



THE AUTISTIC REALM AUSTRALIA

Submission to the Inquiry into Disruption in School Classrooms (School disruption)



Diversity is Autistic Reality.

YOLANDE MCNICOLL

She / Her

Living on unceded lands of the
Boonwurrung/Bunurong and
Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples
of the Eastern Kulin Nation

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She / Her

Living on unceded lands of the
Bhwerawerri, Budawang, Jerrinja,
Murramarang, Tomikin, Wadi
Wadi, Wandi Wandandian, Yuin,

ANNA COLBASSO

She / Her

Living on unceded lands of the
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

► Acknowledgment of Country

We at The Autistic Realm Australia (TARA) acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country, and that the operation and administration of our organisation takes place on the stolen, unceded land of First Nations.

We recognise the Traditional Owners' continuing connection to land, waters and culture and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. ¹



TARA gives thanks to Dana Trenaman for research and idea generation.

¹ Many thanks to Diedre from Blackfulla Revolution for their support and advice on our acknowledgement statement.

As marginalised minorities with a different story, but both with a long history of violence and oppression perpetrated against us, we stand together.



Submission to the Inquiry into Disruption in School Classrooms (School disruption)

The Autistic Realm Australia Inc (TARA) would like to thank the Senate Education and Employment Committees for the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Select Enquiry into “The issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms.”

As Autistic adults representing a grassroots Advocacy organisation with a diverse membership base, we amplify the voices of our membership as well as offer our own unique insight and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further our position in person.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission presents the Autistic experience and insight of our Board and members to improve understanding of School Disruption and how it relates to Autistic students.







We believe that both students and teachers have rights, and that these rights can be compatible in a school environment that fosters mutual respect and trust between teachers and students.

- ▶ We believe that School Disruption and School Can't are inherently linked, multifaceted and complex issues that require an holistic approach
- ▶ Students whose needs are not met may respond by being disruptive, whether those students have a disability and/or needs
- ▶ It is integration, not inclusion, to place students with a disability in mainstream schools without providing support to ensure equity. It is discriminatory and ineffective
- ▶ We reject any suggestion that students with a disability (or Autistic students specifically) are the sole or main cause of school disruption. This Inquiry must consider e.g., how bullying etc contributes to rising school disruption
- ▶ A classroom environment can 'disrupt' or distress Autistic students. This is easily solved by enabling students to reduce distressing sensory input and allowing them to access their best self-regulating strategies
- ▶ Current practices of suspension, segregation, isolation, and expulsion in response to School Disruption punish Autistic students for features of their disability, e.g., for becoming dysregulated when their needs are not met. These practices contribute in a real way to denying Autistic students access to an education, which is their human right.
- ▶ Neither teachers nor students will benefit from any changes that enforce a more hierarchical power relationship of teachers over their students, or increase access to (the use of) more and different sanctions and punishments.



This submission describes, explains, and provides references for techniques that assist Autistic students, avoid, or defuse disruption and promote safety in the classroom and broader school environment for all students, teachers, and other school staff.

We urge the Panel to consider our recommendations, which are provided at relevant points in this submission, and aggregated below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	To support all young Australians at risk of educational disadvantage, make it the norm to create equitable access for all students to be present at school and engage with the school curriculum.
	As part of developing a school culture of mutual respect between staff and students, all staff who have student contact should have some training about Autism and how it is experienced by Autistic students. This training should be co-designed and should address i) basic understanding and ii) all the different needs of teachers, principals and other staff who contribute to managing schools and making decisions that affect students, on the campus and in the administration of government school districts.
	Schools must embed Trauma-Informed Practices in all areas of service delivery
	It is imperative that teachers be taught to self-regulate effectively (and why this is critical to reducing School Disruption) so that they do not model the behaviour they do not wish to see. A teacher who shouts, or escalates conflict is participating in disrupting the classroom and needs training and support.
	Mandate minimum requirements for qualification, employment, and continuing teacher registration to include compulsory pre-service training and continuing professional development in the following topics, at a minimum: child development, trauma, ² being Autistic, School Disruption and School Can't, inclusion and equity in practice.
	Ensure that all education policies and standards are developed with a Universal Design for Learning approach that is strengths-based and trauma-informed, to support Human Rights, Intersectionality, Identity as a culture, Gender & Gender diversity.

² This systematic literature review found 4 papers between 2011 and 2022 that included the discussion of complex trauma, primary school teachers and how prepared they were for working with traumatised students. This indicates a need for more understanding. *Australian*

	<p>We endorse the OECD recommendation that teachers should have seats on School Management committees, as (when appropriately trained) teachers can be an effective advocate for the child.</p>
	<p>The Productivity Commission should be requested to investigate the social and economic cost of suspension and expulsion, in terms of denying students access to school.</p> <p>This investigation should consistently examine the representation of equity groups such as students with disabilities, Indigenous students, CARM (Culturally and Racially Marginalised), low socioeconomic status students, etc in suspension and expulsion statistics, and provide baseline data to facilitate the monitoring of improvement.</p>
	<p>Develop a national standard for the practice of suspension and expulsion, i.e., a model that is followed, accountable and measurable.</p>
	<p>Make the collection and retention of statistics about suspensions and expulsions mandatory across all types of institutions, departments, and schools. Ensure statistics are collected on child differences, including Autism and mental health; require that this information be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reported annually to state and federal education departments, ▪ reported to Parliament and made publicly available on the Commonwealth education portfolio website, broken down state-by-state, and; ▪ mandate that issues revealed by the statistics must be actioned.
	<p>The recommendations from the National School Reform should be put into place, in particular the Unique Student Identifier (USI) should be applied to schools.³</p>

Teachers' Perception of their Preparedness to Teach Traumatized Students: A Systematic Literature Review.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/qjte/vol47/iss2/6/>

³ National School Reform Agreement Council of Australian Governments

INTRODUCTION

The Autistic Realm Australia Inc (TARA) is a not-for-profit peer to peer community association providing support, education and advocacy for Autistic people and the parents and carers of Autistic people.

As a 100% founded and Autistic-led organisation, we put Autistic people at the centre of our work. We honour diversity as Autistic reality, acknowledging and supporting all of our members whatever their history, expression of identity or support needs.

Collectively our Board includes BIPOC and CARM (Culturally and racially marginalised) people, voices from LGBTQIA+, rural and regional communities. We are parents of gender diverse children and/or of children with complex presentations and/or members of Autistic and neurodivergent families.

TARA is founded on the core position that Autism is a form of neurodiversity, a natural part of the diversity of human neurology. As such we repudiate all therapies aimed at compliance and suppression of Autistic behaviours, reject stigmatising and victimising language of any sort, and strongly reject attempts to “cure” Autism.

TARA works within the Human Rights model of disability, which recognises the impact that structural and environmental conditions have on a person’s ability to function and live a meaningful life. We challenge preconceived ideas about the capacity of Autistic people and reject simplistic labels that seek to categorise our abilities and challenges. Support levels for the Autistic person are not linear and they change according to the environment and threat versus comfort level and any co-occurring conditions.

Autism is a lifelong Neurodevelopmental difference and not a behavioural disorder. Autistic behaviour serves a purpose; it is very different to misbehaviour, as it is not intentional and provides information to those who seek to support us. For these reasons, we practise the principle that all behaviour is information, and challenge the primacy given to verbal speech as an indicator of a person’s intellectual capacity or ability to live a meaningful life.



“

“...right from the start, from the time someone came up with the word ‘Autism’, the condition has been judged from the outside, by its appearances, and not from the inside according to how it is experienced.”

(Donna Williams, 1996)



Diversity is Autistic Reality.

► What we Do

The Autistic Realm Australia represents Autistic intersectionality. We provide peer support and education via online support groups. We challenge systemic barriers to Autistic people flourishing by active consultation with Government and non-government organisations.

We respond to research, policies and political actions that impact Autistic people and share the knowledge and lived experience from feedback from over 8,500 members of the Autistic and Autism communities. We actively partner with Autistic led organisations with like values to contribute to a social movement that promotes autonomy, improved wellbeing, and equitable opportunities for Autistic Australians.

We have been moderating our online communities since 2016 and support a community of Intersectional Autistics, some of whom are very marginalised and who are disadvantaged and discriminated against. This includes but is not limited to First Nations, intellectual disability, co-occurring mental health conditions, domestic violence, and homeless people, and those requiring significant support.

Our largest community is the TARA parent support group, which supports Autistic children by educating parents and carers and those who seek to support Autistic children. Our most frequently asked questions are about education and the need for change so that Autistic children receive the education they are afforded under the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CPRD), UN Convention the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), and related equality frameworks.

► Our expertise and experience

With the background we have outlined above, we present our expertise and experience in relation to Autistic students (many of whom have other differences and/or disabilities), to 'School Disruption', and the ways in which the two interact.

On a deep, personal level, we know how challenging it is to parent a child who is different, who does not meet milestones, who is bullied, who desperately wants friends, who explodes in the classroom and attacks teachers, who has been suspended or expelled– or not expelled, but "encouraged" to leave a school.

We also know how it feels to **be** that child. We provide a lived experience perspective on managing behaviours – and managing expectations in ways that reduce and avoid the distress which can cause our children to be 'disruptive' in the classroom.

From this position, we work to equip others – educators, healthcare professionals, in fact everyone we come into contact with daily, to recognise the legitimacy and humanity of all Autistic people.

► A note on teachers

TARA will not join the ongoing chorus of teacher-bashing or blame teachers for not using techniques when they are not given the opportunity or support to learn or implement them.

We acknowledge that teachers often fund their own equipment and professional learning and work countless unpaid hours.

According to the OECD, Australian teachers reported working more hours on average over the OECD (45 compared to 39 hours) and spent a lower proportion of that time on teaching (19.9 hours, or 44% of their time compared to the OECD average of 20.6 hours, or 53% of their time). The number of hours of work has increased for Australian teachers over the last five years, and all of this time seems to have been in face-to-face teaching.

Teachers as a profession suffer from extensive abuse in the media, and from parents, the wider public and regrettably sometimes also from governments. At the same time, they continue to do a difficult job with, for the most part, great dedication.

Unlike their OECD counterparts, where 56% of principals stated that teachers were given a voice in management committees, only 30% of Australian teachers were afforded the same opportunities.⁴

► Equity and Autistic students - “All Means All”⁵

The Autistic Realm Australia submits the following report noting that the Terms of Reference do not acknowledge *why* students may disrupt classes. We note also that the OECD report and PISA statistics on which the Terms of Reference rely make no reference to students with disability and allow for students with a disability to be excluded from taking the test.⁶

Further, it is important to acknowledge that among students who disrupt class there are other significant cohorts who are between 15-16 years old and e.g., do not live at home/ are in state care, may have undiagnosed conditions, or have ADHD and whose parents will not allow them to take appropriate medication for relief.

We reject any suggestion that students with a disability or Autistic students specifically are the sole or main cause of school disruption. There are many Autistic students who are conscientious, diligent (sometimes anxiously so) members of the class, who suffer disproportionately when other students are causing disruption.

For more on this point please refer to Term of Reference (f).

What we do believe is that students whose needs are not met in the classroom may respond by being disruptive, whatever those needs may be.⁷

**We do not suggest
that all disruptive
students have a
disability or other
disadvantage**

⁴ Thomson, S., & Hillman, K. J. (2019). TALIS 2018: the Teaching and Learning International Survey: Australian report [vols. 1 and 2].

Including students with a disability in mainstream schools without providing support to ensure equity is no more than integration. It is not inclusion, and it is not equitable. It is retrograde, assimilationist, discriminatory and ineffective.

Providing equitable access does not necessarily have to mean attending mainstream schooling. Certainly, attending mainstream school *without adequate support* is not the solution. Equitable education can be provided in any environment, (e.g., distance education, in-school support units that provide the child with an education at their own pace), that engages them and is psychologically and physically safe.

Equitable education is education that takes place in a space where students feel safe to voice their opinions and contribute in whatever form that may take, e.g., via Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC - whether electronic or manual) ⁸ without fear or humiliation.

A 2020 review found that the Disability Standards for Education 2005 were not adequately understood or implemented in some parts of the Australian education system. ⁹ Contrary to all policies and standards, ¹⁰ Autistic children continue to be excluded from schools, both formally and informally, every day (informal refers to the use of principal's leave etc). This practice contributes to the child's view of themselves, causes alienation and disengagement and begins a vicious cycle of disruption and exclusions. There is a real question about the direction of causation: which comes first, the chicken or the egg?

RECOMMENDATIONS



To support all young Australians at risk of educational disadvantage, make it the norm to create equitable access for all students to be present at school and engage with the school curriculum.

⁵ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁶ OECD, (2015), PISA 2018 Technical Standards

⁷ OECD, (2019) Australia – Country Note, PISA 2018 Results Australia – Country Note – PISA 2018 Results

It is our experience and the observation of our members that access to such medication often means the difference between a student being able to benefit from an educational opportunity and being unable to do so.

⁸ The AAC strategy or technique used by the person aims to maximise an individual's communication skills (i.e., production as well as comprehension) for functional and effective communication of their needs, preferences and wishes." from Factsheet: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), The State of Queensland (Queensland Health) 2021 Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service, August 2021.

⁹ 2020 Review of the Australian Disability Standards for Education, <https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/2020-review-disability-standards-education-2005/final-report>

¹⁰ E.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Australian Disability Standards for Education

	<p>As part of developing a school culture of mutual respect between staff and students, all staff who have student contact should have some training about Autism and how it is experienced by Autistic students. This training should be co-designed and should address i) basic understanding and ii) all the different needs of teachers, principals and other staff who contribute to managing schools and making decisions that affect students, on the campus and in the administration of government school districts.</p>
	<p>Mandate minimum requirements for qualification, employment and continuing teacher registration to include compulsory pre-service training and continuing professional development in the following topics, at a minimum: child development, trauma, being Autistic, School Disruption and School Can't, inclusion and equity in practice.</p>
	<p>The Productivity Commission should be requested to investigate the social and economic cost of suspension and expulsion, in terms of denying students access to school.</p> <p>This investigation should consistently examine the representation of equity groups such as students with disabilities, Indigenous students, CARM (Culturally and Racially Marginalised), low socioeconomic status students, etc in suspension and expulsion statistics, and provide baseline data to facilitate the monitoring of improvement.</p>
	<p>Develop a national standard for the practice of suspension and expulsion, i.e., a model that is followed, accountable and measurable.</p>
	<p>We endorse the OECD recommendation that teachers should have seats on School Management committees, as (when appropriately trained) teachers can be an effective advocate for the child.</p>

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference of the Inquiry are:

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; 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;
- c) the robustness, quality and extent of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms;
- d) the loss of instructional teacher time because of disorder and distraction in Australian school classrooms;
- e) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning, compared with their peers in more disciplined classrooms;
- 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;
- g) how relevant Australian state, territory and federal departments and agencies are working to address this growing challenge;
- 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; and
- i) any related matter.

STRUCTURE OF OUR RESPONSES

The aspects of the Terms of Reference on which this submission focuses are outlined below. We will address only those aspects of these Terms of Reference in which we have specific experience.

Part 1 addresses *elements* of Terms (b), (c), and (d) as follows

(b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms

(c) the empowerment and equipping of teachers to maintain order in the classroom and what can be done to assist them; including classroom management techniques

- ▶ that work for Autistic kids, and
- ▶ that negatively affect Autistic kids and may promote classroom disruption

(d) the adequacy of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms, as reflected in the experience of our members

Part 2 addresses *elements* of Terms (e), (f) and (h) as follows

We offer specific insights from our experience on:

(e) the loss of instructional teacher time ...in Australian school classrooms,

(f) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning,

(h) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning

Part 3 addresses Other Issues raised in the Terms of Reference

Under this heading we respond globally to Terms of Reference (a), and (g) and (i).

RESPONSES TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Autistic Realm Australia responds to the Terms of Reference as follows:

PART 1

► (b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms

It is our view that impacts, demands and experiences of disorderly classrooms affect teachers and students, and has a ripple effect upon other staff, and the families of students.

We believe that both students and teachers have the right to psychological safety.

We expand on this point under Term of Reference (c), in relation to how psychological safety is supported by good classroom management.

In this section we will i) unpack the experience of disorder and safety in the classroom and 2) examine the proposition that it is a lack of work satisfaction or safety that drives teachers to leave the profession.

► What is a disorderly classroom?

For the purposes of this enquiry, the term seems to be intended to mean, a classroom where one or more students is disrupting the planned learning session in a way that does not present an alternative way for the class/teacher to learn/teach the material prescribed.

It is important to acknowledge the varied experience of the 25+ people in a classroom, to understand the causes of school disruption. Let us briefly take an Autistic perspective on what constitutes an orderly environment that is conducive to learning.

When all the students are on task, attempting to engage in the activities prescribed by the teacher, *if*:

- the classroom environment is bright, loud, contains strong aromas (including pleasant ones), or a lot of movement *and*
- *the student has no opportunity to reduce the load of these painful sensations.*

then the seemingly 'orderly' classroom can contain a cacophony of uncomfortable inputs that distress an Autistic student. The sensory impact of these stressors can take all the student's effort

to manage, and may prevent them from learning. And sometimes, some Autistic students will be unable to regulate their response to these stressors, and some will disrupt the class because they are no longer able to cope with the onslaught of sensory inputs.

Other reasons why Autistic (and non-autistic) kids may become disruptive as a way to escape from the class demands and/or environment include:

- ▶ they are bored by a curriculum that is too easy or unrelated to their interests.
- ▶ their needs are not supported and/or they are not provided with alternative means of education.
- ▶ they are years behind academically.
- ▶ they are socially unable to access group learning, etc.
- ▶ they have asynchronous development; the 'spiky profile' of Autistic students is not understood or supported.
- ▶ bullying
- ▶ they do not want to feel different to their peers, e.g., when they are dyslexic and are trying to hide their struggles.
- ▶ they are using the disruption to leave a space that is not psychologically safe.
- ▶ they are distressed by sudden changes such as high teacher turnover.
- ▶ Transition times from playground to classroom are not sufficient.
- ▶ More work needs to be done to support these students through major transitions e.g., primary to high school.

It is important to note that the OECD has previously found inequality to have a significant influence upon students' tendency to school disruption:

- ▶ Students from more socio-economic advantaged backgrounds indicated a stronger sense of fitting in well at school and better relations with their teachers than those from less socio-economically advantaged backgrounds.
- ▶ Fitting in at school is most strongly related to greater co-operation, optimism, and sociability. However, students who reported more exposure to bullying reported lower stress resistance, optimism, and emotional control. ¹¹

In light of this finding, The Autistic Realm Australia contends that this Inquiry must consider whether the rise of bullying plays a part in rising school disruption.

All of these common experiences of Autistic students can lead them to feel unsafe at school. Feeling unsafe at school causes students who externalise their feelings to be disruptive. ¹²

¹¹ Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation: Results from PISA 2000*. OECD.

¹² Those Autistic kids who *internalize* their feelings of distress are more likely to experience School Can't, i.e., be unable to attend school, whether for a few hours, days or every day of the school week, term, or year, as shown by data we provided to the School Can't Enquiry.

► Is disorder in the classroom the key driver of teacher attrition?

As indicated above, in **A Note on Teachers** a range of reports ¹³ suggest that more significant drivers of teacher turnover are:

- older teachers are aging out or leaving, replaced by younger teachers without experience and without an experienced mentor
- too much time on paperwork, less face-to-face teaching,
- lack of protection for teachers: an education department can mandate as policies but the way a principal chooses to implement those policies plays a very big role in what a teacher's working life looks like
- Lack of career progression

In addition, The Autistic Realm suggests that work satisfaction for teacher must be significantly undermined by the gaps in training e.g., in effective classroom management, **which we discuss under Term of Reference (d)** and lack of access to support to use effective approaches to teaching Autistic students, **which we describe in Term of Reference (c)**.

► What is challenging or disruptive behaviour?

In addition to the points made above, we also note that official policies and guidance such as that provided for the operation of schools in Victoria, inform teachers that “challenging behaviour” covers a wide range of behaviours that are typical of Autistic students.

The Victorian guidelines associate this gamut of behaviours, many of them harmless or attempts to self-regulate (e.g., ‘shyness, rocking, hand-flapping... being out-of-seat, calling out in class...hand-banging, kicking, running away... inappropriate conversations...’), with a range of *actually* unsafe behaviors, and with grounds for suspension. ¹⁴

This is misleading for teachers who have limited experience or training to teach Autistic students (**a point we expand on in Term of Reference (d)**), who may turn to these documents for guidance. It is potentially disastrous for Autistic students who must interact with teachers who rely on this guidance as one of the few resources they have to hand.

Given the inaccuracy of the resources available, we confidently predict that teachers with more experience of Autistic students would be driven out of the workplace by this devaluing of their expertise.

► (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

We focus in this section on classroom management techniques that we must support teachers to develop, to help them maintain order.

The Autistic Realm Australia rejects any implication that what teachers need is a more hierarchical power relationship over their students, or freer access to/ a wider range of sanctions and punishments.

It is essential that Australia invests in developing people skills, communication skills and relationship skills in our teachers. Mastery of these skills empowers teachers to manage a classroom effectively. To achieve this requires providing teachers with high-quality, mandated professional development in how to build a relationship of mutual respect with students.

This trusting, respectful relationship is the foundation that i) enables a teacher to work with (rather than against) the student, in a learning partnership, and ii) supports Autistic students to feel safe in that teacher's classroom.

Teacher education must equip teachers to use their students' needs and interests to engage them, and train teachers to create a relationship of mutual trust and respect with their students. This relationship of trust and respect must be extended also to include when engaging with students' families and apply to all members of school staff who have contact with students or their families.

All preservice teachers, teachers, executive and support staff should undergo mandatory training on Autism. As we have stated throughout the submission, this training must be based on codesign with the Autistic community.

► What works with Autistic kids?

The following practices have been observed by our members to work with their Autistic children who demonstrate distress at school:

- Teachers co-regulate with students and support students to regulate themselves in the school environment - *instead of punishing them for features of their disability*, e.g., for becoming dysregulated when their needs are not met
- Training and professional development inform teachers accurately of how Autistic people experience Autism, why dysregulation occurs, the impact of trauma suffered by all Autistic students, and how to work effectively with Autistic students
- Schools support teachers to use the knowledge and skills gained

¹³ This recent paper is an important part of the early understanding around why teachers are more commonly leaving the industry. It shows that risks often monitored in helping industries such as burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress are being experienced by teachers working with students who have histories of trauma: Oberg, Glenys, Carroll, Annemaree and Macmahon, Stephanie (2023). *Compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress in teachers: how they contribute to burnout and how they are related to trauma-awareness*. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, 1-10. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1128618

To make this situation more concerning, other research indicates that there may be a population-wide decline in the Mental Health and Brain Maturation of Adolescents who lived through the COVID -19 shutdowns. See Gotlib, I. H., Miller, J. G., Borchers, L. R., Coury, S. M., Costello, L. A., Garcia, J. M., & Ho, T. C. (2022). *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health and Brain Maturation in Adolescents: Implications for Analyzing Longitudinal Data*. *Biological psychiatry global open science*, 10.1016/j.bpsgos.2022.11.002. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpsgos.2022.11.002> A news report of this study is available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/12/01/pandemic-stress-aging-teen-brains/>

¹⁴ State of Victoria, School Operations policy: Section 3. Challenging Behaviour influences and triggers: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/behaviour-students/guidance/3-challenging-behaviour-influences-and-triggers>

- ▶ Schools - and teachers as their agents - address students' needs (not their diagnoses) with adjustments that are genuine, consistent, ongoing and flexible to the students' developing capacity
- ▶ Teachers and schools prioritise creating classroom and school environments that allow all students to feel safe; i.e., listened to, supported to access the academic and social curriculum,
- ▶ able to access quiet spaces and tools to self regulate (i.e., 'reset' a dysregulated nervous system), and
- ▶ able to access structured activities that provide social opportunity during breaks (e.g., board game clubs) that offer an alternative to the chaos of the playground

▶ What does not work with Autistic kids?

As observed by our members, these common practices do not work when their Autistic children demonstrate distress at school:

- ▶ Imposing rigid rules,
- ▶ Making threats (direct or implied)
- ▶ Removing privileges,
- ▶ Removing tools for self-regulation, including stim toys and phones ¹⁵
- ▶

▶ A note on Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA - one type of Autism presentation)

Not ALL Autistics are the same. Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is becoming understood to be part of the Autism spectrum. Children with PDA are likely to refuse to respond to direct requests.

Individuals who present with this particular diagnostic profile are driven to avoid everyday demands and expectations to an extreme extent. This is rooted in an anxiety-based need to be in control. While it is unknown how common PDA is among Autistic people, **it is important to recognise and understand this distinct profile because it has implications for the way Autistic individuals are best supported and managed.** PDA is dimensional and affects individuals to varying extents. **This has direct relevance to classroom management.**

Individuals with PDA have all the same challenges as other Autistic people, in terms of social aspects of interaction and communication, together with some repetitive patterns of behaviour. Autistics with PDA may appear to have better social understanding than other Autistic, but this is at the surface level

¹⁵ Current moves by some states to ban all phones in school is depriving Autistic students of the opportunity to feel safe at school. The role of phones in self-regulation is manifold. Some examples: a student may have an app that works on a phone to help them self-regulate. Less formally, they may have a simple game that they find soothing and reliable, that they use to regain control when they start to feel wobbly. Another very important contribution made by carrying a phone is that the student knows they can always contact a trusted person to talk to, or collect them from school if the situation becomes too much for them. Knowing that they COULD contact this parent or carer is often all the reassurance that an Autistic student needs to be able to get through a full school day without incident. See also Term of Reference (h).

only and makes **them particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation and inappropriate disciplinary responses**, as some of their difficulties may at first appear to be less obvious.

► **Features of PDA include:**

- Resistance and avoidance of ordinary demands of life, which may include getting up, attending school, joining a family activity or other day to day suggestions. This may be the case even when the person seems to want to do what has been suggested.
- Using social strategies as part of the avoidance. e.g., distracting, giving excuses, using humour, playing the clown, etc. Excessive mood swings and impulsivity.
- Being comfortable in role play and pretend, sometimes to an extreme extent.
- Obsessive behaviour that is often focussed on other people.
- Appearing sociable on the surface, but lacking depth in their understanding.

These characteristics make the question-and-answer format used in some class interactions the worst possible method with which to engage with Autistic people with PDA. The format of the interaction is in essence, discriminatory.

It is often the case that some strategies that are typically effective for people with Autism (such as the use of routine, predictability, and structure) need considerable adaptation. Individuals with PDA respond better to less direct and more collaborative approaches, which means that answering questions on the spot will not be **conducive to learning, may provoke significant resistance and will actively exclude some Autistic students from participating in the learning activity.**

► **Strategies for interaction with Autistic people with PDA.**

- Choosing priorities, e.g., which demands are necessary and which can be avoided for now?
- Reduction of demands, where possible, e.g., certain requests and expectations
- Being very flexible and creative
- Giving choice and using negotiation
- De-personalising of requests. e.g., using written suggestions, attributing reasons for a request to other factors, such as health and safety
- Using indirect language, humour and games to obscure demands
- Use of indirect praise and affirmation

NOTE: this need for indirectness is in fact opposite to the stereotypical assumption that Autistics only understand concrete and literal language.

No rewards, bribery or punishment will induce these children to behave differently when faced with a direct demand. This is a feature of their type of Autism, not evidence of defiance. Autistic students with a PDA profile are often frustrated with their own inability to do things they want to do, in response to a direct request or instruction.

These strategies for working with Autistic students are supported by best practice which includes

- ▶ Universal design for learning, **while**
 - maintaining individual tailoring to each student's needs
 - Providing students with safe spaces both physically and emotionally.
 - Schools listening, respecting and acting on the voice of the child
 - Working with the child and their families to ensure success

RECOMMENDATION



Schools must embed Trauma-Informed Practices in all areas of service delivery

▶ What can be done to assist Teachers?

The approaches listed above depend upon skills and knowledge that must be learned, practised, and supported in the workplace.

Teachers must be trained and supported to be flexible in applying one or more approaches that suit each Autistic individual, just as good teachers exercise judgment and tailor their approach to any other student.

The Autistic Realm Australia would like to the relevance of and endorse the following statement from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training review, *Through Growth to Achievement*:

Finally, Australia needs to review and change its model for school education. Like many countries, Australia still has an industrial model of school education that reflects a 20th century aspiration to deliver mass education to all children. This model is focused on trying to ensure that millions of students attain specified learning outcomes for their grade and age before moving them in lock-step to the next year of schooling. It is not designed to differentiate learning or stretch all students to ensure they achieve maximum learning growth every year, nor does it incentivise schools to innovate and continuously improve.¹⁶

¹⁶ 2018Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., ... Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: The report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

► Co-regulation: an overview

Co-regulation is important in the development of emotional and social intelligence and argues that it is more effective than self-regulation alone in supporting children's well-being and growth.¹⁷

Co-regulation is an essential precursor to self-regulation because it lays the foundation for the development of important emotional regulation skills. In the early stages of life, infants and young children rely on caregivers to help regulate their emotional states. Through repeated interactions with caregivers, children gradually learn to regulate their own emotions, leading to the development of self-regulation skills.

Co-regulation provides a safe and supportive environment for individuals to learn how to manage their emotions. It allows individuals to experience the benefits of emotional regulation without having to rely solely on their own abilities. This is particularly important for children and individuals who may have difficulty regulating their emotions due to developmental, neurological, or mental health challenges.

Co-regulation can also help individuals to develop social and emotional competence. By engaging in co-regulation, individuals learn important social skills such as empathy, communication, and problem-solving. These skills can help individuals to form healthy relationships, navigate social situations, and regulate their emotions in a variety of contexts.

Furthermore, co-regulation can support individuals in building resilience and adapting to stressors. It provides a buffer against the negative effects of stress and can help individuals to maintain a sense of control and well-being during difficult times.

In summary, co-regulation is an essential precursor to self-regulation because it provides individuals with the necessary foundation for developing emotional regulation skills, social and emotional competence, and resilience.

► Implications for teachers and classroom management

What this means is that when a student is dysregulated, a teacher can assist them to regain their sense of safety and their composure.

It also means that teachers must also be equipped by their training with strategies for regulating *themselves* and managing the inevitable stresses that accompany working with adolescents.

The key significance of assisting teachers to manage stress effectively is that dysregulated teachers cannot effectively manage dysregulated students. A teacher who shouts, who escalates or cannot de-escalate conflict in the classroom ***participates in disrupting the classroom***. It is imperative that teachers learn to self-regulate effectively for 3 reasons.

- Teachers who lose their cool, or worse, who deliberately manage their class by using aggression, do not make a student who acts out when they feel unsafe, feel safer. It makes them feel less safe and contributes to dysregulation
- A feeling of being unsafe at school may cause (more) acting out in already disruptive students, and also in their classmates.

- Teachers who respond in these ways also potentially make all students, both Autistic and non-Autistic, feel unsafe, e.g., by shouting

Most importantly, a teacher who cannot regulate their own emotions cannot use co-regulation to help disruptive students, reduce disruption or reclaim class time for learning.

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

There is a lack of resources and training to support Autistic children and their families. The training should at a minimum also include empathy, connection over compliance, fostering relationships and equity (not integration), executive functioning and how this varies depending on anxiety, sensory processing, interoception and activities to support transitions from playground to the classroom. It should be done in a real world setting with a mentor, before teaching a class alone.

Our response to this Term of Reference is that initial teacher training and compulsory in-service professional development do not cover these topics. Nor are teachers prepared or equipped to use the strategies described above. Specifically, we refer the Panel to **What works...** and **What does not work for Autistic students**, The **Pathological Demand Avoidance** profile of Autism and **What can be done to assist Teachers**.



Existing curricula are inadequate, and do not support teachers to teach the students they will encounter in schools. Due to the high cost and long wait times involved in accessing Autism assessment, even if a teacher is placed in a classroom with no formally diagnosed child in all possibility there could be undiagnosed Autistic children in the room.

Inadequate initial teacher training¹⁸ and lack of access and uptake of appropriate in-service training is not the fault of our teachers, who suffer from extensive abuse in public discourse. TARA does not wish to join the chorus of teacher-bashing or blame teachers for what they are not given the opportunity or support to learn or implement.

¹⁷ Dr. Mona Delahooke and Dr. Shafali Tsabary have written extensively on the topic of co-regulation in child development, which they argue is superior to self-regulation alone. See Delahooke, M. & Tsabary, S. (2020). The power of co-regulation: Why it trumps self-regulation alone. Psychology Today. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-connection/202005/the-power-co-regulation>
The authors draw on research in psychology and neuroscience to support their arguments and provide practical tips for parents and caregivers to support co-regulation in their interactions with children.

¹⁸ Including some postgraduate courses that exclude candidates from taking units on classroom management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	As part of developing a school culture of mutual respect between staff and students, all staff who have student contact should have some training about Autism and how it is experienced by Autistic students. This training should be co-designed and should address i) basic understanding and ii) all the different needs of teachers, principals and other staff who contribute to managing schools and making decisions that affect students, on the campus and in the administration of government school districts.
	Mandate minimum requirements for qualification, employment and continuing teacher registration to include compulsory pre-service training and continuing professional development in the following topics, at a minimum: child development, trauma, being Autistic, School Disruption and School Can't, inclusion and equity in practice.

Part 2

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

In this section, we focus on the loss of instructional and social time in school by students who are suspended for being 'disruptive'. These students lose school time due to poor management of school disruption and misuse of suspension and expulsion.

The Autistic Realm Australia asserts that this is unjust and a violation of the child's right to education¹⁹ that is overlooked by the Terms of Reference.

Our members inform us of:

- ▶ suspensions being imposed in primary school, to children as young as 6 years old (sometimes more than once for the same student in the same year)
- ▶ schools using suspension in response to minor and confusing transactions that were not equitable, did not allow for the child's disability or follow procedural fairness
- ▶ their child being made to feel due to suspension practices, that he was unwanted at school, at any time, however he might behave

¹⁹ UN Rights of the Child Article 28

- ▶ their child being denied academic opportunities because they are
 - labelled as 'the naughty boy'
 - their behaviour is equated with lack of academic potential, or
 - their past behaviour continues to be punished by denying them enriching or extension activities, which are treated as rewards that these children do not deserve
- ▶ their child missing out on social development, friendships, and forming relationships with his teachers because the school kept using seclusion and suspension in response to his behaviour

Teachers in NSW have agreed that lengthy periods of suspension from school resulting in gaps in students' learning continuum and the need for high-level support in areas of wellbeing and social capacity.²⁰ This strongly suggests that suspension makes students less able to cope when they return to school and may be perpetuating the problem for both child and school.

Current practices amount to punishing Autistic students for features of their disability, e.g., for becoming dysregulated when their needs are not met. We restate our position that both students and teachers have rights, and that these rights can be compatible in a school environment that fosters mutual respect and trust between teachers and students.

There is also the suggestion in our members' experiences (outlined above) that suspension and expulsion may be being used in a discriminatory manner against students with disabilities. Research published by the NSW Dept of Communities and Justice supports this hypothesis, stating that,

*"factors that increased the risk for suspension...[are] "emotional or behavioural problems, poorer language and cognitive skills, hyperactivity and inattention," amongst others."*²¹

The Autistic Realm Australia believes there may be an unconscious bias against students who exhibit challenging behaviours. If this is the case, it is only unconscious on the side of school staff. As parents we assure you that Autistic students can tell when a teacher doesn't like them.

Comparison of matched cohorts of unsuspended students with the same vulnerabilities and students who were suspended shows that suspension reduces the likelihood of school completion.²²

There are many other longterm detrimental effects documented, including:

*"suspension creates gaps in education by taking children away from teaching and learning, rather than providing them with the support and positive guidance they need."*²³

²⁰ Teacher Federation, Submission 345, February 2017, Inquiry into Students with a disability or special needs in NSW.

²¹ Jakob, L., Anderson, C., Laurens, K., & Green, M. (2022). Are children who are known to child protection services more likely to be suspended from school?. <https://apo.org.au/node/321334> p.5

²² Davison, M., Penner, A., Penner, E., Pharris-Ciurej, N., Porter, S. R., Rose, E., Shem-Tov, Y., & Yoo, P. (2022). School Discipline and Racial Disparities in Early Adulthood. *Educational researcher (Washington, D.C. : 1972)*, 51(3), 231–234. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x211061732>

²³ Jakob, L., Anderson, C., Laurens, K., & Green, M. (2022). Are children who are known to child protection services more likely to be suspended from school?. <https://apo.org.au/node/321334>

and

'Out-of-school suspension is associated with adverse educational, justice, health, and welfare outcomes'.²⁴

which attests to the harmful nature of the practice and the necessity that it be used sparingly, well-monitored, and not seen as a solution to School Disruption. Suspension (and segregation, isolation, and expulsion) are not solving School disruption. They are simply removing one disruptive student at a time, from one classroom for a finite period of time, ad hoc. This is not a proactive or effective response to the problem of disruption in schools.

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

The Autistic Realm Australia would like to emphasise that 'disorder' in the classroom takes on many forms and can create barriers to learning for Autistic students (and potentially others who e.g., struggle with focus, traditionally understood sensory disabilities like Deafness and visual impairment/blindness, and learning differences).

► **An Autistic perspective on 'orderly' environments that support learning**

As indicated previously, it is necessary to acknowledge different experiences, including those relating to sensory differences and past trauma.

In an apparently 'orderly' classroom that is satisfactory to the teacher, where all the students are on task, attempting to engage in the activities prescribed for the class, there may be a cacophony of uncomfortable inputs that distress an Autistic student.

While this article is about children who are known to child protective services, rather than Autistic children, but this key point made is across the board.

²⁴ Laurens et al 2021. "Early childhood predictors of elementary school suspension: An Australian record linkage study",
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0193397321001064?via%3Dihub>

For example, if:

- ▶ the neon strip lighting is on
- ▶ other students are talking (about the set work)
- ▶ the chair is hard
- ▶ the set task involves students moving around the room
- ▶ the laptop fans are running
- ▶ There is a banana in the bin
- ▶ there are several classes taking place at once, in one large echoing space
- ▶ the school uniform is itchy
- ▶ the displays on the walls are brightly coloured and chaotically arranged,
- ▶ every period begins and ends with noisy bells, *and*
- ▶ *the student has no freedom to reduce the load of these painful sensations*

then the sensory impact of these stressors can take all the student's effort to manage and may prevent them from learning.

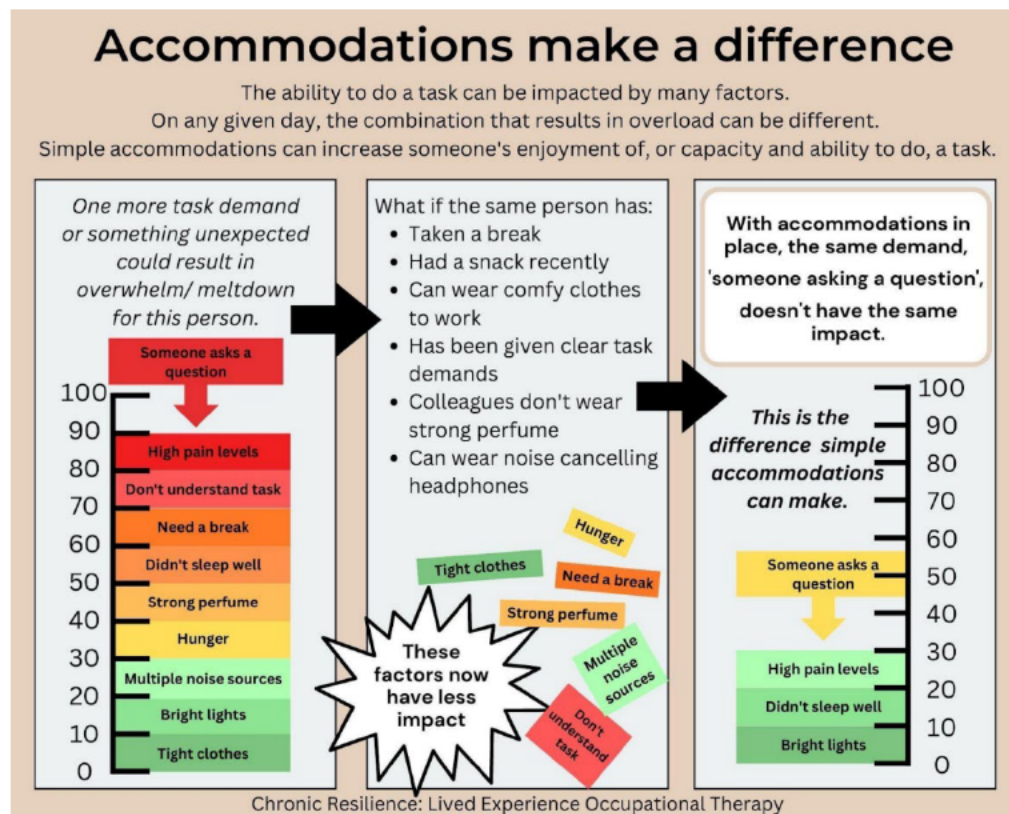
And sometimes, some Autistic students will be unable to regulate their response to these stressors, and some will disrupt the class because they are no longer able to cope with the onslaught of sensory inputs.

It is equally true that some Autistic students (who are never disruptive) find the disruptive behaviour of other class members has deeply negative and ongoing effects on them, and their learning. These include Autistic students who can no longer attend school, due to their distress when other (non-autistic) kids are disrupting class. These students may develop School Can't in varying degrees (as previously mentioned).

*In this context, we need to ask: **do students disrupt classes, or does the classroom environment 'disrupt' these students? The answer may be: Both.** Certainly, no solution will be found without action that gives students the opportunity to influence their environment in class to meet their needs.*

If someone tells you that something is too loud, too bright or too smelly then it **IS** too loud, too bright or too smelly. Sensory issues are very real.

Yenn Purkis



This diagram shows how small changes can greatly increase an Autistic person's ability to cope in a class(-like) environment:

Lastly, The Autistic Realm Australia notes that the comparative question posed in Term of Reference (f) cannot be answered without access to data on the two cohorts identified. This is emblematic of a broader problem we discuss in the next section.

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

The Autistic Realm Australia supports the use of evidence to inform decision-making about issues that affect Autistic lives. In addition to research, we accept the lived experience of Actually Autistic people as a key form of evidence for what works and does not.²⁵

The Autistic Realm Australia notes that significant data that would enhance understanding of School Disruption as a phenomenon is not currently collected in Australia.

This includes data on the use of suspension and expulsion by schools, and school attendance data. School attendance is a measure of behaviour engagement - e.g., school cant. but no data is available

²⁵ We note also the misleading practice of suggesting that some approaches have been researched and found not to be supported by the evidence, **when in fact they have never been researched**. This is an abuse of the concept of evidence-based practice.

on the most vulnerable cohorts - those from low socioeconomic groups, students with disability and students in out-of-home care. National data on children who are home-schooled are also limited.

There may be opportunities to enhance information through linkages; for example, NAPLAN and National Disability Insurance Scheme data, and regular linkage of literacy and numeracy data relating to children in out-of-home care.

The Autistic Realm Australia suggests that if the States moves to ban personal mobile phones in school is to go ahead, the impact on School Disruption and School Can't should be closely monitored and data collected that allow the impact on Autistic and other equity cohorts in the student population be identified.



Revisiting the recommendations of the review of Disability Standards for Education and evaluating the effectiveness of their implementation would contribute substantially to understanding of the interaction between compliance with the Disability Standards and the incidence of students with disability demonstrating disruptive behaviour in school (and/or School Can't).

► Suspension and Expulsion

Rates of suspension and expulsion are not being adequately monitored or reported, either by the responsible departments, or by any independent body. This means that the abuses noted by our members (**refer Term of Reference (e)**) continue unchecked in parts of the system.

Accountability must be established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	<p>The Productivity Commission should be requested to investigate the social and economic cost of suspension and expulsion, in terms of denying students access to school.</p> <p>This investigation should consistently examine the representation of equity groups such as students with disabilities, Indigenous students, CARM (Culturally and Racially Marginalised), low socioeconomic status students, etc in suspension and expulsion statistics, and provide baseline data to facilitate the monitoring of improvement.</p>
	<p>Develop a national standard for the practice of suspension and expulsion, i.e., a model that is followed, accountable and measurable.</p>



Make the collection and retention of statistics about suspensions and expulsions mandatory across all types of institutions, departments, and schools. Ensure statistics are collected on child differences, including Autism and mental health;

- require that this information be
- reported annually to state and federal education departments,
- reported to parliament and made publicly available on the Commonwealth education portfolio website, broken down state-by-state, and; mandate that issues revealed by the statistics must be actioned.

PART 3

► Other issues raised by the Terms of Reference

This section provides a reflection on the preamble and Terms of Reference (a) and (g) and (i).

The Autistic Realm Australia observes that the tenor of the preamble to the Terms of Reference and specifically Terms (a) and (g), appear to express a sense of alarm, and contain a series of assumptions.

We explicitly question the assumptions that School Disruption is the sole or even the main issue in Australian schools that is

- disadvantaging students
- contributing to poor literacy and numeracy results for young people, [or]
- denying them the learning of essential foundational skills to reach their full educational, economic and social potential'

As noted in our response to Term of Reference (h), the data needed to support these kinds of assertions is not currently available. We do not consider the Terms of Reference to fairly represent the findings of the OECD report to which they allude.

Please find below our response to Terms of Reference (a), (g) and (i).

- **(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;**

According to the OECD disciplinary climate index, Australian classrooms rank as one of the most disorderly in the world. In relation to this Term of Reference, it is unclear even from the OECD's own documents how they define 'disciplinary climate'. What the report of the OECD does state, is that while Australian schools are often described as disruptive and noisy, no difference was found between Australia and the OECD average.

In this context, The Autistic Realm Australia restates our position that neither teachers nor students would benefit from enforcing a more hierarchical power relationship of teachers over their students, or increasing access to (the use of) more and different sanctions and punishments.

- **(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:**

We cannot respond to this Term of Reference, except to observe that neither PISA nor NAPLAN represent children with a disability, as they are not included in the report and often are encouraged to not sit Naplan tests. For example:

3.20 One of the issues for many of these submitters is the danger that resources for a school are influenced by NAPLAN test results which can be impacted by a number of factors, often outside of the control of the school. According to evidence received there is pressure placed on a school to ensure it receives the best possible test results and this can lead to the exclusion of students with special needs.

Epping Heights Public School raised this issue:

There are a number of students in our school with learning difficulties that require additional support, but we receive very little support because the majority of our students achieve good results. We wonder if it is fair that these students are judged by the results of others in

their cohort. Alternatively, it seems wrong that schools prevent students with difficulties from sitting the NAPLAN as it will 'bring down' their results. ²⁶

By not including the voices of disabled children in the PISA tests, the data relied on by the OECD gives an incorrect impression and plays into the stereotype that children with a disability should be segregated.

The points made in this section apply also to Term of Reference (h), as they call into question the reliability of results from the PISA and NAPLAN instruments that contribute a significant proportion of the limited data currently available to illuminate understanding of School Disruption in Australian schools.

(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;

Solutions or attitudes to disability, special needs, and discipline across the 30 OECD countries are widely divergent, with some nations not recognising the need for any support for students with disabilities in the classroom. We are not convinced that these nations are culturally or socially similar to Australia in ways that are meaningful to improving student learning in this country or make comparison relevant to Australian society.

²⁶ [CHAPTER 3 – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](http://aph.gov.au)

CONCLUSION

In responding to the call for submissions to this Inquiry, The Autistic Realm Australia has offered experience and insight to improve understanding of the phenomenon of School Disruption and how it relates to Autistic students.

We restate our position that both students and teachers have rights, and that these rights can be compatible in a school environment that fosters mutual respect and trust between teachers and students.

We have shown that current practices for managing classroom disruption contribute in a real way to denying Autistic students access to education, which is their human right.

We have provided description, explanation and references for techniques that assist Autistic students, avoid or defuse disruption, and promote safety in the classroom and broader school environment for all students, teachers and other school staff.

We urge the Panel to consider our recommendations, which are provided at relevant points in this submission, and also aggregated with the Executive Summary that opens the document. Additionally, we refer the Panel to the recommendations of our submission to the Senate Inquiry into School "Refusal", i.e., School Can't, and reiterate that these phenomena are clearly two sides of the same coin.

Diversity is Autistic Reality.

We are asking for nothing less than a
fundamental cultural shift in approaching Autism that values and
centres the voices, experiences and expertise of Autistic people.

Anna, Kylieanne & Kathy

CO-FOUNDERS

The Autistic Realm Australia Inc.