



QUT Education, within the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), is pleased to submit this position paper in response to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee call for submissions to its Inquiry into disruption in Australian school classrooms.

QUT has a strong and extended history in providing high quality teacher education and leading transformative educational research to inform policy and practice. This submission has been developed by researchers within **QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education** and teacher educators involved in the provision of initial and postgraduate teacher education at QUT (see Attachment 1 for contributing QUT researchers).

QUT Education provides a suite of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, at both Bachelor and Master levels, preparing teachers to work across the education continuum (i.e., prior to school early education, primary and secondary education). We also offer postgraduate courses that address priority areas in education, including Graduate Certificate and Master of Education programs that specialise in educational leadership, inclusive education and trauma-aware education.

The Centre for Inclusive Education ([C4IE](#)) is founded on an understanding that Inclusive Education is a fundamental human right that enables all other rights. The Centre exists to produce research that will reduce exclusion and increase inclusion to provide all children and young people with high-quality, inclusive, and equitable opportunities to learn and develop as independent and valued human beings.

This submission is structured in alignment with the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, which are addressed in turn below.

(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

The premise for this Term of Reference is that Australia ranked 69th of 76 countries in disciplinary climate in PISA 2018. However, as noted on pages 66-67 of the OECD PISA 2018 report (2019), the wide cultural and economic variation across the countries surveyed likely play into their rankings. The 2018 report also notes: "On average across OECD countries, almost one in three students reported that, in every or most lessons, students do not listen to the teacher or there is noise and disorder" (p. 66). Australia is ranked alongside similar English-speaking settler colonies like New Zealand (65th) and Canada (60th), and Scandinavian countries, like The Netherlands (67th) and Finland (62nd). It is not clear from either the 2009 or 2018 reports if there is a statistically significant difference between Australia and the OECD average. **Further, claims as to placement or declines in ranking are problematic, given the increasing number of countries participating in each PISA round¹ and clustering of statistically indistinguishable performances, which are not reported.** The tables in which countries are "ranked" therefore cannot be used to make strong claims about student behaviour, behaviour management practice, or initial teacher education in any of the participating OECD countries. While it is clear that Australian students self-report higher rates of classroom noise and disorder than students in some other OECD countries, particularly those in the top 5 (Korea, Kazakhstan, Albania, B-S-J-Z (China) and Japan), there are numerous systemic and classroom factors, unrelated to individual misbehaviour, that are relevant for interpretation of data relating to classroom noise and time to quiet down. For example, Australian classrooms are characterised by a constructivist approach to teaching, which places high emphasis on student agency and voice, group work and inquiry-learning.

There is empirical evidence that Australian educators find low-level disruptive and disengaged behaviours to be the most prevalent and the most challenging to manage (Sullivan et al., 2014). This team also found that

¹ Participation in PISA has grown from 43 countries in the first assessment in 2000 to 79 countries in 2018. Sixty-five countries participated in 2009.



the step approaches teachers' report using, "may not address the underlying causes of that behaviour" (p. 53), suggesting a disconnect between teachers' interpretation of behavioural antecedents which could be addressed through quality professional learning in classroom management. **However, it would be a mistake to stop at classroom management for student behaviour is influenced by a multitude of factors and there are important patterns in disciplinary data which point to much deeper problems within our education systems.** Three recent studies into the use of exclusionary school discipline in Australia have identified overrepresentation of students in priority equity groups: Indigenous students, students with disability, and students living in care (Graham et al., 2020a; Graham et al., 2022; Graham et al., forthcoming).

Analyses that further disaggregate these groups (Indigenous only, Indigenous + disability, Indigenous + in care, Indigenous + disability + in care) indicate that disability is a 'common denominator' among students who receive repeat suspensions. This has implications for the accessibility of classroom teaching and the provision of reasonable adjustments and support in schools, something that was found lacking in the *Inquiry into suspension, exclusion and expulsion processes in South Australian government schools* (Graham et al., 2020a). **The needs of these students cannot be addressed through behaviour management alone. They need highly skilled, resourced, and supported teachers who are provided with time to plan for all students in their class and to teach all of those students well.** Those teachers also need time to consult with parents, colleagues, and allied-health professionals (Mann et al., 2020; Tancredi et al., 2020). Australian teachers currently do not have the time, support or access to specialist colleagues to do this work to the level required and there is a flow-on to behaviour.

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

The percentage of teachers feeling unsafe at work has increased from 18.9% to 24.5%, an increase of 5.6 percent from 2019 to 2022 (Longmuir et al., 2022). Student behaviour and violence was cited as one factor among many including parent abuse, negative relationships with staff and school leaders, and concerns related to COVID-19. Teachers need time to develop and maintain relationships with students, parents, and colleagues (Van Bergen et al., 2020), as well as access to ongoing training and support to effectively meet the needs of students with complex learning profiles (Mann et al., 2020; Tancredi et al., 2020; Swancutt et al., 2020). Teachers also report the impact of workload and perceived respect within the broader community on their work satisfaction (Longmuir et al., 2022). A recent independent Inquiry into teachers' work found that teaching had both intensified and become dramatically more complex over the years. The work is more professionally demanding, yet teachers' status and remuneration has not kept pace (Gallop, et al., 2021). **Notably, Australian teachers spend more hours teaching than the OECD average (838.28 hours/year vs 800.45 hours respectively) and considerably more than their counterparts in countries like Korea (516.98), which is ranked first in classroom disciplinary climate.** QUT supports current workforce initiatives to address these concerns and enhance the professional work context of teachers across the education continuum (National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, 2022; National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, 2022).

(c) The robustness, quality and extent of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms

Initial Teacher Education is highly regulated in Australia. All of QUT's courses are nationally accredited and enable teacher registration. Aligning to accreditation requirements (ACECQA, 2020; AITSL, 2020), and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2022), our programs are designed to equip graduate teachers with the pedagogical knowledge, skills and confidence to teach diverse learners. This includes development of a suite of proactive and evidence-informed strategies to create and maintain safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments, and to provide positive behaviour support for individual students.

All ITE courses teach preservice teachers about behaviour and classroom management. While course design varies, this is most often addressed in focused units supported by embedded learning and assessment across the degree. Supporting the translation of theory to practice, this includes embedding and assessing this learning in professional experience and the capstone Teaching Performance Assessment.



Research from a 6-year longitudinal study—using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008); a direct measure of teaching quality developed by the *Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning* at the University of Virginia—with 68 primary school teachers from seven Queensland primary schools serving disadvantaged communities found no differences between beginning and experienced teachers in the quality of teaching, including in behaviour management (Graham et al., 2020b). While beginning teachers were doing as well as experienced teachers there were some differences at the classroom level which demonstrated the impact of teacher productivity on classroom behaviour (Graham, 2018). Using a different measure with almost 1000 primary school teachers in New South Wales, Gore et al., (2023) also found no difference in the quality of teaching in any experience category. **Together, these two studies suggest that initial teacher education is preparing graduates to engage in similar level teaching quality as their more experienced colleagues.**

Teaching is demanding and complex professional work, and ‘initial’ teacher education programs address the knowledge and skills required to enter the profession. While there is always room for improvement, preliminary review confirms we are already addressing core content recommended in the recent Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper (2023) and continuing to promote evidence-based practices. In the context of classroom management, this includes building capacity to establish and teach rules and routines; implement proactive practices; model and acknowledge desired behaviour; and respond to persistent misbehaviour. Informed by neuroscience, we have also introduced a core unit on Trauma-Aware Education in our ITE programs which addresses the impacts of childhood trauma on learning and behaviour and provides preservice teachers with practical strategies to teach self-regulation and positive behaviour.

Of course, initial teacher education is only the beginning: teachers also need access to high quality continuous professional learning. QUT offers a suite of postgraduate programs targeting priority areas of learning identified by the profession. This includes our Graduate Certificate and Master of Education in Inclusive Education and in Trauma-Aware Education. Leveraging our teaching and research strengths in these areas, these programs address cutting edge practices in addressing reading and writing difficulties, multi-tiered systems of support and creating positive learning environments. Seeking to strengthen inclusion within state education, the Queensland Department of Education funded scholarships for principals to complete the QUT Master of Education (Inclusive Education).

As a nation, we 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. These necessitate appropriate and considered adjustments and supports informed by current evidence-based support practices and research. Here responsibility is shared across the education ecosystem. ITE providers need to be resourced with adequate funding to teach preservice teachers well about inclusive learning, positive behaviour support and effective classroom management. Teachers need time and funding support to access high quality ongoing professional learning opportunities, including postgraduate education programs. Government and employers need to create and maintain a supportive work environment, with attention to work culture and the conditions that support genuine inclusion and enable the meaningful participation of all students.

(d) The loss of instructional teacher time because of disorder and distraction in Australian school classrooms

Evidence from large scale longitudinal studies—both in the United States and Australia—show that disorder and disruption arise from low productivity (e.g., where teachers do not have sufficient time to prepare lessons, organise materials and resources, manage supporting technology). Productivity is one element of teaching explicitly measured using the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008). Importantly, some dimensions of the CLASS are interrelated. Poor performance in one dimension can affect performance in other dimensions and strong performance in one dimension can ameliorate poor performance in another. Productivity and Behaviour Management are two such dimensions. If teachers do not have time to plan and prepare and the class is kept waiting, this has a knock-on effect for behaviour management (see Graham, 2018). **Focusing on behaviour management is therefore only one part of the puzzle, an important one but insufficient without strong content knowledge and well-planned lessons, delivered through accessible and responsive pedagogy.** Time for planning, especially collaborative planning, is critically lacking for Australian teachers.



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

Large-scale longitudinal studies have found that increases in the quality of teaching are associated with reduction in off-task behaviour and noncompliance with requests (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005). High quality classroom interactions are characterised by teacher knowledge of students' academic and emotional needs, use of consistent routines and scaffolding, and proactive approaches to supporting behaviour, including supporting students to regulate their attention during the class (La Paro et al., 2004). Conversely, negative classroom climates and punitive school disciplinary practices, such as suspension, are associated with lower school achievement, reduced trust in school authorities, increases in anti-social behaviour, early school leaving and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Pyne et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2020a).

(f) 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

Since the 1990s, Australian governments have promoted education to ensure national economic competitiveness. Youth policies in Australia aiming to improve post-school attainment have focused on individuals, often attributing poorer post-school outcomes and youth unemployment to young people's poor attitudes. However, an "increasingly tenuous relationship exists between educational attainment and well-paid, meaningful jobs, particularly for young people" (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016). Despite younger Australians achieving higher levels of education than previous generations, their higher participation in education is not necessarily associated with a higher employment rate. Instead, evidence shows that increasing youth unemployment lies in structural factors, rather than in the intrinsic personal qualities of young people. These structural factors include the extension of time spent in education (increased number of young people engaging in post-compulsory education), the increased prevalence of insecure work in the labour market, and increased labour market competition (Borland & Coelli, 2021).

Widespread and ongoing media attention has been given to apparently declining and/or stagnating reading and numeracy as measured in NAPLAN testing; however, these claims often reflect a misinterpretation of the data and the inherent sampling variability expected to occur from year to year (Larsen, 2022). There is limited research investigating the relationship between NAPLAN outcomes and final school results or post-school outcomes, with only one study on the former known to the authors (Houng & Justman, 2014). Nonetheless, it is known that many Australian adults (some 2.3 million; 14%) have literacy levels below what is considered necessary for meeting the demands of life and work (Productivity Commission, 2020), indicating the importance of high-quality and evidence-informed teaching of reading throughout school, and particularly in the early years. There is also a well-known association between poor reading progress and disengaged/disruptive behaviour, however, the latter is what commonly attracts attention in schools (Graham et al., 2020c). A longitudinal study tracking 118 children through Grades 1-3 pointed to the impact of misidentification on the type of support provided to students who were provided a behaviour plan or a wobble chair but not the reading instruction they needed (Graham et al., 2020c).

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

There is strong evidence that participation in high quality and inclusive early childhood education and care provides the foundation for successful transition to school and engagement in lifelong learning (Thorpe et al. 2020). The benefits are well documented and include positive impact on self-regulation and behaviour. In the English Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study, Taggart et al. (2015) found a high association between participation in high quality early education and pro-social behaviours in school, evidenced up to the age of 14 years. Similarly, in a Queensland longitudinal study, Thorpe et al. (2020) used



data linkage to track students entering school from Prep through to Year 8 in secondary school. The study identified high emotional support in preschool (as measured by CLASS) was the single greatest predictor of student behaviour in school over time.

In line with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania are investing in two years of universal preschool education led by a degree qualified early childhood teacher. This is an important and evidence-informed investment that needs to be replicated across all states and territories.

The Queensland government is investing \$3.2 million into Positive Behaviour Intervention Supports (PBIS) and the South Australian government is also implementing PBIS. The NSW government has also developed a new behaviour strategy and recently appointed Professor Donna Cross as their Behaviour Advisor. All sectors and systems need to adopt Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Graham et al., 2020a)

(h) 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

Reforms over the last decade in the United States are worthy of further investigation for adaptation and potential implementation in Australian schools. Their public-school systems have responded to Federal government guiding principles issued in 2014 to implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. MTSS draws on the tenets and tiered approaches of PBIS (behaviour) and Response to Intervention (academic) and incorporates a third developmental domain of social-emotional. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been embedded in curriculum and delivered at both universal, and targeted/intensive tiers in US schools, to explicitly teach self-regulation and responsible decision-making to children throughout their 13 years of school. This has been achieved with success in very challenging public-school districts, including Chicago Public Schools and the Los Angeles Unified Schools District, where there is evidence of reduction in the use of exclusionary school discipline, increased school safety, and improved social and academic outcomes (Graham et al., 2020a; Graham et al., 2022). **Importantly, implementation of any SEL programs and practices need to be developed and tested here, particularly given the historical dispossession and trauma for Aboriginal students, the latent racial bias in our community, and the unique context that this brings for Australian schools.**

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