

21 June 2023

Senate Education and Employment References Committee
c/- Sarah Redden
Acting Committee Secretary

eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senators,

Inquiry into Disruption in Australian School Classrooms

On behalf of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL), I am pleased to provide a brief submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee's inquiry into the issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms.

Effective classroom management is necessary for learning; it increases instruction time and maximises student achievement while providing a positive learning environment and enhancing student-teacher relationships. This submission outlines key facts and data on classroom disruption and management, relevant national frameworks for which AITSL is the custodian on behalf of Education Ministers, and existing and future work to support teachers in practising effective classroom management.

About AITSL

AITSL is a Commonwealth company that provides national leadership for the Australian, state, and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and educational leadership across schools and early childhood settings. AITSL's focus is on ensuring Australia has a high-quality education system in which teachers and leaders have the greatest impact on the educational growth and achievement of every learner.

For over a decade, AITSL has worked to strengthen teaching through our [national frameworks](#), and supported teachers and leaders to reflect on their practice and grow their expertise with a range of tools and resources. Our role also extends to leading the national conversation on teacher workforce supply, characteristics and experiences through implementation of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative, which is delivered by AITSL on behalf of Education Ministers and senior officials.

Key facts on classroom disruption and management

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.

There are a number of data and evidence sources that provide insight into the effects of classroom disruption on teaching and learning in Australia and approaches to classroom management:

- AITSL has previously published a *Spotlight* evidence summary on classroom management ¹ and provides relevant data through the ATWD. These are outlined below.
- Other sources include the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) *Focused classrooms practice guide* ² published in 2021 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education policy outlook in Australia* ³ published in 2023.

Australian Teacher Workforce Data

The ATWD unites and links data on initial teacher education and the teacher workforce to build a national picture of Australia's teaching profession. The workforce experiences of teachers are included through the ATWD Teacher Survey, which with over 38,000 complete responses for 2022 is the largest ever sample of Australian teachers collected for research purposes.

The ATWD Teacher Survey gives greater depth to our understanding of some of the more practical elements of teaching and provides greater insight on the challenges they present. Findings from the ATWD Teacher Survey indicate 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 ⁴ shows that in 2022:

- The proportion of the teacher workforce saying they intend to leave prior to retirement was greater (35%) than the proportion who planned to remain until retirement (31%).
- Among classroom teachers, classroom-related factors was only the third-ranked category of reasons for leaving ⁵ but saw the largest increase between 2020 and 2022. In 2022, 65% of classroom teachers who expressed an intention to leave cited classroom-related factors as a reason, up 10 percentage points from 2020 (55%).

Intentions to leave do not necessarily correlate with actual attrition, but rather are an indication of where teachers are feeling stress in their jobs. Just 5% of the workforce has any intention to leave within the next year, and only 1.25% percent of teachers who registered in the year after

¹ AITSL 2021, *Spotlight – Classroom management: Standards-aligned evidence-based approaches*, <<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/classroom-management-standards-aligned-evidence-based-approaches>>.

² AERO 2021, *Focused classrooms practice guide*, <<https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/focused-classrooms-practice-guide/focused-classrooms-practice-guide-full-publication>>.

³ OECD 2023, 'Education policy outlook in Australia', *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, no. 67, OECD Publishing, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/ce7a0965-en>>.

⁴ AITSL 2023, *Preliminary data (2021-22)*, ATWD Key Metrics Dashboard, <<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/key-metrics-dashboard>>.

⁵ Teachers could indicate multiple reasons for intending to leave the profession. Reasons for leaving included in the 'classroom-related factors' category are: *Insufficient support staff; Class sizes too large; I'm facing challenges with student behaviour management*.

graduating from an initial teacher education program discontinued their registration each year for the first seven years.⁶

Data in the ATWD Key Metrics Dashboard also shows that teachers and leaders are spending more time on student support and supervision, as well as addressing wellbeing and behavioural issues. In 2022:

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

Spotlight evidence summary

Spotlights are a series of evidence summaries produced by AITSL, which synthesise the latest education research relevant to Australia's teaching profession. In December 2021, AITSL published [*Spotlight – Classroom management: Standards-aligned evidence-based approaches*](#) which highlighted key findings from research and evidence on classroom disruption and management, informed by the experiences of practising teachers, and effective approaches to classroom management utilised in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Finland, and New Zealand.

The Spotlight also highlighted a range of tools and resources available to teachers to support them in their practice, aligned with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (refer to section on *National frameworks* for further information).

Key findings outlined in this publication include:

- School behaviour policies are helpful when they are applied consistently across the school. Leadership is key to ensuring students' behaviour and conduct feeds into and reinforces the school culture. By working to set firm boundaries and improve consistency and coherence, school leaders support teachers and help reduce parent and student frustration.
- Parental engagement and involvement can contribute to a positive school climate and influence students' classroom behaviour. Building relationships with parents and carers is a valuable way to support student participation and establishes a base from which to have challenging conversations if they are required in the future.
- Professional practices relating to creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments are critical for effective classroom management.
- Building relationships and mutual respect with students, and engaging students in their learning, while respecting student identity and culture, are crucial to supporting student participation and for preventing classroom behavioural issues via proactive student engagement approaches.

⁶ AITSL 2023, *ATWD National Trends: Teacher Workforce*, <<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/atwdreports/national-trends-teacher-workforce>>.

- Orderly routines and rules for students are key for classroom consistency and structure, appropriate behaviour should be modelled so students know what is expected and students should be held to high standards.
- Challenging behaviour ranges from low-level disruptions to extreme violence and threatening behaviour. Proactive strategies are essential at both ends of the spectrum and remaining calm in the face of challenging behaviour is critical, although challenging.
- Wellbeing and safety should be prioritised, preferencing holistic, whole-school and whole community anti-bullying interventions. Exclusionary practices don't work; they can result in significant learning loss and can alienate the student against their learning environment.

National frameworks

The [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (the Teacher Standards) are a public statement of what constitutes quality teaching, and provide a framework which makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required to be demonstrated by teachers across their careers. The expected practice of teachers in relation to classroom and behaviour management is articulated in *Standard 4: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments*. The focus areas of Standard 4 and descriptors of expected teacher practice at each career stage are provided at **Attachment 1**.

Under the [Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia](#), teachers are registered at the Graduate and Proficient career stages of the Teacher Standards by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities. Teachers may also choose to pursue [national certification](#) at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages of the Teacher Standards. Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs) demonstrate leadership and commitment to excellence in teaching, and HALT certification can help teachers to progress professionally and gain valuable recognition for their skills, while continuing to hold a classroom teaching role.

The Teacher Standards also underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programs under the [Accreditation of initial teacher education in Australia: Standards and Procedures](#) (Accreditation Standards and Procedures), and inform teachers' professional learning and development goals by assisting self-assessment and reflection on their teaching practice.

AITSL provides a range of tools to support practising teachers, including in relation to Standard 4 and classroom management:

- Over 300 [Illustrations of Practice](#) which provide examples of teachers demonstrating particular Teacher Standards descriptors at different career stages.
- The [In the Classroom](#) series which includes complete video footage of teachers delivering a lesson, along with audio commentary and an interview detailing their teaching approach and methods and links to the Teacher Standards.
- The [Teacher Self-Assessment Tool](#), which allows teachers to situate their current practice within the career stages of the three domains of the Teacher Standards.
- The [High-Quality Professional Learning Toolkit](#), an online platform that guides teachers in creating a professional learning plan that is Standards-aligned, collaborative and future-focused.

Current work underway by AITSL

AITSL continues to deliver projects and resources that support teachers in demonstrating and reflecting on effective classroom management practice. Current work underway includes a focus on middle leadership and supporting implementation of the Disability Standards for Education.

Professional Standards for Middle Leaders

AITSL has partnered with the Queensland Department of Education to develop and trial professional standards for middle leaders (middle leadership standards).

There are a wide range of middle leader roles which sit between the work of teachers and the work of senior school leaders. AITSL's research suggests that at least 90% of middle leaders are also classroom teachers. Some middle leaders have line management responsibility for a team of teachers, whereas some roles focus on pastoral care or student wellbeing, and others coordinate administration, projects or activities within a school. Middle leaders are well positioned to improve teaching and learning practice and foster a positive, safe and inclusive school culture. The middle leadership standards are being drafted with the support of experts in educational leadership and through consultation with the profession.

The draft standards include a high-level set of descriptors of how effective middle leaders ensure a safe, supportive and orderly learning environment. Middle leaders lead other staff in their schools to have high expectations of student behaviour, develop teacher understanding of evidence-based behaviour management strategies, and lead their schools to shift from an incident management approach to school behaviour to a strategic review of school policies and procedures.

This project with the Queensland Department of Education is due for completion by the end of April 2024, with AITSL intending to subsequently provide the middle leadership standards to Education Ministers for consideration as national standards.

Disability Standards for Education Resources

The Australian Government Department of Education has commissioned AITSL to implement three recommendations arising from AITSL's *Review of Disability Standards for Education: Mapping of teaching and school leadership frameworks* Final Report. The recommendations aim to increase clarity around obligations under the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) in the Teacher Standards, specifically around reasonable adjustments; further support whole-of-school leadership with respect to inclusive education; and improve the availability of professional learning resources that help educators meet their obligations under the DSE.

AITSL has developed a suite of DSE resources ensuring that teachers and school leaders provide equal opportunities for students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability, and that students with disability can learn in a safe, inclusive environment free from harassment, victimisation, and discrimination.

The DSE resources highlight the necessary work of middle and senior school leaders in establishing clear policies and procedures to address grievances relating to disruptive classroom behaviour as well as providing necessary professional learning opportunities for teachers to build their classroom management skills. The DSE resources articulate that all educators establish and promote a positive school culture, setting high expectations as well as modelling inclusive behaviour that fosters acceptance and recognition of students with disability.

The DSE resources will be published from July 2023.

Other national work underway

In addition to work underway by AITSL, other national and collaborative work is taking place to support teachers in implementing effective classroom management practices.

National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

The [National Teacher Workforce Action Plan](#) agreed by Education Ministers in December 2022 sets out 27 actions across five focus areas to attract, train and retain people in the teaching profession. AITSL is leading approximately one third of the actions in the Action Plan, and of particular relevance to this inquiry are:

- **Action 14:** AITSL is developing national guidelines to support early career teachers and new school leaders, including mentoring and induction. The guidelines for early career teachers will support effective transitions from initial teacher education into the workforce, and better prepare them for the practical realities of classroom teaching.
- **Action 17:** AITSL is providing advice to Education Ministers on streamlining processes for HALT certification and working with states and territories towards a target of 10,000 HALTs or equivalent by 2025. As part of this, AITSL is working with the New South Wales Department of Education to trial specialisations within HALT certification, including classroom management.
- **Action 27:** AITSL will collect and publish additional data around teacher wellbeing and career intentions through the ATWD. This data will inform the development of initiatives to improve retention in the teacher workforce.

Beyond those being led by AITSL, other actions relevant to classroom management include:

- **Action 8:** Review initial teacher education to ensure graduating teachers are better prepared for the classroom (with explicit reference to classroom management).
- **Action 18:** Develop micro-credentials and expand the Quality Teaching Rounds to enhance teachers' access to quality professional development.
- **Action 21:** Identify the most effective use of initial teacher education students, teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff.

AITSL will continue to work closely with key stakeholders, including the Australian Government, state and territory governments, the non-government school sectors, teacher unions, principal associations, and the profession itself to support implementation of the Action Plan.

Teacher Education Expert Panel

The [Teacher Education Expert Panel](#) will provide advice to Education Ministers on reforms to initial teacher education, including to:

- strengthen initial teacher education programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates, including ensuring graduates are taught evidence-based practices to meet the Teacher Standards and empower them to lead a classroom (with a particular focus on classroom management)
- improve the quality of practical experience in teaching, with regard to best practice models used in education, medicine and other disciplines
- improve postgraduate initial teacher education for mid-career entrants, to encourage more people to become teachers while maintaining high standards.

The Expert Panel is expected to make its recommendations to Education Ministers by 30 June 2023. AITSL will work closely with key stakeholders to implement any reforms to the national initial teacher education accreditation system agreed by Education Ministers, including changes to the Accreditation Standards and Procedures.

Australian Education Research Organisation

Under the [Engaged Classrooms initiative](#), the Australian Government has commissioned AERO to design a suite of resources to support classroom engagement and professional learning for teachers and school leaders. Resources will include evidence guides, adaptable best practice templates, video demonstrations and written case studies. Resources will also include online and face-to-face training materials, including materials for initial teacher education.

Further information

Thank you for the opportunity for AITSL to provide a submission to this inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact the AITSL Chief Executive Officer, Mr Mark Grant PSM, via email to mark.grant@aitsl.edu.au should you require further information at any time.

Yours sincerely,

Melbourne Laureate Professor Emeritus John Hattie
Chair, AITSL Board of Directors

Attachment 1: Extract from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Standard 4: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

Descriptor at career stage			
Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Focus area 4.1 Support student participation			
Identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities.	Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities.	Model effective practice and support colleagues to implement inclusive strategies that engage and support all students.	Demonstrate and lead by example the development of productive and inclusive learning environments across the school by reviewing inclusive strategies and exploring new approaches to engage and support all students.
Focus area 4.2 Manage classroom activities			
Demonstrate the capacity to organise classroom activities and provide clear directions.	Establish and maintain orderly and workable routines to create an environment where student time is spent on learning tasks.	Model and share with colleagues a flexible repertoire of strategies for classroom management to ensure all students are engaged in purposeful activities.	Initiate strategies and lead colleagues to implement effective classroom management and promote student responsibility for learning.
Focus area 4.3 Manage challenging behaviour			
Demonstrate knowledge of practical approaches to manage challenging behaviour.	Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and address discipline issues promptly, fairly and respectfully.	Develop and share with colleagues a flexible repertoire of behaviour management strategies using expert knowledge and workplace experience.	Lead and implement behaviour management initiatives to assist colleagues to broaden their range of strategies.
Focus area 4.4 Maintain student safety			
Describe strategies that support students' wellbeing and safety working within school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.	Ensure students' wellbeing and safety within school by implementing school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.	Initiate and take responsibility for implementing current school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements to ensure student wellbeing and safety.	Evaluate the effectiveness of student wellbeing policies and safe working practices using current school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements and assist colleagues to update their practices.

Descriptor at career stage			
Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Focus area 4.5 Use ICT safely, responsibly and ethically			
Describe strategies that support students' wellbeing and safety working within school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.	Ensure students' wellbeing and safety within school by implementing school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.	Initiate and take responsibility for implementing current school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements to ensure student wellbeing and safety.	Evaluate the effectiveness of student wellbeing policies and safe working practices using current school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements and assist colleagues to update their practices.