



Submission
to the
Senate Education and Employment Reference
Committee Inquiry into The Issue of Increasing
Disruption in Australian School Classrooms

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Correna Haythorpe
Federal President

Kevin Bates
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street
Southbank Vic 3006
PO Box 1158
South Melbourne Vic 3205

Telephone: +61 (0)3 9693 1800
Web: www.aeufederal.org.au
E-mail: aeu@aeufederal.org.au

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents over 195,000 members, most of whom are employed in public primary and secondary schools throughout Australia. These members educate over 2.6 million school students including the vast majority of students with disability, students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, students from households with low levels of English proficiency and student from low socio-educational backgrounds. Every child in Australia is entitled to a free, comprehensive, and secular education and public schools are open to all and do not discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation, academic achievement or the ability of parents to pay fees.

The AEU entirely rejects the assumptions made about “disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments” and the inappropriate interpretation of the OECD disciplinary climate index in this Inquiry’s terms of reference. We also note that whilst this Inquiry’s terms of reference presume that disruption is rife, there is no attempt made to investigate the factors that drive current conditions in Australia’s schools. This submission will seek to rectify the shortcomings of this Inquiry by addressing the litany of education policy failures over the last decade that have left Australian public schools without the resources they urgently need to meet the needs of students.

Public education is a public good

Public education is a public good and a comprehensive education available to all benefits the whole of society. Equitably resourced public education provides lifelong benefits through improved health, wellbeing, and employment options, improves society by increasing equity and social cohesion and provides a myriad of economic benefits in terms of increased productivity and economic activity. It is the glue that holds together civil society and the economy, by developing the capacity of people to lead fulfilling and productive lives. The importance of public education as a driver of progress was first recognised in Australia from the 1830s onwards, and the education settlement in Australia continues to be that every community in Australia should have well-resourced government schools open to all.¹

Prof. Alan Reid argues that public education is central to the principle of universalism: that there must be “free, secular and compulsory state schools funded by State and federal governments and available to all in every local community in Australia...that these schools should be inclusive, comprehensive, well-resourced and staffed” and that “public education should be understood not as a commodity to be used solely for the benefit of individuals but as a community resource to which everyone has rights of access.”²

Public education systems must be resourced to provide equality of opportunity

To fulfil its purpose as a public good, public education must focus on equity and equality in opportunity. This requires universal access to well-resourced public education from early childhood onwards including quality early childhood education, primary and secondary school, and the opportunity to access further or higher education.

The OECD, reporting the 2018 PISA results, stated:

“The principle that every person has a fair chance to improve his or her life, whatever his or her personal circumstances, lies at the heart of democratic political and economic

¹ Reid, A, *Federalism, Public Education and the Public Good*, The Whitlam Institute, 2012, p.10

² Reid, A, *Ibid*.

institutions. Ensuring that all students have access to the best education opportunities is also a way of using resources effectively, and of improving education and social outcomes in general.....Equity does not mean that all students have equal outcomes; rather it means that whatever variations there may be in education outcomes, they are not related to students' background, including socio-economic status, gender or immigrant background.”³

The OECD concludes that “success in education can be defined as a combination of high levels of achievement and high levels of equity” and furthermore that “equity in education is also a matter of design and, as such, should become a core objective of any strategy to improve an education system.” The OECD consistently finds that high performance and greater equity in education are not mutually exclusive and has consistently concluded that the equity with which resources are distributed across schools has a significant impact on how the system performs overall.

Australia's growing inequality manifests first in the classroom

Economic inequality has been steadily rising in Australia since the turn of the century. The Gini Coefficient, which measures the level of income inequality in all nations on a scale of 0 (perfectly equal) to 1 (perfectly unequal). Australia's score has risen from 0.303 in 1997-98, to 0.318 in 2021, which makes Australia the eleventh most unequal country in the OECD.⁴

At the same time, Australia's performance in PISA is in long term decline and shows wide gaps between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. In PISA 2018 Australia scored higher than the OECD average in reading and science but not significantly different from the OECD average in mathematics. Performance in mathematics has been declining for fifteen years and in science for six years. These results show the impact that educational inequity has on student's outcomes:

- In Australia, students from socio-economically advantaged households outperformed students from disadvantaged households in reading by 89 score points in PISA 2018
- Some 24% of students from advantaged households in Australia, but 6% of students from disadvantaged households, were top performers in reading in PISA 2018.
- Socio-economic status was a strong predictor of performance in mathematics and science in all PISA participating countries. It explained 11% of the variation in mathematics performance in PISA 2018 in Australia and 10% of the variation in science performance
- Only 13% of students from disadvantaged households scored in the top quarter of reading performance within Australia⁵

To counter this inequity, it is imperative to restore the basic notion of education as a public good with equitable access to the resources of the state, and where the benefits spread across society in terms of employment, economic prosperity, health and social cohesion. These benefits, as provided by a well-resourced public education system, allow students to engage successfully in school, reinforces egalitarianism in Australian society, and provides the economy with the productive capacity it needs to grow. For society to gain the most benefit from public education, it is necessary for schools to be well and equitably resourced.

³ OECD, *PISA 2018 Result (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/132219b1-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/132219b1-en>

⁴OECD, *Income Inequality Gini Coefficient*, retrieved from <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm>

⁵ OECD, *Results from PISA 2018 Country Note: Australia*, retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_AUS.pdf

Public school students have been denied full and fair funding for over a decade

The 2012 *Review of School Funding: Final Report* determined that a needs-based, sector-blind model, the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), was the minimum recurrent funding required to ensure that the majority of students reached minimum achievement benchmarks. The Review concluded that adherence to the full SRS was essential for fairness and equality of opportunity in education.

Since 2013, delivery of the full SRS to public schools has been consistently and deliberately undermined by the former Commonwealth Coalition Government. Changes to Commonwealth funding arrangements to the *Australian Education Act* as amended in 2017 dismantled the co-ordinated needs-based approach to schools funding initiated by the *Australian Education Act 2013*, and in the five years since the *amendment* there has been further destruction of the original aims and focus of the 2013 Act. \$3.4 billion of additional funding was provided to private schools over ten years from 2020 to accommodate the transition to the Direct Measure of Income in the calculation of parental capacity to contribute. Coupled with the euphemistically named \$1.2 billion “Choice and Affordability Fund”, both announced as one of the first acts of the Morrison Government in September 2018, they demonstrate that the former Government’s funding priorities were neither needs based nor sector blind. In addition, the failure of the previous Commonwealth Government to honour signed National Education Reform Agreements (NERA) with the states and territories resulted in public schools not receiving \$1.9 billion of funds that were expected under these agreements in 2018 and 2019, and the imposition of new National School Reform Agreements (NSRA) on states and territories in 2018 and 2019.

The combined impact of all these changes, along with depreciation write offs that the previous government allowed jurisdictions to make in their individual funding agreements have resulted in public schools in Australia being underfunded by more than \$20 billion since 2018 and by \$6.6 billion dollars in 2023 alone.

The legacy of this entrenched funding neglect is that, on average, every public school student in Australia is missing out on \$1,800 of funding every single year. In an average class of 23 students⁶, this amounts to \$41,000 per year that is not available for specialist support with literacy and numeracy, English language support and specialist support and timely assessments for students with disability.

Students labelled as disruptive are often neurodiverse or have disabilities and need appropriate resources to meet their needs

Many students labelled as disruptive are neurodiverse or have disabilities. A well-resourced public education system that values diversity, understands social and cognitive development, engages all learners through inclusive processes and is responsive to fundamental human needs has the potential to develop all students into highly literate, numerate, actively engaged, resilient and connected members of the wider community.

Resourcing for students with disability is by its very nature intensive. This resourcing must continue to ensure adherence to philosophies of equity, social justice and inclusivity. Despite numerous official reports and State and Commonwealth government reviews over the past two decades identifying serious deficiencies in the resourcing of the education of young Australians with disability, and recent changes to funding and loading arrangements, there has been little

⁶ Zyngier, D, 2019 *Report Card for Australia’s National Efforts in Education*, retrieved from <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=5000>

progress in this regard. Governments have continued to talk about the problem whilst many thousands of children with disability have started and finished primary school without seeing any improvement in the resources provided by governments to them.

The AEU's 2021 "State of Our Schools" survey found that 89% of public school principals surveyed said they have had to divert funds from other parts of school budgets in the last year because they do not have the resources to provide adjustments for students with disability. This figure has consistently been above 80% over the decade that the survey has been conducted and has increased over time. In 2021, principals said that they divert an average of \$101,000 per year from other budget areas to cover funding shortfalls for students with disability.⁷

This burden of a lack of resource is clear in the responses of the more than 9,000 teachers who responded to the survey. 43% of teachers said that the needs of students with disability were not able to be met at their school with the vast majority saying that the main resources lacking were those reliant on staff resource including classroom assistance (71%), specialist support (58%) dedicated programs (53%) and professional development (50%) being the most frequently selected areas in need.

The original 2011 *Review of Funding for Schooling* identified disability as one of the key factors of disadvantage affecting school engagement, attainment and achievement, and made a key recommendation that resourcing for students with disability be "set according to the level of reasonable educational adjustment required to allow the student to participate in schooling on the same basis as students without disability."⁸ Additional targeted resources were viewed by the review panel as being a basic matter of equity that will keep more students in schools longer and raise skill levels and ultimately lift workforce participation of persons with disability.

However, changes to disability loading categories in recent years have left many students without any support, or with inadequate support. In 2018, of children aged 5-14 years who received support or special arrangements, over one third (36.1%) reported that they needed more support than they received.⁹

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) dataset as reported by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) has consistently reported a much higher prevalence of disability among school students than the ABS, and the most recent data in the 2021 collection shows that 21.8% of all students, and 22.6% of public school students had a disability, as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act.

According to ACARA there were approximately 592,000 students with disability in public schools in Australia in 2021, but at least 186,000 of these students were not in receipt of any loading.¹⁰

With two thirds of students with disability enrolled in public schools and 86% of all students with disability being educated in mainstream schools¹¹ there is an extraordinary contribution made by

⁷ Internal AEU analysis of *State of Our Schools* 2021 survey data - available on request

⁸ Gonski, D. et al, *Review of Funding for Schooling—Final Report*. p. 185

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools dataset*, 2018

¹⁰ ACARA, *National report on Schooling Data Portal*, retrieved from: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/school-students-with-disability#SWD>

¹¹ Education Council, *2016 Emergent data on students in Australian Schools receiving adjustments for disability*, retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/health/ED17-0046%20SCH%20NCCD%20Report%202017_ACC%20%281%29.pdf

the teaching profession and education support workers in the education of students with disability, in an under resourced system where workload pressures are immense.

Additionally, and importantly, much greater attention needs to be paid to the impact from the NSRA and its bi-lateral agreements in not meeting the full SRS on all equity measures. AEU analysis of data provided at Senate Estimates shows that failure to fund public schools to 100% of the SRS means that nationally in 2021 the 399,336 students in receipt of a disability loading received \$601.2 million less in disability loadings than they should have that year.

The largest shortfalls were in the states with the largest student populations:

- In NSW 144,225 students with disability who qualified for loadings were short changed \$180.7 million due to NSW not meeting its minimum SRS requirements.
- In Victoria 97,223 students with disability who qualified for loadings were short changed \$204.2 million due to Victoria not meeting its minimum SRS requirements.
- In Queensland 72,897 students with disability who qualified for loading were short changed \$128.2 million due to Queensland not meeting its minimum SRS requirements.

This inequity for students with disability who qualify for loadings is entrenched in the NSRA and bi-lateral agreements until at least 2027 (and to 2032 in Queensland) and can only be rectified by ensuring that the shared responsibility of the Commonwealth and States/Territory governments is guaranteed in the next agreement.

A further and significant issue with the resourcing of disability loadings for students in public schools is that many public school teachers and leaders do not have the required resources or time available to them to engage in the repeated assessment and application processes necessary to ensure that their students receive their proper loading. This issue was raised by DESE officials in the 2022/23 Budget Estimates Hearings:

[W]e saw that government schools were slower to respond to some of the issues for picking up students with disability and providing certain kinds of support for students with disability. So their loading was not increasing as much during that time, whereas, for the non-government sector, we saw quite a strong response to identifying and providing the supports for students with disability. So that's just an example of how one loading is quite different between the government and the non-government sector. If you look at the funding there in terms of disability, you see that the non-government sector was responding in 2020 and 2021 with shifts of nine percentage each per annum, in terms of those disability loadings, whereas the government sector was much slower to respond.¹²

This suggests that there are significant numbers of students with disability in public schools who are not in receipt of a disability adjustment or are not in receipt of the correct level of adjustment and thus missing out on necessary support. Indeed, the AEU has had numerous reports from AEU Branches and Associated Bodies (in particular from New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania) that this is the case.

School systems have ultimate accountability for ensuring that students with disability have access to the support that they need to participate in education on the same basis as students without

¹² Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 1st April 2022, p.68 retrieved from: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/25685/toc_pdf/Education%20and%20Employment%20Legislation%20Committee%202022%2004%2001.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22education%20and%20employment%22

disability, but it is the responsibility of governments who administer and fund these systems to ensure that schools have the resources necessary to support students with disability. It is also the responsibility of governments to ensure that schools have enough resources and the capacity to complete the administrative and bureaucratic requirements that the system demands. In many jurisdictions there are simply not enough places available in specialist settings for the number of students who require them.

Too often the responsibility for ensuring that students receive the support they require falls to teachers and principals, as does the blame when these students are branded as disruptive. Instead, the responsibility of the authorities which manage school systems and the State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments that fund them should be emphasised.

In 2018 the Commonwealth Government moved from flat rate loadings to allocating funding based on the level of the four NCCD adjustments being determined and delivered by schools. The lowest level of adjustment - quality differentiated teaching practice – receives no additional funding. Essentially, this category recognises when a student has disability but offers no additional resource to allow schools to support them. The three loading amounts for students with disability that do receive funding for their adjustments were based on per-student spending identified for selected students in a national sample of schools. The loading amounts are shown at table 1 below in relation to the full SRS amount.

Table 1: 2021 students with disability loading by NCCD level of adjustment

	SRS funding amount in 2021	Supplementary	Substantial	Extensive
Primary student	\$12,099	42% (\$5,082)	146% (\$17,665)	312% (\$37,749)
Secondary student	\$15,204	33% (\$5,017)	116% (\$17,637)	248% (\$37,706)

The publication of the NCCD and the application of the four adjustment levels and three new funding loadings has exposed the huge difference between the numbers of students that schools currently are funded to support and the number they actually have to provide assistance to. In the AEU’s 2021 *State of our Schools* survey of thousands of principals and teachers across Australia, 91% of principals said teachers would benefit most from additional classroom support when teaching students with disability if additional funds were available, and as outlined above, and nearly nine in ten (89%) said that they divert funds from other areas to assist students with disability.¹³

Yet, what these loadings actually do is reduce the amount of funding available to schools to make adjustments for students with disability. To date the Commonwealth government has provided no clear evidence for how it set the funding levels for each of the three levels of adjustment. What is apparent is that funding levels have been set without any obvious relationship to student need. Although the unfunded “Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice” level of support attracts no additional funding the Commonwealth considers that it “means a student requires monitoring

¹³ Internal AEU analysis of *State of Our Schools* 2021 survey data - available on request

and support from the teacher and school staff; for example personalised learning” before going to explain without justification “but this can be done without the need for additional funding.”¹⁴

We request that the Committee consider how increased monitoring and support and personalised learning, all of which require an enormous amount of teacher resource, can be dismissed as not needing to be funded in any way?

The current national teacher shortage crisis has been a decade in the making

Teachers are working harder than ever to deliver high quality public education to larger and more complex classes with fewer resources than at any stage over the last two decades. The teaching workforce is at a point of crisis, as shown in the current daily media reports of widespread teacher shortages across the country.

This national teacher shortage has been building for over a decade, and AEU members experience the impact of it every day. Student enrolment projections from the Department of Education predict that an additional 185,000 students will be enrolled in Australian schools by 2029¹⁵, and employment projections produced by the National Skills Commission showed that demand for school teachers was expected to increase by 10.2% (or 42,600 new jobs) over the five years to May 2024.

In New South Wales alone an additional 11,000 teachers will be needed over the next decade, and this increases to an additional 13,750 teachers if student teacher ratios were to be maintained at the national average.¹⁶ This does not include the number of teachers leaving the profession prior to retirement. In Victoria, half way through term 1 of 2023, there are still 1,000 vacant teaching jobs in public schools.¹⁷ The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) estimates that, over the next 10 years, non-retirement attrition could be 14% above and beyond the currently expected shortages.

Workload is a major issue for the teaching profession and a consistent barrier to retaining experienced teachers, and there is a huge body of evidence showing that unrelentingly high workloads are driving teachers away. The Victorian, NSW Teachers Federation Branches of the AEU and the Queensland Teachers’ Union have conducted extensive studies of teachers’ workloads and average weekly working hours in recent years and have found that teachers are working substantially more hours than contracted at significantly higher levels than the OECD average and are undertaking a very large amount of work at home and during holidays.

In NSW, a survey of over 18,000 teachers found that the average full time teacher is working 55 hours per week during term time, with over 43 hours per week at school on average and a further 11 hours per week at home.¹⁸ In Victoria, a 2021 survey of over 10,000 Teachers found that on

¹⁴ Department of Education and Training Fact Sheet, retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.au/what-Government-doing-support-students-disability>

¹⁵ Department of Education Question No. SQ22-000248

¹⁶ Rorris, R., *NSW Public Schools to 2031: Impact of Enrolment Growth on Demand for Teachers*, retrieved from <https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/rorris-report.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/just-up-and-quitting-victorian-schools-short-1000-teachers-20230301-p5col9.html>

¹⁸ McGrath- Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. & Fitzgerald, S., (2018) *Understanding Teaching in Schools, the Foundation for Teaching and Learning: 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation*, Sydney, p. 14

average they work 53 hours per week.¹⁹ AITSL's Australian Teacher Workforce Dataset has subsequently found that teachers work an average of up to 57 hours per week, exceeding their contracted hours by up to 50%.²⁰

In the 2021 Victorian workload survey, only 14% of teachers said that their workload is often or nearly always manageable, and only 15% felt that they often or nearly always had a good balance between home and work. 84% of teachers indicated that their workload at some stage has had a negative effect on their home life, and most alarmingly, 49% teachers in all schools indicated that their workload often or nearly always adversely affected their health.²¹ In addition to excessive working hours, a large majority of teachers report significant workload intensification and sustainability concerns. The AEU's national *2021 State of our Schools* survey found that of the 73% of experienced teachers who are considering leaving the profession prior to retirement, 88% said that workload would be the driving factor for their decision.

Earlier, a 2018 Australian Council for Education Research²² (ACER) study was commissioned by the Queensland Teachers' Union. Among its findings, the ACER study found just twenty-five percent of the teachers surveyed believed that their workload was manageable, and even fewer believed they have a good work-life balance. The study also found over thirty percent of high school teachers were teaching subjects for which they were not trained, and that between sixty to eighty percent of teachers teach classes with at least one student requiring an individual curriculum plan.

The consistency of these results clearly indicates that work in schools simply is too great in volume and intensity to be undertaken in the time available at school, and it is no surprise that less than one third of teachers say that they "have the time to do my job well."²³ Teachers need more time and space to do their jobs including more planning, preparation and assessment time, smaller class sizes and pay and progression structures that recognise the value of their work throughout their careers.

AEU members across the country have repeatedly told us of the impact of the ongoing teacher shortage on the ground - it is larger class sizes, collapsed programs, an increase in split or merged classes and schools being forced to run classes under minimal supervision.²⁴ It also means that schools do not have the capacity to release teachers to engage in professional development activities, including professional learning on behaviour management, mentoring and beginning teacher support.

Additionally, AEU members around the country frequently report continually declining support from the system itself. For example, behaviour specialists who were previously the responsibility

¹⁹ *State of our School Survey Results: Survey of Victorian Public School Staff, conducted Feb-March 2021*, retrieved from https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/sites/default/files/vgsa/210430%20State%20of%20our%20Schools-FINAL.pdf?_t=1619736721

²⁰ AITSL, *Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report December 2021*, p.22

²¹ Weldon, P. & Ingvarson, L. (2016), *School Staff Workload Survey: Final Report to the Australian Education Union Victorian Branch*, p.38

²² The Australian Council for Educational Research. (2018). *Queensland Teacher Workload Study: Final report to the Queensland Teachers' Union*, retrieved from https://www.qtu.asn.au/application/files/8915/5176/5949/QTU_Survey_Report_-_FINAL.pdf

²³ *NSW People Matter Employee Survey 2020*, retrieved from <https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-data/people-matter-employee-survey/pmes-2020>

²⁴ <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/new-south-wales-education/western-sydney-school-teachers-to-walk-off-the-job-over-chronic-shortages/news-story/e2827b775b69967489aaa94330ca7bc4>

of, and provided by, Departments of Education and are now devolved to schools to manage without the training, time or resources to adequately support students.

This causes huge disruption to students' learning and their overall experience of, and engagement with, school. It impacts on students' sense of security in the classroom and on the continuity of their learning. Instead of being able to develop supportive relationships with students, too often teachers and school leaders are left scrambling to ensure that each class is covered.

The AEU urges the committee to consider the extent to which the chronic national teacher shortage, which is rooted in attrition caused by excessive workloads and inadequate remuneration, contributes to disruption of classroom routines and class cohesion.

Initial Teacher Education is failing to prepare graduates for the classroom

Australia needs a systemic and robust approach to preparing teachers for a successful career in the classroom and a more rigorous threshold to ensure that every teacher entering the profession is ready to teach. The top-performing countries in international assessments spend substantially more time and resources than Australia does to ensure that standards, programs and entry assessments are aligned and coherent.

New educators with three or less years' experience have consistently told the AEU that they do not believe their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) sufficiently prepared them for the complex realities of the classroom. In our 2021 survey the main areas where new educators were underprepared were teaching students whose first language is not English (62%), dealing with difficult behaviour (55%), teaching students with disability (47%) and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (43%). More than a third (35%) of new educators said that their ITE was not helpful in preparing them to manage classroom activities, and in under resourced schools this increased to 41%.

This survey data is confirmed by the TALIS 2018 results which show that across nearly all elements new educators in Australia feel less prepared to teach than their peers in other OECD countries, despite a higher percentage having covered each element during their ITE.

This is why it is of the utmost importance that the standard of a four year undergraduate degree or a two year master's degree are maintained as the qualifications to enter teaching.

The AEU was strongly concerned about the communiqué from the Education Ministers Meeting on February 27th, 2023, which tasked AITSL and the Teacher Education Expert Panel with finding ways to compact postgraduate ITE to a one year master's course.²⁵ Therefore we are heartened by the recent comment by that Panel that "The Panel does not see a case for returning to a one year Graduate Diploma of Education as a way of shortening the time spent out of the workforce, as it is not academically and professionally proportionate with the complexity and status of teaching."²⁶

The risk inherent in lowering qualification standards is particularly acute in jurisdictions which use the alternative authority to teach to bring unqualified and under-qualified people into classrooms through fast track programs such as Teach For Australia (TFA).

²⁵ Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper, retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.au/collections/communiqués-education-ministers-meeting-2023>

²⁶ Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper, *Ibid.*, p. 63

The alternative authority to teach is designed as a stop gap where there is an acute shortage in a particular area, a significant issue arises when it is used as a core component of any program which seeks to fast track unqualified teachers into the classroom without adequate supervision. There is no evidence that this practice is in the interests of student learning, helps promote high standards or is a suitable mechanism for attracting and retaining people to the profession, and the result is indeed often harmful to both student learning and the retention of fast tracked teachers to the profession.

Evidence from the implementation of programs such as TFA and its predecessor Teach Next,²⁷ demonstrates that such ‘fast track’ programs are wasteful and inefficient and undermine both quality and retention. Where they have been implemented, such programs have been clearly demonstrated not to have a sustainable impact on teaching quality and has clearly demonstrated not to be effective in preparing mid or late career ITE students to enter the classroom.

Recruiting unqualified and inexperienced TFA associates to teach in the most disadvantaged communities is not just counterintuitive, it is damaging for all concerned. Continued attempts to fast track mid-career professionals through ITE by expanding the Highly Achieving Teachers program, and the suggestion by Education Ministers of one year master’s programs as detailed above, amount to an admission of policy failure by governments that have ignored developing current teacher shortages for over a decade.

Pre-service teachers must have access to rigorous full length ITE and substantial pre service experience in the classroom. There is a clear need for better professional experience (practicums) for student teachers and for better assessments of their readiness to teach, and to ensure they meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

The AEU 2021 *State of our Schools* survey shows that new educators are not enthusiastic about how their ITE prepared them for teaching, and many did not receive assistance with the transition into teaching. On average they rate their ITE experience as 6 out of 10 and only one third intend to continue teaching in public schools until retirement. Very tellingly, only 5% of new educators said that they had received any follow up from their ITE institution at the start of their career.

Increased support for ITE students is sorely needed, and this must include ongoing observation of, interaction with, and advice from experienced teachers during practicums as well as a significant increase in support from ITE providers. Financial assistance for ITE students to undertake further or additional practicum during their studies is necessary, including support with living expenses and the maintenance of student lodgings. Extended practicums must include an adequate level of in class supervision by a properly resourced mentor.

NAPLAN is being used against teachers and vulnerable students

An appropriate national assessment program should be closely aligned to curriculum, informed by classroom experience and provide accurate and timely information based on the professional judgement of teachers. All assessment processes should be transparent in terms of their intent, the relationship to the curriculum, what is being assessed, how it is being assessed and the evidence used to make professional judgements. Assessment must incorporate a range of professional practices including structured and impromptu observations; formal and informal discussions/interviews; collections of students’ work; use of extended projects, performances, and exhibitions; tests and practical exams.

²⁷ Topsfield, J, *Gillard’s school plan costly failure*, The Sydney Morning Herald, 14/02/2013, retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gillards-school-plan-a-costly-failure-20130213-2edbi.html>

Assessment must be teacher led and developed and must rely on and value informed teacher judgement, as this ensures the integration of a range of factors including knowledge of the student and performance in a variety of forms of learning and assessment.²⁸

Instead of meeting these objectives, over the past 15 years NAPLAN has:

- Narrowed the range and depth of curriculum in many of the nation’s classrooms.
- Increased the high stakes nature of assessment and prioritised NAPLAN above other forms of assessment and reporting.
- Had a significant and detrimental impact on the wellbeing of students.
- Had a range of negative outcomes related to its use, including as the dominant performance measure for schools, leaders, teachers and students and subsequent basis for systemic funding decisions.
- Caused a culture of shaming teachers, principals, vulnerable children and communities through the decontextualized reporting of NAPLAN results on My School website leading to the publication of school league tables in the press.

NAPLAN has failed. A new comprehensive assessment framework must be developed that restores teachers’ professional judgement of student learning as the prime consideration in its design - one that is classroom based and available for use at the best time as determined by the teacher aligned with their curriculum and programs and, that includes significant and meaningful input from the teaching profession at all stages of its development. This framework must be orientated to improving the educational outcomes for all students, be curriculum-based, and incorporate the professional expertise of the classroom teacher. This new framework should include the following components:

1. A national assessment based on a comprehensive and inclusive sample that takes into account and addresses the wide range of learning needs of students in public schools. Such an approach would give parents, teachers and public officials a clear understanding of how various social groups, jurisdictions, and parts of the country are progressing.
2. Classroom based assessment by teachers using their professional judgement and collective moderation processes aided by a bank of test items focusing on literacy and numeracy and more broadly across the curriculum as appropriate that are aligned to the formal curriculum and delivered at the time of need as determined by the teacher.

The Gonski Institute for Education and the University of New South Wales have already proposed a new sample based *National Assessment System* that fulfills these needs, and ensures that “by refocusing on student learning, engaging teachers, and supporting schools we will fare better, and make better progress toward our national educational goals of ‘excellence and equity’.”²⁹

We urge the Committee to consider the negative impact of the current national assessment program on students’ wellbeing and on their experience of school, and to consider alternative and less damaging options such as the National Assessment Program proposes by the Gonski Institute.

²⁸ AEU Position Statement on Assessment, November 2020, available on request

²⁹ Wilson, R., Piccoli, A., Hargreaves, A., Ng, P. T., & Sahlberg, P. (2021). Putting Students First: Moving on from NAPLAN to a new educational assessment system (The Gonski Institute Policy Paper #2-2021). Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute., p. 65.

Governments must respect teachers’ professional autonomy

In recent years the blame for Australia’s performance in international assessments has been consistently pinned on teachers by large sections of the media and by politicians looking to divert attention from their own policy failures. The malicious ‘teacher quality’ narrative that any decline in student performance in standardised testing is due to flaws in the level of competence of teachers severely undermines public confidence in the profession and is a major disincentive to those considering joining the profession. Such messaging, inevitably accompanied by calls to curtail professional autonomy through the advocacy of direct instruction teaching methods and calls to increase discipline (as in this Inquiry) further undermines the core principle of teacher autonomy.

Teachers must be granted the respect and trust of governments and permitted to exercise their professional autonomy whilst doing their jobs. Their work in classrooms is set out in the Australian Curriculum and teachers use their professional judgement to adapt the Curriculum to meet the changing needs of their students.

Table 2: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Domains of teaching	Standards
Professional Knowledge	1. Know students and how they learn 2. Know the content and how to teach it
Professional Practice	3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning 4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments 5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
Professional Engagement	6. Engage in professional learning 7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

Table 2 shows the seven professional standards for teachers in Australia. AITSL states that these standards exist to “contribute to the professionalisation of teaching and raise the status of the profession” by “providing a framework which makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers’ careers.”³⁰ It is clear from each of the seven standards and the four career stages (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher) that a significant level of professional autonomy over curriculum and practice is required to meet the standards and to progress through the career stages. However, we have recently seen a drive by federal, state and territory governments to increasingly restrict teacher’s autonomy over curriculum and assessment, and this is unfortunately reflected in this Inquiry’s terms of reference.

It is clear that the erosion of teachers’ professional autonomy through an increase in administrative workload and published standardised assessment impacts. This was a key finding of a study of the work composition of over 18,000 teachers in NSW, which found that “teachers require more professional respect, time and support for their teaching and the facilitation of student learning” and reported “an expansion of the range of duties performed, particularly in relation to administrative tasks. Over 97% of teachers reported an increase in administrative

³⁰ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011), *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, p.2

requirements in recent years, whilst 96% reported an increase in the collection, analysis and reporting of data.”³¹

The AEU recommends that teachers are granted a greater level of control over assessment and curriculum and reverses the drive towards explicit instruction and undifferentiated national assessment. Support for professional autonomy in teaching, curriculum development and assessment and reporting must be increased and then maintained rather than undermined through increased monitoring and the increased collection of data.

COVID and climate catastrophes have exacerbated declines in student wellbeing and engagement

Student wellbeing, mental health and the impact of trauma is a significant and growing issue for schools and has been exacerbated by the difficulties of students and school staff in dealing with both the short and long term challenges presented by COVID-19. Similarly, many schools and students are still reeling from trauma and damage caused by the climate driven fires in Victoria and NSW in 2019 and 2020³² and unprecedented severe floods in Queensland and NSW in 2022.³³

The impact of the twin traumas of COVID and climate catastrophe is evident in the results of the AEU’s 2021 *State of Our Schools* survey, where although principals considered themselves able to deal with most wellbeing and mental health challenges in a positive manner overall, the results show principals encountered the most difficulty in the following:

- being able to provide ongoing learning support for students with additional needs.
- providing ongoing learning support for students with disability.
- pastoral care for vulnerable students.
- maintaining student engagement.
- supporting student’s mental health.
- 65% of principals said they have noticed a decline in student wellbeing in the last 18 months, rising to 71% in school described as under resourced by the principal.
- 66% said they have noticed a decline in student engagement in the last 18 months.
- Under resourced schools have had three times the level of significant decline in engagement that adequately resourced schools have had (26% vs 8%).

The classroom impact from this decline in student wellbeing is significant. Staff in all roles in schools are often required to devote significant additional time and resources to meet the needs of their students and their families. A lack of accessible mental health services in the community often means that schools are currently called on to devote additional time and resources to attempting to find ways to provide support to students’ families that are well outside of any educational role. With limited time and resources, schools are forced to choose between taking on additional pastoral care responsibilities to support students’ mental health and wellbeing and the work required to implement the best quality teaching.

³¹ McGrath- Champ, S., Wilson, R., Stacey, M. & Fitzgerald, S., (2018) *Understanding Teaching in Schools, the Foundation for Teaching and Learning: 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation*, Sydney, pp. 1-2

³² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-21/bushfire-covid-mental-health-corryong-college-vce-top-state/101780328>

³³ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/class-on-the-grass-flood-hit-schools-face-years-of-disruption-20220325-p5a7w7.html>

These demands cause considerable health mental impacts for educators who can find themselves undertaking mental health crisis work and de facto social work with no training or support. These educators often sustain serious psychological injury as a result of this unsafe work, compounding the issues of staffing shortages.

For example, in NSW members report unacceptably long waiting lists for students to see their school counsellor and there are substantial numbers of school counsellor positions vacant, particularly in the rural and regional areas.

This means that counselling has now become crisis management. Instead of being able to provide proactive, ongoing support to students as soon as problems emerge, counsellors are running from crisis to crisis.

The AEU welcomed the Schools Upgrade Fund and Student Wellbeing Fund announced in the October 2022 Commonwealth Budget, but we note that those measures expire over the next two years, and although they will contribute to addressing some of the growth in inequity resulting from long period of remote learning during 2020 and 2021, increased and consistently accessible funding is required to maintain student wellbeing and to ensure that upgrades continue to be made and are maintained in the future.

Public school systems urgently need additional resources to address the loss of learning already incurred by students, particularly students from disadvantaged households, due to COVID and climate catastrophe disruption in recent years, and to address the compounding effect of that learning loss and trauma.

Conclusion and recommendations

The AEU considers this Inquiry an opportunistic and ideological attack on public schools, students, and teachers. This is clear from the terms of reference which refer to “the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments”³⁴ without any consideration of the huge inequity in Australian schools. Further, the terms of reference seek to compare Australia with countries with vastly different school systems and pedagogical approaches and then seek to legitimise the assertions made through a disingenuous reliance on an OECD measure of disciplinary climate which the OECD itself emphasises “varies according to school characteristics that are largely out of teachers’ control. For instance, socio-economically advantaged schools typically have a more positive disciplinary climate than disadvantaged schools.”³⁵

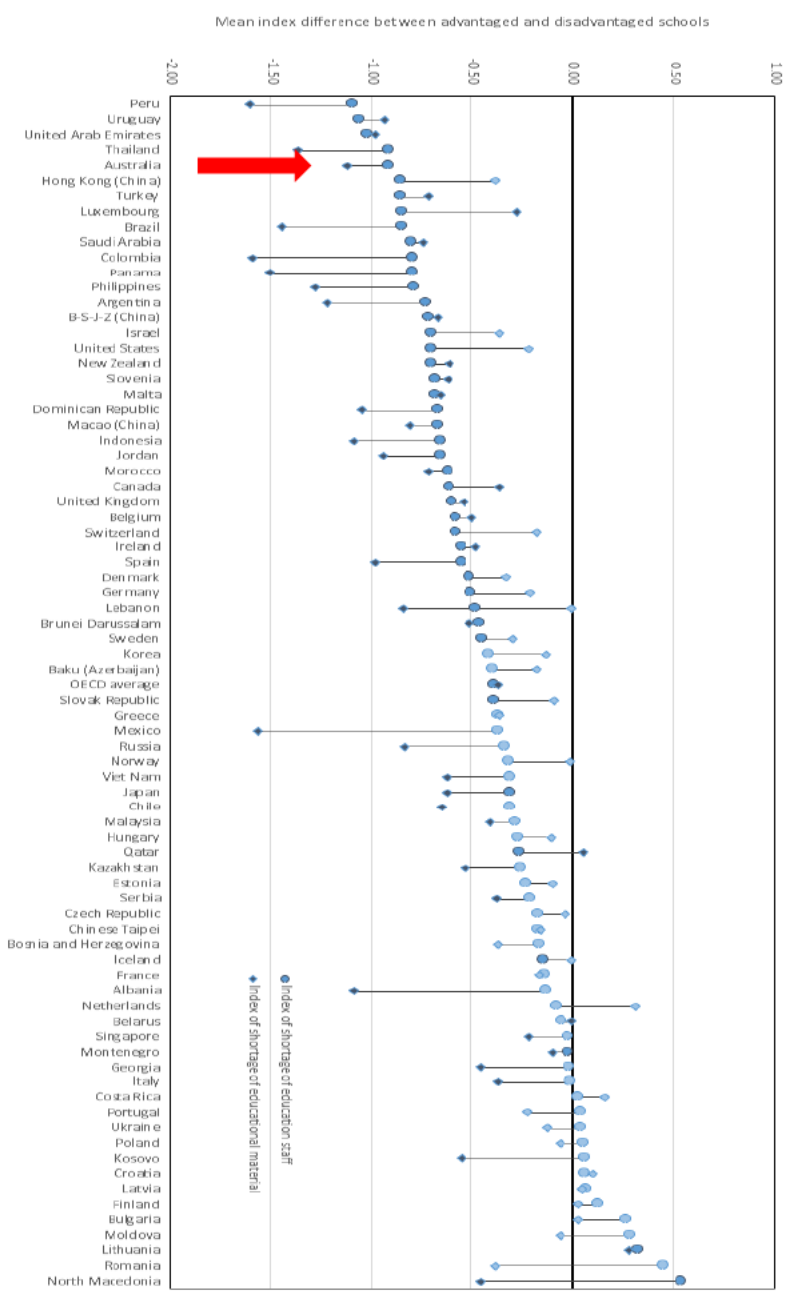
As a counter, we would like to bring to the Committee’s attention another OECD index, the *Difference in shortage of education material and staff, by schools’ socio-economic profile* from PISA 2018 Vol II. This index is used to demonstrate the balance of resources between advantaged schools and disadvantaged schools. A value of zero indicates the even distribution of resources across schools, a positive value indicates that disadvantaged schools have more resources, and a negative value indicates that advantages schools have more resources.

³⁴ Senate Education and Employment Reference Committee, *Inquiry into the issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms*, Terms of Reference, retrieved from: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/DASC/Terms_of_Reference

³⁵ OECD, *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): What School Life Means for Students’ Lives*, retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f05bb3ee-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f05bb3ee-en>

As starkly shown in Figure 1 below, Australia is equal fourth worst in the expanded group of 78 countries for teacher shortages with a value of -0.9 and equal ninth worst for differences in material resources between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, with a value of -1.1.

Figure 1 Difference in shortage of education material and staff, by schools' socio-economic profile



The AEU asserts that this Inquiry would have benefitted greatly from terms of reference that acknowledged the issues of chronic school funding inequity, teacher shortages that have developed over a decade, the difficulties and hardships that public school students in Australia have faced in recent years and the resulting challenges to student wellbeing that we have raised in this submission.

A bold investment in public school funding, buildings and equipment is urgently needed to achieve an improvement in equity of provision and student achievement that not only leads to better life outcomes for individual students but enormous long term benefits to society, the economy, and the entire country.

An Inquiry addressing those urgent issues facing public school students and teachers and seeking to address the drivers of disengagement and disruption would have been enormously valuable.

With those factors in mind, the AEU makes the following recommendations:

1. That the terms of reference for this inquiry are revised to address the root causes of issues of behaviour and classroom management.
2. That the Committee consider the extent to which the chronic national teacher shortage, which is rooted in attrition caused by excessive workloads and inadequate remuneration, contributes to disruption of classroom routines and class cohesion.

3. That governments address the issue of escalating and unsustainable teachers' workload.
4. That Commonwealth, State and Territory governments ensure that the next round of bilateral funding agreements ensure that there is systemic resource allocation with a minimum of 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard delivered to all schools, and that the 4% depreciation allowance is removed from future funding agreements.
5. That government reviews loadings for students with disability to determine the real costs of ensuring that all students with disability can access a high-quality education so that such loadings are set according to the level of reasonable educational adjustment required to allow the student to participate in schooling on the same basis as students without disability.
6. That the Student Wellbeing Fund is increased and made permanent to improve and maintain student wellbeing long term.
7. That the professional autonomy of teachers is recognised, reaffirmed and respected by governments and departments of education.
8. That Financial assistance for ITE students to undertake further or additional practicum during their studies is made available, including support with living expenses and the maintenance of student lodgings.
9. That teachers are granted a greater level of control over assessment and curriculum and that the drive towards explicit instruction and undifferentiated national assessment is reversed.
10. That the committee consider the negative impact of the current national assessment program on students' wellbeing and on their experience of school, and to consider alternative and less damaging options such as the National Assessment Program proposed by the Gonski Institute at UNSW.