lead to significantly poorer outcomes for those students.

5.34 While there is no doubt that better equipping teachers to identify students who may have complex needs is desirable, teachers alone cannot be expected to solve the growing problem of disruptive behaviour. The need for additional resources in schools, particularly behaviour specialists and other allied health professionals, was emphasised by many participants.

5.35 Currently, however, such support is often unavailable. There can also be delays in accessing services, particularly in relation to diagnosis. The committee heard that, in some cases, it could take as long as 12 months to get an appointment with a paediatrician and about 24 to 28 months for an autism diagnosis.

5.36 The committee therefore supports the need for more timely and effective pathways for schools to refer students to support services. This includes psychologists, social workers, and behaviour specialists to help identify and manage disruptive behaviour.

### **Recommendation 6**

**5.37 The committee recommends that state and territory governments explore more effective integration between education and healthcare services so schools can have timely access to student support services, including psychologists, social workers, and behaviour specialists, to help identify and manage disruptive behaviour.**

### **Currency and accuracy of data**

5.38 The committee agrees that better national data is required to fully understand the issue of classroom disruption, particularly the amount of time teachers and school leaders spend managing student behaviour and the effect this has on student outcomes. This should include the reporting of comparative national data on adjustments to support students with disability and the use of exclusionary discipline, including suspensions and expulsions.

5.39 Improving the currency and accuracy of data in this area will help create a benchmark for student and school performance. It will also allow monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and programs. To achieve this, the committee recommends the establishment of an annual national survey like the United Kingdom's (UK's) National Behaviour Survey.

5.40 The committee found the evidence around the National Behaviour Survey that was introduced in the UK to be a compelling example of how the survey could be implemented in Australia and urges Education Ministers to consider it as a scaffold for how a similar survey could take place in Australia.

5.41 Given that the UK survey was conducted in a series of waves and through existing panels surveys carried out by the Department for Education, the Australian version could be completed by all students as part of their NAPLAN tests for appropriate age groups, focusing on students in years 5, 7 and 9. This would also provide the opportunity for additional learning climate matters, other than behaviour, to be included in the survey, to assist schools and to measure their progress across different areas of development.

### **Recommendation 7**

**5.42 The committee recommends that Education Ministers commission an annual national survey of students and staff on behaviour in schools, including school learning climate, behavioural culture and policies, and the frequency and impact of classroom disruption and schools' responses.**

### **Coordination of a national approach**

- 5.43 The committee believes that a national approach to providing resources and access to supports should be developed to help all Australian schools select and implement evidence-informed approaches, programs, and practices for addressing disruptive behaviour.
- 5.44 The committee notes that the upcoming development of the new National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) will provide an opportunity for the NSRA Ministerial Reference Group to consider the inclusion of strategies for addressing disruptive classroom behaviour as one of the priorities for the next NSRA.
- 5.45 An important component of any national approach will be the role of the Unique Student Identifier (USI) in facilitating information sharing between school systems and across state and territory jurisdictions. The USI will be a valuable tool for tracking students who require additional support through the education system by ensuring they don't fall through the cracks.

### **Recommendation 8**

- 5.46 The committee recommends that the National School Reform Agreement Ministerial Reference Group consider including strategies for addressing disruptive classroom behaviour as one of the priorities for the next National School Reform Agreement.**

### **Recommendation 9**

- 5.47 The committee urges the National School Reform Agreement Ministerial Reference Group to fast-track the implementation of the National Unique Student Identifier for school students, an initiative of the current National School Reform Agreement.**

**Senator Matt O'Sullivan  
Chair**



## Labor Senators' additional comments

- 1.1 The Albanese Labor Government is committed to driving real improvements in learning and wellbeing outcomes for school students.
- 1.2 Labor Senators value the role of teachers and school leaders in Australian society and celebrate our teachers' commitment to their students. We also note the complexities inherent in teaching in the twenty-first century.
- 1.3 Labor Senators understand the importance of productive learning environments that support students to fully engage in their learning in order to meet their aspirations and achieve their potential. Further, they note Australian students' reports of a decline in disciplinary climate between 2009 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> Classroom disruption can have a significant impact on student learning and negatively impact the experience of teachers and school staff.
- 1.4 Labor Senators note that the causes of classroom disruption are complex and multifaceted, and may result from factors including availability of or support for teachers, classroom management practices, student background, or limited levels of effectively differentiated learning opportunities that lead to boredom and 'acting out'.
- 1.5 Labor Senators note the strong links between vaping, nicotine withdrawal and classroom disruption, and the fact that about one in six high school students are vaping.<sup>2</sup> The Minister for Health and Aged Care is leading strong action on behalf of the Government. On 6 July 2023, Education Ministers agreed to work with Health Ministers to combat vaping in schools.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.6 Labor Senators are broadly supportive of many of the recommendations made in this report, and note the significant investments that have already been made to promote higher levels of engagement in Australian classrooms, including:
  - \$3.5 million to the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) for the Engaged Classrooms initiative, to develop evidence-based tools,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019). *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results, Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), pp. 88–89.

<sup>2</sup> The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care. *Press Conference*, 28 November 2023. <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/minister-for-health-and-aged-care-press-conference-28-november-2023?language=en>.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education, *Education Ministers Meeting Communique*, 6 July 2023, <https://www.education.gov.au/education-ministers-meeting/resources/education-ministers-meeting-communique-july-2023> (accessed 30 November 2023).

routines, strategies and approaches to support teachers in effectively managing classrooms;<sup>4</sup>

- Almost \$5 million to expand the Quality Teaching Rounds to an additional 1,600 teachers, providing support for teachers to collaboratively develop their classroom practice;<sup>5</sup>
- More than \$3 million to design and deliver free microcredential courses – vital professional development opportunities for school staff, teachers and school leaders, including in behaviour management; and<sup>6</sup>
- \$203.7 million to help young people in every classroom through the Student Wellbeing Boost, and \$307.18 million for a new five-year Federation Funding Agreement to deliver the National Student Wellbeing Program.<sup>7</sup>

- 1.7 Labor Senators note Recommendation 9 – which supports the implementation of a national Universal Student Identifier. A decision of the Australian Government made in 2009, significant progress was made on this matter in December 2022 when the Education Minister Meeting agreed to a model to roll-out the Unique Student Identifier (USI) to all school students nationally.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.8 Understanding the links that may exist between students with disability and classroom engagement, Labor Senators note that the Albanese Labor Government is committed to driving action through Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031 to build a more inclusive society. The strategy is Australia’s national disability policy framework, outlining the commitment made by all levels of government to work towards a unified, national approach to improving inclusion for people with disability. A key outcome area of the strategy is focused on education and learning, so that people with disability have access to education so they reach their full potential.
- 1.9 Labor Senators note the findings of the Teacher Education Expert Panel which found that while there are great initial teacher education (ITE) programs nationally, too many beginning teachers have reported that they felt that they

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<sup>4</sup> The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, ‘*More support for teachers to manage the classroom*’ Media Release, 2 May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education and Sharon Claydon MP, Member for Newcastle, ‘*Expansion of Quality Teaching Rounds Program*’ Media Release 27 July 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, ‘*Free short courses to help teachers in the classroom*’, Media release 21 September 2023.

<sup>7</sup> The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education ‘*Half a billion dollar investment into student wellbeing*’, Media Release 2 February 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education, *Education Ministers Meeting Communique*, 15 December 2022, [www.education.gov.au/education-ministers-meeting/resources/education-ministers-meeting-communique-15-december-2022](http://www.education.gov.au/education-ministers-meeting/resources/education-ministers-meeting-communique-15-december-2022) (accessed 30 November 2023).

needed to be better equipped to work in a contemporary classroom.<sup>9</sup> ‘Strong Beginnings’, the report of this panel recommended that initial teacher education programs embed Core Content in Classroom Management – rules and routines, proactive practices, managing behaviour, and whole-school behaviour frameworks.

- 1.10 Labor Senators note that in response to ‘Strong Beginnings’, Education Ministers have agreed to ensure core content is embedded in all ITE programs before the end of 2025.<sup>10</sup>
- 1.11 In recognition of the role of states and territories, and the Non-Government school sector play in the delivery of education, Labor Senators note the potential of the next intergovernmental schools agreement to build on the good work being done in Australian schools – particularly in the areas of equity and wellbeing.
- 1.12 In preparation for this, Education Ministers have sought advice from the expert panel conducting Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System – whose terms of reference including advising on the targets and reforms that should drive real improvements in student outcomes, and how the next agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing, and support schools to attract and retain teachers.<sup>11</sup> In its Consultation Paper, the expert panel noted that learning environment is a factor that impacts on student outcomes, including for students most at risk of falling behind.<sup>12</sup>
- 1.13 Labor Senators anticipate that the next schools agreement will empower systems, schools, educators and communities through the reforms and targets that will make a difference to Australian students.

**Senator Tony Sheldon**  
**Deputy Chair**

**Senator Fatima Payman**  
**Member**

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/resources/strong-beginnings-report-teacher-education-expert-panel> (Accessed 30 November 2023)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education, [Education Ministers Meeting Communique, 6 July 2023](#) (Accessed 30 November 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education, [Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Terms of Reference](#) (Accessed 30 November 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education, [Better and Fairer Education System – Consultation Paper](#). (Accessed 30 November 2023).



# Australian Greens Dissenting Report

- 1.1 From the outset the framing of this inquiry has had the potential to demonise children and young people and punish parents and carers. Instead of considering the real issues that lead to students struggling and disengaging in classrooms, it has engaged with the topic in ways that are wholly detached from socioeconomic and psychosocial challenges.
- 1.2 This inquiry should have started with the question ‘why are these students coming into school today feeling distracted, unheard or frustrated?’. We either believe that students are inherently ‘badly behaved’, or we can engage with the reality and circumstances of their lives and feelings:

... 72 per cent of children have been exposed to at least one adverse childhood experience such as bullying, family violence, sexual abuse, racism, neglect, death of a parent, parental mental health or substance use issues, food or housing insecurity or environmental disaster.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 Evidence indicates that part of students struggling can stem from a failure of accommodation for disability. Autism CRC submitted that ‘students, including students with disabilities, may have difficulty communicating their needs and may express frustration if these needs are not understood or addressed’ and that this could ‘lead to the interpretation of behaviours as being disruptive rather than communicative’.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4 Students with a disability are disproportionately suspended and excluded.<sup>3</sup> This profoundly undermines the right to an education, and focusing on increasing support rather than removing it should be a priority.
- 1.5 Information that Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (QAI) obtained through right to information processes showed that nearly half of suspended and excluded students have a disability. Students from First Nations communities and students living in out-of-home care are also disproportionately represented in these statistics.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.6 Everyone working in the education system has a right to feel safe, secure and protected in their workplace. Schools have a unique place in society, serving as both places of education and workspaces. Educators often bear the brunt of broader socio-economic challenges as one of the few institutional touchpoints

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<sup>1</sup> MacKillop Family Services, *Submission 34*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Autism CRC, *Submission 25*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ms Sophie Wiggans, Systems Advocate, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 20 April 2023, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ms Sophie Wiggans, Systems Advocate, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 20 April 2023, p. 6.

for disadvantaged children. Ensuring that these workspaces are free from risk is critical.

- 1.7 This can be partially addressed by expanding teacher training. However, this risks shifting the burden of student's struggling wholly onto teachers, with the premise being that these teachers simply don't know how to manage their classrooms.
- 1.8 Critical to any expansion of professional learning opportunities is that teachers are provided with both the time and funding support. Mandating or increasing professional development, without increasing in parallel the amount of support and administrative staff, and a reduction in face-to-face teaching time, simply means a further expansion of teacher's working hours, rather than a reduction. Teachers must have the time and space to actually take up development opportunities. Any expansion of professional development or curriculum must take this into account.
- 1.9 Further, rather than assuming that behaviours of concern drag down literacy and numeracy, it is worthwhile to also interrogate whether the overemphasis on standardised testing leads to an environment that is more conducive to misbehaviour. This was referred to by Dr Helen Egeberg in the course of hearings:

Teachers tell us that their instructional time is being disrupted by testing, data collection and form filling. Research indicates the demoralising impact of incessant standardised testing. Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, the gurus of assessment for learning, pointed this out to us in their seminal work from 1998, explaining that as teachers we need to recognise the profound influence of assessment on students' motivation and self-esteem, both of which are crucial influences on learning and behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

- 1.10 It is for similar reasons that an overemphasis on explicit instruction as a silver bullet removes the autonomy of teachers to cater to the students and classrooms that they know. Removing the ability for teachers to adapt their instruction in the classroom means a sliding disconnect between students and teachers. Education policy should fundamentally be about inspiring enthusiasm and enjoyment of learning. Dr Helen Egeberg noted that a study of early childhood teachers' experiences of behaviour in their classrooms showed an increase in challenged behaviour with the onset of mandated explicit direct instruction in their classrooms.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.11 Scripted routines and approaches are a profoundly simplistic way to manage students in a classroom. It demonstrates a failure to understand outside

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<sup>5</sup> Dr Helen Egeber, Senior Lecturer, Edith Cowan University School of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dr Helen Egeber, Senior Lecturer, Edith Cowan University School of Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 7 June 2023, p. 1.

purposes, as well as removing any space for nuance and empathy and, importantly, freedom for teachers to manage their classrooms using their expertise and judgement.

- 1.12 These recommendations are based on the premise that challenging teaching environments can be improved through increased training and a more rigid curriculum. In reality, and as the inquiry has borne out, it is not a problem of disruption, it is a problem of disregard and neglect by governments.
- 1.13 Central to the issues of classroom conditions is the funding crisis in our public school system. Just 1.3% of Australian public schools are funded to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). Public schools are overwhelmingly responsible for teaching young people experiencing various forms of disadvantage or additional need. The immediate full funding of public schools should be the starting point for any reform.

### **Recommendation 1**

- 1.14 Fully fund public schools at the beginning of the next National School Reform Agreement in 2025.**
- 1.15 Final recommendations are reserved for the final report.

**Senator Penny Allman-Payne**  
**Substitute Member**



# Appendix 1

## Submissions and Additional Information

- 1 Disability Discrimination Legal Service
- 2 Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
- 3 Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA)
- 4 Australian Catholic University
- 5 Dr Greg Ashman
- 6 Food Intolerance Network
- 7 *Name Withheld*
- 8 *Name Withheld*
- 9 *Name Withheld*
- 10 *Name Withheld*
- 11 Australian Council of State School Organisations Ltd
- 12 Mr John Corrigan and Dr Mark Merry
- 13 InSpEd
- 14 Country Education Partnership (CEP)
- 15 Transforming Education Australasia
- 16 Associate Professor Rebecca Collie
- 17 Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA)
- 18 The Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education
- 19 Catholic School Parents Australia
- 20 Queensland University of Technology - Centre for Inclusive Education
- 21 Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion
- 22 Australian Secondary Principals' Association
- 23 Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)
- 24 Department of Education
- 25 Autism CRC
- 26 Children and Young People with Disability Australia
- 27 National Catholic Education Commission
- 28 MultiLit
- 29 NSW Secondary Principals' Council
- 30 Monash University Faculty of Education
- 31 Parents Victoria
- 32 ARACY
- 33 Australian Education Union Federal Office
- 34 MacKillop Family Services
- 35 Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter)
- 36 New South Wales Primary Principals Association
- 37 Square Peg Round Whole WA
- 38 Berry Street Victoria

- 39 Disability Advocacy NSW
- 40 St Joseph' Flexible Learning Centre
- 41 Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented
- 42 Australian Society for Music Education
- 43 Independent Schools Australia
- 44 Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
- 45 Commissioner for Children and Young People (SA)
- 46 Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW
- 47 Western Australia Council of State School Organisations
- 48 Schofields Public School Parents and Citizens Association
- 49 Square Peg Round Whole Australia
- 50 Social Ventures Australia
  - Attachment 1
- 51 Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations
- 52 The Y WA
- 53 Advocate for Children and Young People NSW
  - Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
- 54 University of Tasmania School of Education
- 55 Office of the Children's Commissioner Northern Territory
- 56 Children & Media Australia
- 57 Australian Psychological Society
- 58 Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese
- 59 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- 60 Northern Territory Department of Education
- 61 The Autistic Realm Australia
- 62 ADHD Australia and Macquarie University
- 63 Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People
- 64 *Name Withheld*
- 65 *Name Withheld*
- 66 *Name Withheld*
- 67 *Name Withheld*
- 68 *Name Withheld*
- 69 *Name Withheld*
- 70 *Name Withheld*
- 71 Carol Barnes
- 72 Ms Olivia Grant
- 73 Dr Sarah Bernard
- 74 Dr David Roberts
- 75 Dr Geoff Kewley
  - Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2

- 76 *Name Withheld*
- 77 Jo Rogers
- 78 Stephen Michael Foundation
- Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
  - Attachment 3
  - Attachment 4
  - Attachment 5
  - Attachment 6
- 79 *Confidential*
- 80 Dr Bob Riessen
- 81 *Name Withheld*
- 82 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- 83 Mr K. J Brown

#### **Answer to Question on Notice**

- 1 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Queensland Advocacy of Inclusion at a public hearing on 20 April 2023, received 5 May 2023
- 2 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Queensland University of Technology at a public hearing on 20 April 2023, received 8 May 2023
- 3 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 4 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 5 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 6 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 7 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 8 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 9 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 10 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 11 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 12 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 13 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023

- 14 Answer to a question taken on notice by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 15 Attachment for question on notice 9, provided by the WA Department of Education following a public hearing in Perth on 7 June 2023, received 14 July 2023
- 16 Answers to questions taken on notice by MultiLit at a public hearing on 4 August 2023, received 25 August 2023
- 17 Answers to questions taken on notice by the NSW Department of Education at a public hearing on 4 August 2023, received 30 August 2023.
- 18 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Australian Catholic University at a public hearing on 4 August 2023, received 5 September 2023
- 19 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, received 23 October 2023
- 20 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, received 23 October 2023
- 21 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Australian Education Research Organisation at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, received 13 October 2023
- 22 Answers to questions taken on notice by the Australian Education Research Organisation at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, received 13 October 2023
- 23 Answers to questions taken on notice by Dr Donna Cross OAM at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, answers were provided by the NSW Department of Education, received on 13 November 2023
- 24 Answers to questions taken on notice by The Autistic Realm Australia at a public hearing on 15 September 2023, received on 3 November 2023

### **Additional Information**

- 1 Dawson Park Primary School, Public School Review, February 2022
- 2 Role of the Speech Pathologist at Dawson Park Primary School
- 3 Comparative Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) and NAPLAN results for Dawson Park Primary School
- 4 A-Z of Ngala's Programs and Services 2022–23
- 5 Parenting Programs delivered by Parenting Connection Western Australia
- 6 Exclusionary discipline - Students with Disability, Square Peg Round Whole Western Australia

## Appendix 2

# Public Hearings and Witnesses

*Thursday, 20 April 2023*

Brisbane Airport Conference Centre  
2 Dryandra Road  
Brisbane Airport

*Queensland University of Technology - Centre for Inclusive Education*

- Professor Linda Graham, Director

*Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion*

- Ms Matilda Alexander, Chief Executive Officer
- Sophie Wiggans, Systems Advocate
- Elly Desmarchelier, Project Worker

*The Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education*

- Mr Dale Murray, Co-Chair

*Catholic School Parents Australia*

- Ms Carmel Nash OAM, Executive Member

*Australian Secondary Principals' Association*

- Mr Andrew Pierpoint, President
- Mr Mark Breckenridge, Vice-President
- Mrs Robyn Thorpe, President of Northern Territory Principals Association (via teleconference)

*Wednesday, 7 June 2023*

Freemantle Room  
Parmelia Hilton  
Perth

*Dr Helen Egeberg, Private capacity*

*Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators Association (WAESPAA)*

- Ms Deborah Taylor, President

*WA Department of Education*

- Ms Lisa Rodgers, Director General
- Ms Melesha Sands, Deputy Director General - Schools
- Mr Martin Clery, Executive Director - Statewide Services
- Mr Stuart Percival, Assistant Executive Director, Professional Capability

- Mr John Burke, Principal, Bob Hawke College
- Ms Louise O'Donovan, Principal, Wattleup East Primary School

*Ngala*

- Ms Amanda Lovelock, Head of Operations
- Ms Natalie Alach, Senior Coordinator PCWA
- Ms Nancy Kirby, Operations Manager (via teleconference)

*Square Peg Round Whole WA*

- Ms Symone Wheatley-Hey, State Coordinator/Member advocate
- Ms Tania Cataldo, Member advocate

*The Y WA*

- Dr Tim McDonald, Chief Executive Officer

*Stephen Michael Foundation*

- Mr Paul Mugambwa, Chief Executive Officer

*Western Australia Council of State School Organisations*

- Mrs Pania Turner, President

*Friday, 4 August 2023*

Cora & Cruwee Rooms

Pullman Sydney Airport Hotel

Sydney

*Dr Jennifer Buckingham OAM, Private capacity*

*MultiLit*

- Dr Robyn Wheldall, Director

*Australian Catholic University*

- Dr Paul Kidson, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership

*Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA)*

- Mrs Karen Yager, Vice President

*NSW Department of Education*

- Ms Leanne Nixon, A/g Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement
- Ms Cathy Brennan, A/g Deputy Secretary, School Performance North

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*Friday, 15 September 2023*

Committee Room 2S3

Parliament House

Canberra

*The Centre for Independent Studies*

- Mr Glenn Fahey, Program Director, Education Policy

*Dr Donna Cross OAM, Private capacity*

*Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority*

- Mr David de Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Sharon Foster, Executive Director, Curriculum
- Mr Russell Dyer, Executive Director, Assessment & Reporting

*The Autistic Realm Australia*

- Ms Anna Colbasso, Co-Founder and Chair
- Dr Yolande McNicoll, Secretary (Executive role), Board Member
- Mrs Kylieanne Derwent, Vice President (via videoconference)

*Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership*

- Mr Mark Grant, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Edmund Misson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

*Australian Education Research Organisation*

- Dr Jenny Donovan, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Sarah Richardson, Program Director

*Department of Education*

- Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary, Teaching and Learning Division
- Genevieve Watson, Assistant Secretary, Teaching Practice Branch

*Tuesday, 7 November 2023*

Committee Room 2S1

Parliament House

Canberra

*Professor Tom Bennett OBE, Private capacity*