



independent education

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# InFocus **Professor Catherine Bennett**

***Meet one of the many women scientists  
working on Australia's pandemic response p6***



## Uluru Statement from the Heart

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

*This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.*

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. *This is the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

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## Editorial

**The reach and repercussions of the global COVID-19 pandemic have only deepened and expanded since the previous edition of IE.**

Outbreaks have led to lengthy lockdowns in Victoria, NSW and the ACT, and shorter disruptions in other states and territories. This means teachers and support staff have again risen to the huge challenge of online teaching and learning.

In this edition, we talk to one of the scientists at the forefront of Australia's pandemic management, Professor Catherine Bennett, the inaugural Chair in Epidemiology at the Institute for Health Transformation at Deakin University in Victoria (page 6).

A go-to epidemiologist for media seeking expert information, Professor Bennett traces her brilliant career for us, traversing fields as diverse as archaeology, population genetics and paleo-forensic work.

As Professor Bennett talks about her lifelong love of learning and her support for women studying science and developing careers in STEM, we can't help but notice the prevalence of female scientists in Australia's pandemic response.

Elsewhere we explore another health issue impacting teachers: vocal injuries (page 22). New research reveals the extent of the problem and we explore ways of preventing and responding to this professional hazard. Information overload is another headache, and we look at strategies for sifting through the ongoing avalanche (page 20).

As all school staff know, not every student automatically thrives at school. Some experience social disadvantage, others live with disabilities, whether physical or intellectual. All have a right to a good education. In 'Second chance school' (page 14) and 'Inclusivity enables us all' (page 16), we talk to the principals, teachers and education assistants who make it happen.

On the legal front, we explore the potential impacts of One Nation's proposed Parental Rights Bill in NSW (page 10) and the federal Religious Discrimination Bill (page 28).

Three times a year, *IE* brings you news and views from our members and branches throughout Australia. We trust you will enjoy this issue, and we encourage you to share it with your colleagues and invite non-members to join us.

**Carol Matthews**

Acting Secretary  
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch  
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### Victoria

#### Vaccination blitz targets final-year school students and staff

Final-year secondary students, their teachers, exam supervisors and assessors were granted access to priority timeslots during a "vaccination blitz" commencing in early September.

With second doses of all vaccines then separated by six weeks, willing parties could be fully vaccinated prior to end of year exams. While at press time, mandatory vaccinations had not been put in place for Victorian schools, Premier Dan Andrews said if there was a "safety imperative" mandatory vaccinations would be put in place.

The IEU VicTas is a strong advocate of vaccination for education staff, saying, "We will be safest from COVID-19 where students, staff and other members of the school community are vaccinated to the fullest extent possible". However, the union said it would expect "appropriate consultation" with the IEU from schools that chose to mandate vaccinations. Such employers would have to:

- have exhausted efforts to encourage staff to be vaccinated
- consult with the union, health and safety reps, and employees
- permit exceptions for genuine and compelling medical reasons and where access to a recommended/appropriate vaccine is not reasonably available
- ensure that there was no unlawful discrimination against people with a protected attribute.

### Tasmania

#### Union calls out risk of rejecting teacher voices

The IEU VicTas Branch was disappointed that its submissions to the Review of Education Regulation were not incorporated by the Tasmanian Government's Education Review Bill. Enacted in its draft form, the Bill would greatly reduce teacher representation on the Office of Education Registrar, the Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification, and the Teachers Registration Board Tasmania.

In its submission to the Review, the IEU said: "The formal involvement of appropriately qualified and experienced education practitioners on the governance bodies of the regulatory authorities and offices ensures the relevance, practicability, and quality engagement necessary for effective regulation. The IEU is opposed to any lessening of the current representative governance arrangements."

IEU VicTas General Secretary Deb James said removing teacher voices from the regulatory bodies, particularly from the Teachers Registration Board, was a "serious disenfranchisement" of teachers.

The Education Regulation Advisory Council will be constituted only "of representatives of the three sector authorities". But the IEU submitted that Board and committee members should still be nominated by major stakeholder bodies. "The IEU believes that the Council will have an important role in providing direct advice to the Minister. However, the non-inclusion of the other key education stakeholders such as the education unions on the new Advisory Council, together with the cessation of representation of the various Boards, has the effect of specifically disregarding the teaching profession and presents a significant risk of the provision of narrow advice that represents only the sector authorities' interests and views."

### Queensland

#### Improper use of fixed-term contracts

IEU-QNT continues our campaign to reduce insecure work in the non-government education sector, by taking on improper use of fixed-term contracts in the Queensland Catholic sector.

In the last round of collective bargaining, members not only won important protections for continuing positions and limits on the use of fixed-term contracts, but an employer obligation to conduct annual reviews on fixed-term contracts.

The provision requires an annual employer review of all contracts to check that all fixed-term contracts are genuine and identify those positions that instead should be made continuing.



The new provisions mean more teacher and school officer members have successfully converted from rolling fixed-term contracts to ongoing employment. Members in other sectors are also pushing for similar provisions in their collective agreements to help address insecure work.

These limitations on the use of fixed-term contracts members have recently achieved are just one example of how our union makes a difference.

We will continue to monitor the ongoing issue of insecure work across all schools and sectors, to ensure employers are not abusing fixed-term contracts so members can enjoy financial security and peace of mind with ongoing employment.

### **Northern Territory Voices heard at Teacher Registration Board**

Union representation on the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board (TRB) is helping to ensure the voices of members are heard about their professional concerns.

IEU-QNT Branch Executive member and teacher Louise Lenzo, who represents our union on the NT TRB, said a current focus of the Board was how to help teachers better manage their compulsory Professional Development (PD) and reflection logs.

"The TRB has acknowledged there was a need for additional PD, information and resources for teachers to assist them in meeting PD requirements and maintaining their logs, after receiving an influx of queries and concerns from teachers," Louise said.

Creation of instructional videos has been identified as a potential way to provide teachers with advice on PD, whilst reducing the administrative burden on TRB staff.

The idea of these videos was raised in response to calls from members for clearer guidelines regarding exactly what should be included in PD logs and reflections, such as the content and level of detail required.

Louise reported the Board is also considering whether the current approach of five-year audit cycles is optimal, or whether the requirement for teachers to submit 20 hours of PD evidence per year would be better.

### **NSW School ventilation guidelines are crucial**

Good ventilation in classrooms is a vital tool in the fight against COVID-19, along with mask wearing, social distancing, rapid antigen testing and, of course, vaccination.

The IEU Executive has called on NSW Health to develop guidelines concerning ventilation and air filtration to make the re-opening of schools as safe as possible for staff and students. The union has also written to employers asking them to act on this before the return to schools.

Viruses such as COVID-19 are spread by air droplets when infectious people cough or sneeze. They can stay in a room's air for up to eight minutes. When opening windows isn't possible, air purifiers and carbon dioxide sensors, which indicate when the air is becoming stale, are also important.

University of NSW air pollution expert Donna Green wrote in *The Conversation* that for \$50 million all Australian schools could be provided with High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) purifiers, which can minimise the risk of COVID spread, as well as mitigate health risks from bushfire smoke. While this may sound like a big investment, it pales in comparison with the cost of lockdowns (\$220 million a day in Sydney).

## **ACT**

### **Pre-service teachers must register**

All pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience placement in ACT schools are legally required to be registered on the ACT Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) Pre-service Teacher Register. There is no cost to register.

Amendments to the TQI Act were passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly in August 2019 to enable this change.

TQI reports that collaboration between universities, schools and pre-service teachers ensured a smooth introduction of the register. Since its inception in January 2020, more than 1500 pre-service teachers have registered.

Being on the register allows pre-service teachers access to information about approved professional learning programs.

As the system grows, pre-service teachers should be able to enter details of their professional experience placements. TQI will then be able to collect information about the schools and sectors involved in providing teacher professional experience placements.

TQI will also be able to collect anonymous information that can be shared for workforce planning purposes including the number of:

- pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience in a particular year
- schools providing professional experience placements
- pre-service teachers undertaking their professional experience at particular schools
- pre-service teachers undertaking their professional experience in, for example, a science specialisation, and
- the destination of graduating students and their initial teaching experiences.

## **South Australia**

### **Online learning leaves some students behind**

A coalition of education and charitable organisations, including the IEU, concerned about growing inequality in classrooms propelled by digital exclusion, has written to the Minister for Education in South Australia.

"Inequality in Australian education is increasing," wrote education experts Amy Graham and Professor Pasi Sahlberg in *The Conversation*. "School education, according to the OECD and UNICEF, is not treating Australian children fairly."

The shift to online learning was thrust upon schools by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Now the Delta variant is affecting younger students as well.

The need to learn from home for disadvantaged students is problematic for various reasons, including:

- low-income families may not have internet access or digital devices suitable to connect to their school learning portal
- loss of employment (during lockdowns and/or ongoing employment) may prevent families from affording the required digital devices and internet access
- the home environment may not be conducive to learning – be that through the impact of resident family members/friends, domestic violence or other domestic issues that impede the student.

Community libraries may offer some access for students; however, this may not be available to a student without appropriate care, assistance or transport.

The IEU is calling upon the SA Government to urgently develop a plan that will provide the resources and devices for these students. We hope action will be taken to ensure no student falls behind.



# InFocus **Professor Catherine Bennett**



**Many women scientists are at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic response. One of them is epidemiologist Professor Catherine Bennett, who began her career in a grocery store and says she still finds learning 'the most fun'. She talks to journalist Will Brodie.**

Professor Catherine Bennett is in great demand. Name a media outlet and she's there – in print, online, on radio and TV – answering questions from anxious Australians about lockdowns, COVID outbreaks and vaccinations.

Professor Bennett made time for *IE* because she's passionate about education, in particular promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects to girls.

Bennett is the inaugural Chair in Epidemiology at the Institute for Health Transformation at Deakin University in Victoria, and she was the founding Chair and President of the Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australia.

She has a Master of Applied Epidemiology from Australian National University (ANU) and was Head of Deakin's School of Health and Social Development from 2010 to 2019.

All that achievement began with parents who valued education and invested in it "above all else" – and insisted their children help pay for it.

"They worked so hard to provide me and my four siblings the best education opportunities," Professor Bennett says.

"We were all put to work in a licensed grocery business my parents ran so that we could collectively afford a good education for all five of us.

"We watched a rented black and white TV at home when my friends all owned a colour set, but it was the best lesson in life – education first, a solid foundation for our futures – one that would open up options throughout life."





### Early inspirations

Professor Bennett's first scientific interest, archaeology, was fostered by documentaries she watched on that humble TV featuring the famous Leakey family discovering ancient human skeletal remains in Africa. Ground-breaking paleo-anthropologist Mary Leakey starred in these documentaries, but Professor Bennett says she didn't think of becoming an archaeologist as a child because she'd never met an archaeologist "in real life".

"Professor Julius Sumner Miller also fascinated me with his TV science when I was a kid, but I don't think I realised girls could grow up to be professors either," she says.

In real life, her most important educational impetus was much closer to home.

"While I had mentors and other positive influences, ultimately I think it was the academic expectations of my

parents that motivated me most, and the inspiration I found in their valuing of education and how, through education and professional growth, you could give back to the community," Professor Bennett says.

This environment nurtured the formidable curiosity of a young Professor Bennett, who became a "vacuum cleaner of facts and knowledge". At school, she enjoyed the "challenge and wonder" of science subjects, but biology was her first love.

"There was something amazing about studying life, evolution, diversity, from the amazing detail of plants and animals through to the phylogenetic trees that connect species," Professor Bennett says.

"Human biology was the most intriguing to me, understanding how our bodies work, how varied we are and what we can learn from our past to help map our future."

Professor Bennett's formative educational mentors also included another family member.

"My aunt, Joan Pietzsch, was a science teacher and a leader in encouraging females into the sciences," she says. "Her good friend, Val Stewart, was the science teacher at my secondary school, Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak, and another inspiration to me. She also fed my hungry appetite for knowledge."

At home, Professor Bennett's penchant for science was encouraged. "My sisters weren't into science, but I had two brothers who were [one is now an engineer, the other a vet], so it was normalised at home," she says.

"I liked school and was ribbed for being a bit of a smarty pants at times, but I wasn't a bookworm either. I was into sport and socialising so that probably helped keep me from being too much of a nerd, and no doubt helped me grow up a little more rounded."

### Connection and communication

Professor Bennett says this ability to connect with others eventually helped her communicate with the students she taught, the researchers she collaborated with and the members of the public who took part in her research. Of course, effective communication is also central to her current role relaying vital public health messages via the media.

As a teenager, Professor Bennett devoured pure knowledge. But as a kid, she'd also loved reading detective novels. She enjoyed problem solving. When medicine beckoned for the high achiever, she already "instinctively" knew research was her passion.

"For me, the science behind the medicine seemed more alluring from the start."

She revelled in her "broad science degree" at the University of Melbourne before settling on physical anthropology, microbiology and epidemiology.

Professor Bennett admits she still squeezes multiple careers into her life, but she learnt early on not to spread herself too thin. To be "useful to the world" you need to "master knowledge and skills in focused areas at a sufficient depth", she says.

### Uncovering Aboriginal ancestry

This sense of public service has been a foundation of Professor Bennett's career. She says she quickly learned that science and policy "often sit side by side".

"When I left uni after completing a degree in population genetics and microbiology, I began working with the police and Aboriginal communities in Victoria when unmarked human burials were accidentally disturbed," she says.

"This was paleo-forensic work as we had to determine whether this was more recent or pre-European contact and, if more recent, the ethnicity of the person."

"The public policy had changed through my time as a university student with Aboriginal communities recognised as the custodians of the remains."



# ***"I have a great respect for knowledge ... I also think learning is the most fun and energising thing in the world."***

"It was a significant time to be working in this space – to be utilising science to support the return of ancestral remains and working with Aboriginal communities who were interested in what could be revealed about past lifestyles and customs from the burials."

## **Young leader**

Such work cast the young epidemiologist into a leadership role, a formative learning experience. Before she had turned 25, she was appointed Victoria's State Physical Anthropologist.

"I didn't aspire to be a leader, but the nature of my study and work interests meant I had to be pretty independent all through, and then would find myself alone and standing out front, representing the Victoria Archaeological Survey where I worked at that time," she says.

"I do remember being pretty overwhelmed when I was appointed into that role as State Physical Anthropologist and trying to absorb so much so quickly. I remember feeling some relief late on my first day when the person showing me around my lab offered me a document, the Guidelines to Managing Human Remains. I let out a sigh of relief. An instruction book!

"But as it was handed over, I was told 'you will want to review and rewrite this'. I made a small whimper inside. But it turned out they were correct – I rewrote the guidebook, found my feet in the process, and the rest is history."

## **Teaching is learning**

That history includes a lot of teaching, which Professor Bennett says was among her most valuable learning experiences. "I have a great respect for knowledge, so take that very seriously, but I also think learning is the most fun and energising thing in the world," she says.

"In teaching you are immersed in this wonderful space where you can be in awe and laughing at the same time. Research is like that too at its best. Contributing new knowledge and growing others so they gain that knowledge is an extraordinary thing.

"I actually remember the day I had set my first exam as a university lecturer. I was mortified that I might have asked an ambiguous question or made some embarrassing typo despite my many checks.

Then, as I watched the students open the exam books, I worried that I may not have taught them well enough, and they might not do so well on my exam. But then, as I watched them scribble away in earnest when writing time started, I realised I was watching them process and make their own all the teaching and learning we had shared in class.

"I was actually quite overwhelmed. It was at that precise moment, I think, that I became a teacher."

## **Technological change**

Professor Bennett says technological advances have had a massive impact on science teaching. "It has changed so

much, it's like all the great things about the best teachers in my time are now rolled up into new teaching methods and technology," she says.

"Access to the entire world via the internet has changed learning resources. I can only imagine how my training would have changed with computer simulations in class.

"But I think more significantly the move away from didactic teaching to more experiential, student-centred learning is quite profound. That, along with the emphasis on learning, not just teaching, encourages those engaged, shared experiences that draw people in.

"It's much easier to get excited about science if you are in a group with a teacher discovering things together. There, you can learn about the joy of discovery itself, not just what is discovered. That is the best of science."

## **Women to the fore**

Professor Bennett says her public role during the pandemic is encouraging young women to engage with science – one of the "great silver linings" of the crisis.

"Women have been prominent in leadership roles in this pandemic response," she says. Casting an eye around Australia, we see leading epidemiologists Professor Raina MacIntyre and Professor Marylouise McLaws; and Chief Health Officers Dr Kerry Chant (NSW) and Dr Jeannette Young (Queensland). Then there's Professor Sarah Gilbert in the UK, co-creator of the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine.

"Young women now know what epidemiology is, that it's a career option that can only be more in demand from here, and that there are female professors," Professor Bennett said.

"I have had the chance to speak to many groups about both epidemiology and leadership and chatted to many about careers individually as well. The interest has grown month to month."

## **Pandemic publicity**

An untiring source of information in the media and social media throughout the pandemic, Professor Bennett says this work is an extension of her research and teaching.

"This is in terms of the skills I have developed over the years that I use 24/7 now, but also in the extraordinary opportunity to communicate with the media as extensively as I do, and with people from all walks of life: the public, industry, academics across disciplines, lawyers and policy makers.

"This has been about unpacking apparently simple but actually quite complex numbers and taking people through the extraordinary world of epidemic dynamics – while being surrounded by it.

"It is another form of sharing knowledge and, as always happens in teaching, learning more about yourself in the process. Therein lies the secret reward."



# Our union speaks about the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

**The IEU has raised the voices of our 75,000 members in the Federal Government's review into Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE),** journalist Jessica Willis writes.

The review seeks to broadly address two key areas for engaging students into the teaching profession:

- attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession, and
- preparing ITE students to be effective teachers.

The final report was due to be delivered in October.

Our union's position is that QITE cannot be supported in a situation where staff and schools are inundated with increasing, arbitrary workload requirements and struggling with inadequate resources.

## **New minister, new review**

Earlier this year, newly appointed Federal Education Minister Alan Tudge used his maiden speech as minister to flag yet another review into the teaching profession, specifically into Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

In his speech, Tudge focussed on Australia's "declining Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes in both absolute terms and relative to other countries" and identified quality ITE as one of the key areas of focus to return Australia to the top group of nations.

He asserted that ITE in Australia was not up to a high standard while also suggesting there would be a push for shorter ITE courses in programs.

## **Attracting and retaining teachers**

IEUA Acting Federal Secretary Christine Cooper said our union

strongly believes that programs and policies which are aimed at attracting and retaining a high-quality teaching workforce need to address a range of issues, including public perceptions of teaching as well as underlying industrial and professional issues.

"Firstly, any policy change needs to acknowledge there are significant issues around public perceptions of teaching perpetuated both by mainstream media as well as by governments.

"We need to respect and support teachers as the professionals they are and the important job they do for students and the school community.

"We also need to ensure our ITE courses are rigorous and of sufficient length to ensure students who graduate can meet the Graduate Professional Standards before commencing employment as teachers.

"Tertiary study is the appropriate form of teacher preparation, and our union is strongly opposed to any proposition to fund a small number of 'fast-tracked' teachers at the expense of high-quality teaching and learning and the future teacher workforce," she said.

"Our union fully supports enabling career changes into teaching; however, not at the expense of producing highly qualified professional teachers.

"Finally, there must be an acknowledgment and mitigation of excessive workloads within the teaching profession, often concerning arbitrary data collection that is more for government accountability rather than the benefit of quality teaching and learning.

"The retention of quality teachers can only be ensured through greater provision of additional supports, especially for graduate teachers and

those teachers working rurally and regionally," she said.

## **Preparing students to be effective teachers**

Cooper said that it is wrong to assume current teachers and ITE programs do not use evidence-based teaching practices.

"This is already the standard and the government should be looking at ways to further invest in the quality programs already in place, rather than shorter ITE courses that won't prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom.

"This should include quality practicum experiences that develop pre-service teachers' professional skills, abilities and confidence in responding to educational contexts," she said.

## **Listen to teachers**

Cooper said instead of engaging with IEU members on the issues impacting the profession, the Federal Government has once again sought to make political gain from education policies.

"Our union believes that to maintain the integrity of the teaching profession and further strengthen Australia's education system, the government and its policy makers need to consult with and listen to teachers about the issues impacting the teaching profession," she said.

"Both politicians and the public underestimate the intelligence, creativity and resilience required of teachers.

"This has to change: teachers are experts in their field and should be heard when it comes to issues affecting their professional practice," she said.





# Parental Rights Bill

## School staff, unions and parents push back

**Teachers in NSW are under attack from One Nation's proposed legislation, writes Professional Engagement Officer Pat Devery. Unfortunately, such a threat could emerge in any state or territory.**

The NSW Parliamentary Committee Report on the *Parental Rights Bill*, released in early September, is a sharp disappointment. The worst aspects of the Bill's attack on teacher professionalism have not been addressed, and the IEU has called on all NSW politicians to reject the proposed legislation in its entirety.

Steered by One Nation's Mark Latham, the *Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020* purports to be about parental rights, but it attacks the professionalism of teachers and the rights of the child.

The union believes the Bill would be unworkable in practice and unsafe for vulnerable students in schools.


### Why it's unworkable

The *Education Act* already states as a fundamental principle that "the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents". The IEU supports this and emphasises that parents are already responsible for teaching children about core values, such as ethical and moral standards, political and social values, personal wellbeing, gender and sexuality. However, the Parental Rights Bill goes much further in giving parents a key role in matters of school curricula.

Let's take a closer look at what it means. The Bill proposes that schools provide a detailed summary at the start of each year regarding any course content relating to these 'parental primacy' issues.

Parents could then object to curricula supplied by the NSW Education Standards Authority in science (evolution); Shakespeare (cross-dressing, suicide, pre-marital sex,





***"It is an unwarranted and ill-conceived attack on the professionalism of teachers and the rights of the child as articulated in the UN Convention."***

infidelity); geography (climate change, environment); modern and ancient history (religion, social movements; role of women; political beliefs; reconciliation); and PDHPE (personal wellbeing, identity, discrimination, sex, consent).

Parents could also withdraw their students from any class that covers these topics.

The Bill's broad definition of parental primacy means all schools would be required to ensure the education they provide is "consistent with the moral and ethical standards and the political and social values" of parents. Given every school in NSW welcomes a diverse cross-section of students with parents from every social, political and religious view, the practicalities of ensuring the curriculum provided to each child meets their parents' stipulations are simply unworkable.

### **Weight on workloads**

The red tape created for schools and teachers in demonstrating compliance with the Bill would only add greater complexity at a time when teachers and education authorities are working to declutter the curriculum and remove unnecessary administrative burdens.

The Bill requires schools to provide parents with detailed summaries of course content at the start of every year, with an associated list of textbooks and other learning materials. This would not only add to teachers' already heavy workloads, but also put school leaders in the invidious position of refereeing differences of opinion between groups of parents and potentially even between parents of the same child.

In his evidence to the Education Committee inquiry, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam said the Bill was "an onerous and burdensome addition to what schools are already doing".

Teachers continually evaluate and adapt their teaching programs and, on a daily basis, respond to questions students might ask in the classroom. It would be impossible to stick strictly to a course outline provided months earlier. The right of parents to withdraw children in such a situation would prove chaotic.

### **Jeopardising jobs**

While the Parental Rights Bill supposedly focuses on parents and children, it has teachers and principals squarely in its sights. The Bill proposes a mandate that to become accredited, every teacher would have to agree that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children, and teachers would automatically lose their jobs should they breach any of the Bill's complex provisions.

One of the Bill's more extreme elements, prohibiting references to gender fluidity, has been dropped from the final recommendations. However, the remaining elements of the Bill, especially the requirement to outline in detail any curriculum content which falls under the newly proposed understanding of parental rights, continue to pose a significant threat to a teacher's accreditation should they find themselves in a position where they need to provide support to at-risk students.

This potential threat to a teacher's livelihood, simply for answering students' inevitable questions of affirming the vulnerable student in their care is fundamentally wrong. No teacher should lose their job for supporting a student.

### **Opposition expands**

IEU members have also expressed strong opposition to the Bill. "The Bill indicates little knowledge or understanding of how schools function on a day-to-day basis, shows no regard for the professional judgement of teachers, and has the potential to cause significant harm to individual students and teachers," the NSW North West Sub Branch of the union said in a resolution.

"It is an unwarranted and ill-conceived attack on the professionalism of teachers and the rights of the child as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory."

The IEU's school counsellor members have also expressed their deep concern that the legislation would "place unreasonable limitations on their ability to discuss sensitive matters with students who are in need of pastoral care relating to issues of sexuality and gender". As a result, these students could be further marginalised rather than shown care.

"We are concerned about the adverse impact on the professional judgment of teachers and counsellors and the broad effect this legislation could have on teaching, learning and student wellbeing in our schools," the counsellors said.

The IEU's NSW South Coast Sub Branch also condemned the Bill, describing it as "deprofessionalising and anti-student wellbeing". In a resolution, the Sub Branch called on the NSW Parliament to reject the Bill. "It does not acknowledge the complexity of the nature of education and is therefore unworkable," the resolution said.

The Parliamentary Committee's report also noted that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW and the NSW Parents Council both opposed the Bill, stating in their submissions that the "uncertainty this would create within education could potentially be catastrophic to the delivery of a uniform curriculum, and place schools and teachers in untenable positions".

This legislation has no place in a progressive society. The IEU has called on every NSW politician to vote against it.



# Uniform policy

# Skorts more than just for sport

**When it comes to school uniforms, new research has revealed the campaign for equity could be further enhanced by allowing sports uniforms to be an everyday option for students, journalist Jessica Willis writes.**

Recently, the Norwegian women's beach handball team made headlines across the world for taking a stand against their uniform, which was clearly not-fit-for-purpose, uncomfortable and sexist.

Many were outraged when the International Handball Federation fined the team for wearing shorts rather than the required bikini bottoms "no more than 10 centimetres at the sides".

Men, on the other hand, can wear shorts as long as 10 centimetres above the knees as long as they are "not too baggy".

Women have raised concerns about their compulsory uniforms, not just in handball or other sport, for years; however, often they are shut down and told nothing can be done, when something definitely could be done.

In Australia, many non-government schools require students to wear 'traditional' school uniforms; trousers or shorts, button-up shirts, tunics and skirts, socks or stockings and leather shoes – and have policies limiting the wearing of sports uniforms to the nominated sports/activity days only.

## **Girls' Uniform Agenda**

The Girls' Uniform Agenda (GUA) has been challenging compulsory uniforms norms, particularly in non-government schools.

Established in 2017 by co-founders Dr Amanda Mergler and Simone Cariss, the organisation's goal is for all students in all schools around Australia to have the choice of pants and shorts as part of their daily uniform options.

Our union has been a major supporter of the GUA's campaign, encouraging members to wear pants to

school during the week of International Women's Day, among other collective activities, to celebrate the freedom to wear pants to work that some students do not have.

GUA has successfully helped many people lobby their schools or education departments for more appropriate uniform options for students with their collective approach and accessible resources.

The IEU-QNT School Chapter at the Essington School is one such group who used their union collective with the resources created by GUA to get their school to change girls' uniforms.

Students now have the option to wear better fitting skorts that allow them to play more freely. They were also able to select uniform fabrics better suited to the tropical climate.

## **Benefits of uniform equity**

While removing a barrier to sport and physical activity is a major driver for the GUA campaign, they also argue that girls should have the option of pants or shorts because:

- Letting students choose the most comfortable option of clothing for themselves allows them to focus on their learning or playing, instead of worrying about the length of their skirts, whether anyone can see their underwear or being cold in winter.
- Rigid gender stereotypes are damaging to everyone. It is unfair to require girls to wear skirts and dresses so they 'look' a certain way, when boys have less restrictive options that allow for more freedom.
- The majority of women at work and in society (perhaps with the exception of professional athletes) have options to wear what is appropriate for their job and comfortable for them personally. Teachers, nurses, police officers and office workers all have uniform or dress code options; they are not forced to wear dresses or skirts (Girls' Uniform Agenda, 2019).

## **Next steps to achieve equity**

A University of Newcastle research team have been looking at the benefits of students wearing their sport uniform every day.

Sports uniforms are cheaper, more comfortable and could lead to an increase in physical activity according to the team (McLaughlin, Wolfenden, McCarthy and Nathan, 2021).

Research findings also indicate teachers, students and parents prefer sports uniforms, and would support a change to a daily sports uniform (McCarthy et al., 2020).

One survey conducted by the researchers found that of the participants (principals, teachers and parents of children in grades two to three from 62 primary schools) 63 percent of teachers and 78 percent of parents supported a change to daily sports uniform, whereas only 38 percent of principals did (McCarthy et al., 2020).

They found the biggest barrier to the change was the perception a sports uniform is not appropriate for formal occasions, the potential financial impact on families that comes with uniform policy changes as well as the cost to the school's image, status and tradition (McCarthy et al., 2020).

Talking to the *Sydney Morning Herald* this year, lead researcher and PhD candidate Nicole McCarthy said, "the biggest barrier is the image and its appropriateness for formal occasions. It's important to the schools. We know that, and that's okay. There's a sense of identity. But maybe it's more about challenging the uniform providers to make attractive, smart sportswear that would still be acceptable." (Baker, 2021)

## **Students say 'yes'**

Most importantly, the researchers have tested both primary and secondary students' attitudes to changing traditional uniforms to sports uniforms. Overall, 63 percent of primary students



reported that they would prefer to wear their sports uniform every day (McCarthy et al., 2018).

Sixty-two percent of the students believed they would be more active during the school day if they were wearing their sports uniform (McCarthy et al., 2018).

Of the secondary students surveyed, 71.9 percent said they would prefer to wear their sports uniform every day and 65 percent believe they would be more active if allowed to do so (McCarthy et al., 2019).

Given these findings, as well the fact that activity levels for young people are low across the board, sports uniforms may prove a valuable tool in increasing physical activity and sports participation for students.

This is exactly the next step the team are taking in their research: a large study looking at whether primary school students are more active if they wear sports uniforms every day.

Twenty-four NSW schools have signed up for the study, with 12 asking their students to wear sports uniforms every day, while the rest will wear the traditional uniform (Baker, 2021).

The researchers will record the students' fitness over a year and their physical activity over a week.

### Continuing to advocate for change

While many positive changes have occurred to provide greater school uniform equity, widespread policy and cultural change to school uniforms is not going to happen overnight.

There are some valid reasons the traditional uniform are in place, such

as forming a school identity, but those should not mean we never revisit uniform policy.

We need to be open to change, especially when simple changes could make big differences to students, for example changing uniform material to better suit hotter or colder climates.

Our union is a great way for members to become involved in uniform equity.

Women's or equity committees in our union's various branches are a key

avenue to continuing our campaign for change in this area.

IEU members can also raise the issue of uniform equity for discussion in their school chapters.

Whether it be removing barriers to physical activity and learning or allowing students to be more comfortable in what they are required to wear every day – together we can achieve equity for our students and our school communities.

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*Clockwise from top: Just some of the diverse student cohort at Warakirri College; Principal Carolyn Blanden at her desk; Blanden helps out at a BBQ for students*

# Second chance school

**Warakirri College offers a lifeline to students who struggle to thrive in mainstream education, journalist Sue Osborne writes.**

Young people disconnect from mainstream schools for a variety of reasons including mental health challenges, complex family situations, repeated expulsions, drug or alcohol problems, becoming parents as teenagers, socio-economic disadvantage, undiagnosed low literacy or learning difficulties, behavioural challenges, bullying, gender dysphoria – the list is long.

Principal Carolyn Blanden believes all students, even juvenile offenders, deserve a second chance. Her school, Warakirri College, has campuses in Blacktown, Fairfield and Campbelltown, in Sydney's west, and welcomes students aged 14–22.

"What alternatives do they have but to fall back on a life of crime, if they have no chance of an education?" Blanden said.

"At Warakirri College we do our best to provide opportunities for students and teachers to achieve their goals. Many of our students are amazed at what they are able to achieve in an environment that is empathetic, flexible and creatively supportive."

"I would encourage any teacher who wants to make a difference to consider Warakirri or a school like it. Our staff are given opportunities to fast track their career through

professional development and mentoring together with leadership opportunities which are rarely available to young teachers."

Blanden's own career path is impressive and she believes the diversity of her experiences has enabled her to build Warakirri College from five staff and 38 students to three campuses with a fourth under construction and opening next year.

## **Baptism by fire**

A successful graduate of a non-government school, Blanden's first post was as a music teacher, even though she had studied geology (an achievement in an era when women rarely studied science).

It was a baptism by fire. Burwood Girls High School, in Sydney, had a large cohort of new migrants who did not speak English. Blanden said those students would often end up in her music class, because it was assumed music didn't require English skills. She learned that if a lesson wasn't sufficiently engaging, her students would simply climb out the window.

After a few years she took a job as an education officer for a group of financial institutions and visited 150 schools across NSW, speaking to 55,000 students in Commerce and Economics classes.

"What I learnt from that experience is that it didn't matter whether you went to a state or private school, a wealthy or

poor school, it was how the teachers interacted with the students that set the tone," Blanden said.

She resumed teaching at Knox Grammar School in Wahroonga, where she finally got a chance to teach science. It was the early 1980s, and Blanden was one of only three women teachers in the traditional boys' school.

"There were no female toilets in the common room, we had to walk a long way," she said. "The only women in promotions positions were in charge of cooking, cleaning and the school hospital."

When absent from a meeting, Blanden was appointed Chair of the Affirmative Action Committee – an invidious role in a school that preferred not to employ women. However, it gave her a voice and great experience, and by the time she left Knox 15 years later, things were changing, and there were 45 women on staff.

During her time at Knox, Blanden became involved with the Board of Studies as Chair of the HSC Exam Committee in Geology, Supervisor of Marking for 4-Unit Science and membership of the team that started development of the Standards Referencing system.

She moved to Tara Anglican School for Girls in Parramatta as Director of Studies then became Deputy Principal, where she was grateful to be mentored by her first woman principal, Dr Ruth Shatford.

#### **Influential feminist**

Moving to Meriden Anglican School in Strathfield as Principal, Blanden was influenced by the biography of feminist Betty Archdale, a law graduate and captain of the English women's cricket team, who was goddaughter of British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. Archdale became headmistress of Abbotsleigh Girls School in Wahroonga in 1958, where she introduced science to the curriculum and challenged the social norms that had limited the aspirations of generations of schoolgirls.

However, the demands of principalship coincided with a tough time in Blanden's life. Her husband became unwell, and her Year 10 son was struggling with his own demons. She decided to spend more time with her family and quit education for a while.

She took a job with an international consortium, working on several projects, including accreditation of the first Australian school in China to deliver the HSC; developing a machine that could take water from the atmosphere for communities struck by a natural disaster; and managing a \$52 million building project.

After a few years she returned to education as Head of College at Galstaun College at Ingleside, in Sydney's north, a bilingual English/Armenian school. The opportunity to engage with the Armenian community was a rewarding experience that enabled Blanden to more effectively serve the refugee communities of Fairfield and Blacktown.

The offer of principalship at Warakirri came about through a chance meeting over coffee, but Blanden felt she'd been building up to this position all her life.

Warakirri College, an initiative of social enterprise MTC Australia, has 350 students and 70 staff across its three campuses. Blanden said the demand for alternative education is exploding with the increasing prevalence of youth mental health issues, trauma and young people needing a place that responds to their individual needs.

She has acted as an adviser to other organisations setting up similar schools, such as Gateway Community High in Carlingford in Sydney's north west, which opened this year.

#### **Courage is key**

It is the students' courage that motivates Blanden.

"Just getting up and coming to school every day can be such a challenge for them," she said. "I have a student who must get his five brothers and sisters ready for school, then tries to get his mum, who has depression, out of bed, before he can get himself ready. He's been in juvenile detention too. But he keeps coming. We admire him so much."

One student had to do all her oral assessments in an empty classroom with the teacher hiding under a desk to accommodate the student's extreme anxiety. Now she is a 'golden key' honour student, one of the world's top 15 percent of achievers at university.

Blanden is currently putting together a program for young mums to attend class and get support with child rearing, as they are at high risk of having their children removed by Family and Community Services.

"They have no idea how to bring up a child, they are just children themselves," Blanden said.

Blanden has also worked with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to make Warakirri one of the first independent schools accredited to deliver distance education because some students are simply too anxious to come to school, their behaviour is too extreme, or their crimes prevent attendance.

Blanden said the school is often the students' first experience of having a place to go where they can feel safe all day. It provides adult role models who are consistently caring and genuinely interested in the students' growth and development. It's a place where they can find stability and direction, often a novelty in their lives.

"One of our students had a baby on Monday morning and brought him into school on Tuesday morning. It was like she was showing her family her new baby."

The college actively strives to find jobs for students even when they have left school

and are in their 20s.

Of course, during COVID lockdowns, all students must try to learn from home, but this is no simple task although the school uses the CANVAS platform for online classes. Many students have had computers loaned to them, but others have no internet access, so the teachers do home deliveries of learning resources and provide daily one-to-one telephone mentoring.

The teachers always go the extra mile for their students, providing them with clothes for interviews (a barefoot mother was once given shoes), prescription glasses, money to apply for university, family food hampers and other support.

"Being able to make a difference to the community, giving young people a chance to complete their education, have a career and not become welfare dependent, that's what makes it all worthwhile," Blanden said.

On top of her busy schedule, Blanden finds time to be an active member of the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch, having served on its Education Issues Committee and Principals' Sub Branch.

"I grew up believing unions were just about strikes, but I've discovered that our union is a constructive organisation that contributes greatly to our profession," she said.

**"What alternatives do they have but to fall back on a life of crime, if they have no chance of an education."**



The background of the image shows the silhouettes of three people standing in a circle, holding hands. They are positioned on a wooden floor, and their shadows are cast long and dark across the surface. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is one of unity and shared experience.

***“We learn  
so much  
from these  
students  
– we are  
better  
people  
because  
of them.”***





# Inclusivity enables us all

**Inclusive education is an expanding field that offers great rewards for students and teachers alike, but it comes with huge challenges. Journalist Monica Crouch listens to the experts.**

In 21st century Australia, students with a disability (physical or intellectual), students with health-related conditions, learning difficulties, a language disorder, a mental health condition or autism are just as entitled to a high-quality education as every other student.

"These children have every right to be in the classroom, they have every right to be in school, they have every right to be in society," says Bruce Rowles, a retired IEU member with a 45-year career in the sector, most recently as Executive Principal of Aspect Education, which specialises in educating children with autism. "There needs to be opportunity for all children to have their needs met."

But all children haven't always had their needs met. Up until the 1970s, children with disabilities were largely excluded from mainstream education, with little option but to attend schools that catered to specific disabilities (such as schools for children with sight or hearing impairments) which were often run by charities or voluntary organisations. Some children were institutionalised, some didn't even attend school.

All this began to change when state governments started setting up special schools, then establishing special education units within regular schools. Now there is barely a classroom in Australia that doesn't include a student with extra needs, and the terminology has evolved along with the practice: from disability education to special needs education to inclusive education.

Success in this field starts with one key attribute. "Awareness and acceptance of people who are perceived to be different," says IEU member Dianne Smith, who teaches at a big high school in the ACT. (We have changed her name to protect her students.)

## **Proud professionals**

Rowles and Smith can trace the trajectory of special needs education alongside their respective 45-year

careers in the sector. Their combined knowledge and experience is unparalleled.

"I began with teaching in a rural setting where there was no provision for students with additional needs," Smith says. "Then I went into a specialist segregated school, then from segregated schools within a school, or units within schools, to special classes in regular schools under the term of integration."

Next came mainstream classes that adopted the withdrawal of special needs students for individual or small group tuition, then mainstream settings with no withdrawal. "Students with needs were placed in the bottom level class in each grade in a streamed setting, and this model was referred to as 'learning support,'" Smith says.

"From here the schools moved to all students in mainstream classes under inclusive practices."

The notion of inclusivity has also evolved. "There has been a broadening of the concept to cover marginalised groups of students whose needs must also be met," Smith says.

Rowles began his teaching career in 1977 with the Department of Education in the Wollongong area, and his second school focused on special needs education. He then joined the Wollongong Catholic Education Office and became manager of the Learning Centre for students with special needs in a big primary school.

Coordinator roles followed, then 11 years as Special Education Coordinator for the Wollongong Diocese. Deputy Principal and Acting Principal roles preceded his 13 years as Principal with Aspect's South Coast and Riverina schools. For the final two years of his career, Rowles was Executive Principal with Aspect Education, which welcomes 1200 pupils with autism across eight schools.

Rowles supports inclusion, but also recognises the complexities. "Inclusion is a great goal for all of us to achieve," he says. "But the realities are that sometimes there needs to be specialised classes and specialised schools. We need to have the range, so we know we've got opportunities for all of the children."





**Bruce Rowles, retired Executive Principal of Aspect Education**

### It's the law

In 1992, the tireless work of disability advocates was enshrined in law when three brief clauses in the *Disability Discrimination Act* made it unlawful for schools to discriminate against a student on the grounds of disability. Schools could neither refuse admission to a student with a disability, nor develop any curricula with content that would exclude a student with disability from participating.

"So we had to grow," Rowles says of his time at the Wollongong Diocese. "And we grew rapidly – when I started, I think there were probably around 50 to 60 students with disabilities across the whole diocese and when I walked out the door, I think there were 370."

Things have changed for the better, he says. "We've still got a way to go, I know that, but fortunately all of the systems now take the education of students with disabilities seriously, and there's legislation that says they need to do it too."

### True stories

It turns out inclusive education is beneficial not just for students with disabilities – it also offers great benefits to their mainstream peers. Rowles talks about the process of welcoming a child with special needs into school.

"There was a family who wanted their little girl integrated into kindergarten, so we sat down with them and worked out the best way to approach it," he says. "It wasn't without its challenges for the first six to eight months, but at the end of that, the principal said, 'you know what, we've done a lot for her, but by jeez, she's done a lot for us'. She really enriched the school."

Central to this, Rowles says, was teamwork. "We thought it was going to be a difficulty, but we realised we'd approached it the right way, we'd sat down and worked as a team," he says.

The inclusion experience at Smith's school echoes this. "The whole class will benefit by having a student with a disability," one teacher says.

Rowles offers another example of teaching a Year 5 class that included a student with quite severe disabilities. "His needs were challenging, but the other kids in the class were wonderful in the way they supported him and looked after him – they even rostered themselves to look after him at lunchtimes," he says.

"They were fantastic, they just accepted him. He was quite a handful, he could be difficult, but the other students made it so much easier because they saw it as part of their responsibility as well. It worked well."

Rowles says that despite this student's difficulties, acceptance among his classmates was transformative. "They learned a lot from having him in their class," he says. "There was a small group that probably had him in their class for a couple of years and they were still the main drivers of looking after him. It was just wonderful to see."

### How it works

Responsibility for educating students with needs in any school does not rest with an individual teacher or even a team, it permeates the entire school community.

"Ownership must come from all levels, all curriculum areas and from the executive team," Smith says. "Just like we acknowledge that all teachers are teachers of literacy and numeracy, all teachers are responsible for all students learning in their classrooms – from students on modified programs, differentiated curriculum, mainstream students and the gifted and talented."

Inclusivity is a diverse field requiring practical adaptations and expertise. "Schools are expected to consider access, participation, equity and social justice issues for students with disabilities and learning difficulties whether they are diagnosed or imputed," Smith says. "There is an ever-growing and ever-widening sense of the concept of inclusion in schools and in society."

The Inclusive Education Team at Smith's school comprises two resource teachers of many years' experience, five full-time Inclusive Education Assistants (IEAs), and one who is a trained teacher but working as an IEA. There are also three part-timers who are studying to be teachers. And, of course, there is Smith herself.

"We support the teacher supporting the students," one IEA says. "This can include helping to modify classwork and assessment tasks, making sure students understand the activity or assessment and what is expected of them, helping students to take a step-by-step approach to their tasks, and helping to run a reading program for students who are struggling with literacy."



Successful inclusivity relies on recognising that all students are individuals. "But work you prepare for a student with needs will also help other students in the class," another IEA says. "Have high expectations, and if something doesn't work, change your strategy."

The IEAs share their observations of students with the teachers so they can work together to help each student reach their full potential. "We're part of their journey through school, and we help prepare them for the world outside school," an IEA says.

Another IEA encourages all students to have a go at everything. "I read the other day that if a student is not given the opportunity to do a task, the moment is lost," the IEA says. "Also allow students to make mistakes, that is so important. Students need to know it is fine to make mistakes."

The team also develops incremental autonomy in students. "We support independent learning," an IEA says. "I allow students the space and time to use their brain instead of mine."

Smith lists the skills and qualities she considers crucial to effective inclusivity. "You need to be organised, creative, highly intuitive, calm-natured, detail oriented, deadline oriented, adaptable, even tempered, have a good sense of humour, and truly love children."

Yes, it's quite some list; and yes, these attributes take time to cultivate. But the rewards are great. "We learn so much from these students," an IEA says. "We are better people because of them."

### **Weighed down**

Unfortunately, inclusive education also comes with quite a workload. "There are a whole lot of legislative requirements (read: paperwork) around documenting what is being done and for whom," Smith says.

She's referring, of course, to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on students with a disability, known as the NCCD. Its aim is to enable schools, education authorities and governments to understand the needs of students with disability so they can support them through funding. But in practice, it's onerous.

"Many people are unaware of the level of reporting and evidence that is required to get funding," one IEA says. "Providing evidence for the NCCD is a huge undertaking to make sure all students are being supported, including following up with teachers with evidence of modifications, administering and recording data – all of this then needs to be collected, uploaded to students' individual plans."

Another IEA agrees about this administrative load. "There seems to be

a huge emphasis on the reporting and administration requirements placed on the teachers in this area," the IEA says. Enrolments of students with needs are increasing at her school, a testimony to the team's great work. But of course this adds to the NCCD load.

"A lot of work goes into understanding the process around the NCCD, so much paperwork and time goes into planning, assessing and identifying special needs students," another IEA says.

***"We need to make sure our young teachers are equipped, because they're not going to get a classroom these days without a student who's got disabilities of some description."***

### **Taking action**

The IEU is acting on the concerns of school staff around the NCCD. In late 2020, the union's NSW/ACT Branch formed a working group and conducted a survey to understand the impact of the NCCD process.

"The findings couldn't be clearer," IEU Education Coordinator Veronica Yewdall says. "The survey indicated that the NCCD process has a significant impact on workloads for learning support teachers, with nearly half of all respondents reporting they receive no additional release time for undertaking five or more after-school hours per week to complete the process."

That said, survey participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the aims of the NCCD and were committed to securing the support their students need. Survey respondents were not just concerned about their own excessive workloads, but also about the impact on students as the NCCD diverts teaching time into administrative tasks.

The IEU compiled a list of demands arising from the survey, headed by workforce planning to staff the NCCD process in schools so teaching wasn't impacted. "Other recommendations focus on providing sufficient release

time, clarifying and streamlining the evidentiary requirements, and avoiding the layering effect of duplicating data," Yewdall says.

As a result of this survey, the IEU made recommendations to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and all Catholic Dioceses during Term 2 and early Term 3 of 2021. Meetings have been productive, with considerable support for the IEU's requests to clarify guidelines and eliminate unnecessary or duplicative collection of data.

DESE has asked the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch NCCD Working Group to identify the areas of greatest concern and provide more feedback on possible amendments to the guidelines.

### **Pre-service preparation**

Rowles too would like to see greater resourcing, starting with more in-depth training for pre-service teachers. "Up to 10 to 20 percent of the school population will have some learning need or disability – that's a massive chunk of your population," he says.

"You really need a dedicated team and that's why the pre-service training needs to be a core subject that should probably go for three years, because there's a lot to learn."

Then there's that all-important classroom experience. "I'm not sure pre-service teachers are getting the exposure they should be getting, the time in classrooms," Rowles says.

"We need to make sure our young teachers are equipped, because they're not going to get a classroom these days without a student who's got disabilities of some description. It just doesn't exist, thank goodness. But teachers need to be better equipped to manage it, and schools need to have the resources."

Employing more IEAs would make a big difference, too. "How great would it be to have one in every class?" one IEA asks. "The feedback I've received from teachers is that it takes a lot of pressure off them and they feel the students as a group are receiving more support."

### **Further reading**

**Download the IEU's Report on the survey into the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) process in NSW and ACT schools:** [bit.ly/3xyD7bG](https://bit.ly/3xyD7bG)

**Introduction to the report:** [ieu.asn.au/news-publications/news/2020/12/report-nationally-consistent-collection-dara-nccd-process-nsw-and-act-schools](https://ieu.asn.au/news-publications/news/2020/12/report-nationally-consistent-collection-dara-nccd-process-nsw-and-act-schools)

**NCCD process impacts workload of learning support teachers:** [publications.ieu.asn.au/2021-march-newsmonth/news2/nccd-process-impacts-workload-learning-support-teachers/](https://publications.ieu.asn.au/2021-march-newsmonth/news2/nccd-process-impacts-workload-learning-support-teachers/)



# Are you suffering from information overload?

**Information overload was a buzz phrase before the internet, before messaging, the 24/7 news cycle, social media, analytics, keyboard tracking, UX design, LinkedIn, and PowerPoint. But it's a reality here and now for teachers, writes Will Brodie.**

Coined in 1964 and popularised in the 1970s via Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, information overload amounted to mental paralysis: presented with too much data, you were left confused and/or unable to make a decision.

The human brain has not developed as much as technology since 1970. However, expectations of workers, including teachers, to deal with and produce more information have risen dramatically. Technological advances have led to more, not less work and management and administrative tasks that didn't exist a generation ago.

In 2019, *The Educator* reported that Australian lower secondary teachers spent 24.9 hours per week on non-teaching tasks compared to the OECD average of 18.2 hours.

*Valuing the Teaching Profession: An Independent Report*, (known as the Gallop Report), commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation, found the "intensity and complexity of teachers' workloads" had ramped up "enormously".

Report co-author Patrick Lee, former IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Deputy Secretary, said most submissions from teachers to the review went to "the clash between the time available to do the work teachers do and the other stuff you've been asked to do".

These time-consuming duties include: excessive documenting of programs; data collection prioritised over teaching time; system initiatives such as data walls; and the datafication of learning, with teachers required to upload data at every turn.

## Impact on workload

In early 2021, the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch surveyed members on the impact of requirements in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), finding most respondents had to submit the same or similar data on multiple platforms and had issues with uploading data during peak times.

"The NCCD process has a significant impact on workloads for learning support teachers, with nearly half of all respondents reporting they receive no additional release time and are undertaking five or more after-school hours per week to complete the process," the survey found.

In 2018, the review of Victorian teacher workloads conducted by consultancy Nous Group found 88 percent of teachers reported assessment, feedback and administrative tasks had increased their workload in the last three years, and 72 percent of them believed technology had increased their workload in the last three years.

## What is to be done?

Advocates of data-informed practice say the problem isn't how much data we encounter, but how we engage with it.

Data-informed practice is "the simple act of using tangible evidence and information to make decisions and draw conclusions".

A report from the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) says, "Without focused

questions, the collection, analysis and use of data may be scattered, unclear and pointless."

It says data-informed practice in schools should be "the systematic use of data by schools and educators to improve student learning, specific instruction, classroom practices and overall wellbeing".

"For data to be most useful, it should be collected systematically and for a clearly identified purpose."

The Grattan Institute's report *Targeted teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning* states: "Like a doctor trying to identify what treatment patients need to improve their health, teachers need to identify what teaching their students need now to improve their learning."

Schools need "systematic collection of high-quality evidence of student learning, to analyse this evidence to identify learning gaps and to monitor progress over time, and to use this evidence to identify successful teaching".

## Targeted teaching positive feedback loop

### 1. Assess what each of our students knows already

Identify a baseline for every student on an agreed learning progression to:

- assess current understanding
- agree appropriate learning goals

### 2. Target teaching to meet each student's learning needs

Use current achievement data to:

- plan how to cover the next topic
- target teaching to address what each student is ready to learn next
- refine teaching using frequent formative assessment.

### 3. Rigorously track the progress of all our students

Monitor progress of every student to:

- reassess their understanding
- analyse progress vs learning goals
- support any student who is stalled
- provide individualised feedback

### 4. Adapt our teaching practices to improve next time round

Analyse progress and outcome data to select and refine teaching practice:

- keep doing what works best
- improve or stop what doesn't.

## Data applied: A case study

A prime example of the benefits of data-informed practice comes from Duval County Public Schools in Florida, in the United States.

Duval, engaging with a data analytics company, created a customised system to track metrics like attendance, discipline reports and test scores to flag at-risk students, increasing graduation rates by over 25 percent in 10 years.



The digital data system uses a high school graduation tracker, at-risk graduation tracker and early warning systems to provide current student data and “predictive trend-based analytics” that address achievement gaps.

This level of AI doesn't just react to user questions, it can "proactively initiate conversations with users". Constantinou believes this will improve critical thinking skills.

Learn to skim. Most information only contains a key point or two - grab those points and move on.



# VOICING CONCERNS: SPEAKING UP ABOUT VOCAL INJURY IN TEACHERS



**Global research reveals up to 30 percent of teachers will experience a voice problem at some stage of their career, creating the need to educate teachers on how to protect and preserve their voices, journalist Emily Campbell writes.**

Compared to the general population, teachers are between three and five times more likely to suffer vocal problems and 32 times more likely to report a vocal problem than other professions (Voice Care Australia, 2014).

Kirsten Geraghty, an experienced speech pathologist and voice coach who has been practising for more than 30 years, said teachers have a vocally demanding profession and their vocal loads are extremely high, which puts them at increased risk of a voice injury.

"Given how frequently and the length [of time] teachers are required to use their voices for, speaking in front of the class and over competing noises, using it during lunch time duty outdoors and shouting to communicate during events like sports carnivals, it all adds up," Geraghty said.

"Their high vocal load coupled with a good dose of stress, which we know teachers often experience, contributes to the prevalence of voice problems they experience," she said.

## **Women disproportionately impacted**

Previous research indicates there are gender differences in the laryngeal system and pulmonary usage that make women more prone to voice problems (Will, 2016).

According to Geraghty, female teachers who are at the beginning of their teaching career or nearing the end and approaching retirement are more prone to experiencing voice problems.

"It seems to be the trend that voice injuries occur most frequently during the first few years of teaching or at the other end of a teacher's career, particularly during transition to retirement," she said.

"Obviously, voice problems can occur at any stage of a teacher's career, although it seems to be heavily weighted to those cohorts and affects mostly the female population."

"Going from not talking as much being a student to then being in front of a class teaching and talking all day is a drastic change," she said.

Geraghty said stress levels and voice problems are intrinsically linked too, as the vocal anatomy is highly sensitive to stress, hormones and mood changes.

"That's why when for example, if someone is really upset, tired or angry,

you can tell by the sound of their voice and hear something is wrong," she said.

"Voices are really sensitive to mood and how we are feeling, so will close over to protect your lungs, that's what our vocal cords are there for, so it can get ready to shut down very easily," she said.

## **Initial teacher education lacking**

Geraghty believes universities need to do much more in terms of ensuring early career teachers are taught about voice injuries as an occupational hazard and how to protect themselves and minimise risk.

"There is still not enough done in initial teacher education to ensure teachers know how to look after themselves and their voice," she said.

"All beginning teachers, before they enter a classroom, should be taught to recognise the warning signs, how to warm up their voices safely, how to use their voices effectively and project it safely as well as knowing their limitations.

"It really beggars belief that in 2021, the approach to voice injury is still very reactive, rather than proactive.

"Although courses in university might touch on it and there is slightly increased awareness, it's nowhere near as good as it could be, given





that between 20 and 30 percent [of teachers] experience problems.

"That figure is not necessarily reflective of the true number either, because many teachers don't seek help or report their voice problems, because there seems to still be a slight stigma attached to teachers saying I need help with my voice, as though it's a sign of weakness," she said.

Unsurprisingly, health and physical education (HPE) teachers are susceptible to sudden voice injuries, given the nature of their work.

"HPE teachers are prone to more of an acute injury, generally from yelling while outside and having a sudden blowout on the voice fold, or a polyp, a really sudden injury," Geraghty said.

With many teachers now wearing protective masks in the classroom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, voice strain and vocal fatigue are becoming increasingly common.

"It is really disempowering for teachers to have problems with their voice, because they don't feel like they're being heard and it can become a very stressful ordeal," Geraghty said.

"That is why it is crucial for teachers to have flexible voices and be educated on how to protect their voices, know their limitations and project safely," she said.

### Warning signs

There are several warning signs teachers should look out for that indicate a potential voice problem, and Geraghty said teachers should monitor themselves and be familiar with their voices.

"One of the common signs of a voice problem can be huskiness or hoarseness in the voice at the end of a working day or working week," she said.

"If you notice a pattern of your voice being fine at the beginning of a day or week but then fatiguing by the end, that's a sign something isn't right."

Loss of range of volume and loss of range of pitch of the voice are further examples of symptoms commonly reported by teachers suffering voice problems.

"Loss of power and loss of the ups and downs, the melodies of your voice, indicates a problem," Geraghty said.

"A lot of teachers I have treated would say they can't sing anymore with their class whereas once they used to, which is a sign something isn't normal," she said.

If a teacher has returned to work following absence due to an illness but their voice has not fully recovered, Geraghty said that should be monitored.

"Use your sick leave when necessary, take the full two days off to fully recover

from conditions like laryngitis and even longer for colds and flu," she said.

"While you might not feel overly sick, you still lose your voice so teachers do often soldier on and continue to talk over swollen folds, which can lead to chronic and more serious problems.

"If you've been coughing lots, your vocal cords have been slamming together repeatedly, which can affect your voice, and some medications dry up the mucous in your nose and vocal folds, which means your voice is like a car running without oil," she said.

Geraghty said some medical conditions like reflux can also impact on voices.

"Stress can manifest through reflux and if you've got stomach acid coming up and sitting at the back of where your vocal folds are, it creates problems," she said.

"There's also silent reflux, where people don't experience the burning sensation, but the damage can be happening without you knowing it.

"Usually with reflux, you wake up with a husky voice and it clears up as the day progresses.

"Again, if you experience this, go see your General Practitioner (GP) or an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist (ENT) who will be able to help and prescribe



medication to manage the reflux which can help your voice improve.

"Know your voice, don't push it too far and understand the impact stress can have on your voice.

"As a rule of thumb, you know you have a voice problem when you're sucking up your own energy to get your voice out as opposed to energising others with your voice," she said.

### Seek help for voice issues

Geraghty said teachers who have concerns related to their voice should seek help promptly.

"If in doubt, go to your GP and get it checked out," she said.

"They will then examine you and refer you to an ear, nose and throat specialist if necessary, or advise you to see a speech pathologist.

"It's wise to have it looked at and certainly if you're going to try and make a claim, or get some financial support, because it can be expensive over time.

"You don't necessarily have to have a pathology, or nodules or something sinister to lodge a claim and get some help," she said.

The other piece of advice Geraghty has for teachers is to invest in learning how to use your voice correctly and safely by attending a relevant workshop or course.

"Sign up to do a voice course, if there is one available near you, because it's like a form of protection or insurance," she said.

"Take the opportunity to learn about your voice, because it's the main tool of your trade and has to be in top form for many years throughout your career.

"Learning how to warm up, warm down, maintain and project safely are really important.

"Doing a voice course is great because it's professional development but also self-care," she said.

Geraghty said to support colleagues if you notice issues with their voice and encourage them to get help.

"If you hear a teacher struggling, don't be afraid to ask them how their voice is going or let them know it sounds a bit dodgy and encourage them to seek help," she said.

"If you're experiencing issues with your voice, know that you're not alone.

"Don't let it snowball into something out of your control, get on top of it quickly," she said.

### Tips and strategies

Below are some further pointers for minimising the risk of voice injury:

- Stay hydrated by sipping plenty of room temperature water throughout the day.
- Avoid persistent coughing and throat

clearing – instead, try to swallow, yawn or breathe in through pursed lips.

- Have periods of voice rest throughout the day – a period of at least 30 minutes during the working day where you can work silently is ideal.
- Avoid yelling and shouting.
- Use amplification devices like a megaphone or microphone when in outdoor or large spaces and avoid speaking against background noise.
- Attempt to employ non-verbal strategies to attract the students' attention or manage behaviour eg, clapping a rhythm, a coloured sign, hands up in air, etc.
- Give instructions to a small number of children who then have the responsibility of informing the rest of the class.

***"It really beggars belief that in 2021, the approach to voice injury is still very reactive, rather than proactive."***

- Arrange the classroom so that students who are likely to need extra attention are up the front.
- Stand in a place in the classroom that makes it easiest for students to hear you or move closer to the students when talking.
- Don't speak in an unnatural pitch or voice quality for a prolonged period of time – eg, when reading to children or directing plays.
- Try to improve the acoustics in your classroom by using soft furnishings and artwork, especially if there are mainly hard surfaces in the room.
- Maintain a daily warm up and cool down routine. This need only take five minutes and can usually be completed in the car on the way to and from work, or in the classroom just before the students enter.

- Concentrate on speaking 'off' the throat; avoid pushing voice and use optimal posture when projecting.

Tips taken directly from Melbourne Voice Analysis Centre's Voice Care for Teachers guide (2021).

### Posture and breathing

To effectively project your voice, speak from your diaphragm, the muscle located just beneath the lungs, rather than from your throat or nasal passages.

Ensure you have straight posture and open body language, then take a deep breath in and speak, to activate your diaphragm.

Another useful strategy is to imagine the audience you're speaking to is located 20 percent further away (Aquino, 2021).

For example, look at the back wall of the classroom then imagine the room is 20 percent larger and speak to the larger room.

Consistent practice will make strong vocal projection effortless over time.

### Our union is here for you

IEU members who are experiencing difficulties with their voice, or have concerns, should contact their branch for assistance, especially if you are considering proceeding with a workers' compensation claim.

Electing a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) in your workplace is a key way members can combat voice injuries, raise awareness and implement strategies to minimise risk.

If your IEU chapter does not have an elected HSR, contact your union branch for advice and information on how to elect one.

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# Temporary contracts, long-term problems

**Alarming new research confirms what our union has long campaigned on - the substantial difficulties teachers on contracts face due to their insecure employment status, journalist Emily Campbell writes.**

A recent survey of 18,000 members of the NSW Teachers' Federation regarding their workload and experiences has reinforced the importance of our union's ongoing work in fighting back against fixed-term contracts and abolishing precarious working arrangements.

This survey on the issue in government schools, echoes the long-term trends identified by our union in the non-government sector.

Through surveys and member engagement, the IEU has continued to campaign and achieve substantial change when it comes to insecure jobs.

## Fixed-term contracts concern

The use of fixed-term contracts remains a major issue in the non-government education sector, causing teachers and school support staff uncertainty and stress.

IEU branches are fighting for better protections for members, including limiting the use of fixed-term contracts by employers so they are only used for genuine short-term needs. Fixed-term contracts should also not be used as a probationary period.

IEU members employed on fixed-term contracts who have any doubts about the validity of the reason should immediately contact their union branch for advice.

## Pressure to outperform

The results of this latest survey in the government sector showed teachers employed on short fixed-term contracts feel forced to compete with their colleagues to stay employed.

Dr Meghan Stacey, lead author of the study and academic from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) School of Education, said despite having a similar workload to their counterparts employed in continuing roles, teachers on fixed-term contracts felt compelled to go above and beyond to impress.

"There's an unspoken pressure on these teachers to 'do more' to increase their chance of getting more work," Dr Stacey said.

"They feel they have to jump through extra hoops or take on extra work just to have their contracts renewed or to be considered for a continuing position.

"Temporary teaching work is not like casual work - the hours and demands are considerably higher.

"There's a frustration because they're essentially doing the same work as teachers employed on a continuing basis, just without any security," she said.

## Animosity between colleagues

Some teachers on contracts also reported feeling tension with permanent teaching staff, having to compete with others on fixed-term contracts in uneasy one-upmanship to secure a full-time position.

One respondent claimed they felt "being a temporary teacher is something that is consistently held over my head", causing them to "have to increase my workload to ensure that I am a more desirable employee, and someone they would keep over others".

"They know that their continued employment comes down to impressing those around them, particularly the school principal," Dr Stacey said.

## Career progression hindered

Dr Stacey said the negative, discouraging experiences of teachers on contracts could also affect their career progression.

"The uncertainty, and that sense of being undervalued, can be quite demoralising," she said.

"It can also have a scarring effect for job prospects, not only on wages via promotion opportunities, but also professional development opportunities."

The research showed women were more likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts than men, and less than a third of those teachers working on fixed-term contracts were doing so by choice.

"Our data also suggest that women may also stay longer on fixed-term contracts than men do, with potential implications for future career opportunities and leadership positions in schools," she said.

Dr Stacey said converting long-serving temporary teachers into continuing positions would help manage workload demands, reduce turnover and promote career progression.

"New teachers working in today's classrooms are tomorrow's leaders, and we must do better to look after them and the future of public education."

## Reference

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# Joint statement First Nations history has a rightful place in schools

**Reviews of the National Curriculum are always contentious. People of all political stripes like to have their say – particularly about the teaching of First Nations history, writes journalist Will Brodie.**

It's fortunate that Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Chief Executive David de Carvalho and Chair Belinda Robinson welcomed "robust discussion" of their draft review of the National Curriculum. They got plenty.

"The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum outlines the core knowledge and skills to be taught to students, wherever they live in Australia," ACARA said on its website in opening the review for public consultation in late April 2021.

"The Australian Curriculum Review looks to improve the curriculum by refining, realigning and decluttering the content so it focuses on the essential knowledge and skills students should learn and it is clearer for teachers on what they need to teach."

The mission may sound simple enough. It's anything but.

## Media commentary

When the 10-week public consultation period on the proposed revisions ended on 8 July, the barrage of criticism included Graham Young, thundering in *The Spectator* magazine: "The national curriculum doesn't just threaten our children. It's a threat to the future of our nation."

The politically conservative Institute of Public Affairs claimed a "tightknit gang of bureaucrats and academics" was attacking Western Civilisation and

"cancelling the teaching of freedoms that underpin Australian democracy, including freedom of speech, association, and religion".

News and current affairs website *Crikey* disagreed, saying politicians and interest groups were trying to frame the ACARA draft as "woke activists" teaching children to "hate Australia".

## Measured opinion

More moderate voices could also be heard. A group that included the Independent Education Union of Australia's Acting Federal Secretary, Christine Cooper; the President of the Australian Education Union, Correna Haythorpe; and the Chief Executive of Reconciliation Australia, Karen Mundine, released a joint statement supporting the proposed revisions targeting reconciliation in education.

"We support the calls from First Nations peoples and educators for a stronger focus on the inclusion of First Nations' histories and cultures, and for greater truth-telling in the Australian Curriculum," the statement read.

It said strengthening the curriculum to support reconciliation in education would be "a step towards a reconciled nation".

"Learning about the histories, cultures and contributions of Australia's First Nations peoples is fundamental to learning about what it means to be Australian," the statement said.

## Gauging community views

The joint statement was informed by the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, a survey undertaken by Reconciliation Australia, the national

body for reconciliation, established in 2001. Reconciliation Australia's mission statement is to "promote and facilitate respect, trust, and positive relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students".

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer measures attitudes towards reconciliation, using the five dimensions of reconciliation – race relations, equality and equity, unity, institutional integrity, and historical acceptance – to inform data collection and analysis.

The 2020 Reconciliation Barometer found that more than 80 percent of the Australian community believe "it's important for First Nations histories and cultures to be taught in schools". The barometer also revealed that:

- 91 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (89 percent in 2018) and 83 percent of the general community (79 percent in 2018) believe it's important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to be taught in schools
- 90 percent of the general community (86 percent in 2018) feel it is important for all Australians to learn about past issues, compared with 93 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (91 percent in 2018).

## Votes of confidence

Professor Sue Bennett, head of the University of Wollongong's School of Education said she was confident in the proposed curriculum changes because of the "really extensive consultation

# "We support the calls from First Nations peoples and educators for a stronger focus on First Nations' histories and cultures, and for greater truth-telling in the Australian Curriculum."

process" they've undergone.

"Part of the process is that we need a curriculum that is keeping pace with changes in knowledge, keeping pace with changes in society and able to be reviewed and changed, rather than just kind of stagnating and not really reflecting our society," Professor Bennett said.

"I think, on balance, it does do those things that it set out to do. It has clarified a lot of things. It has reduced duplication and it has built better connections between different areas of the syllabus."

Dr David Hastie, Associate Dean of Education Development at Alphacrucis College, told ABC News that ACARA had "overreached" in its "noble effort to give voice to the hitherto voiceless" in the draft History and Civics Consultation Curriculums. (Alphacrucis College is a Christian institution, describing itself as "the official training college of Australian Christian Churches, the Assemblies of God in Australia". Its main campus is in Parramatta NSW.)

Hastie was concerned that the volume of the suggested First Nations curriculum and subtraction of Christianity jeopardised reconciliation by "providing a platform of complaint for more unsavoury voices in the public forum".

At the same time, he applauded the "excellent" First Nations content and said the ACARA revisions were "remarkable educational drafts".

"The Consultation Curriculum contains brilliant material - exactly the kind of fascinating detail that has been absent in conventional teacher training,

and definitely lacking in schools.

"As an historian, I applaud, and can confirm, the rigour with which the Consultation Curriculum seeks to increase First Nations history. As an Australian of Anglo-Protestant early settler and convict descent, I repudiate any sentiment that First Nations content should be downplayed in school curricula because it is not significant enough. A celebration of Indigenous Australia should be at the core of our positive national identity."

## Next steps

The 10-week public consultation period on proposed revisions ended on 8 July 2021. All feedback will be reviewed and considered in finalising proposed changes to the Australian Curriculum.

The Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland is undertaking an independent analysis of the data collected through the online surveys and email submissions and will prepare consultation reports to assist ACARA in completing the revisions.

Final revisions to the Australian Curriculum will be provided to education ministers for their consideration and endorsement before the end of 2021.

The updated version of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum, once approved by ministers, will be made available on a newly designed Australian Curriculum website for the start of 2022.

## ACARA Review of the Australian Curriculum

### Joint Statement of support for proposed revisions to the Australian Curriculum that progress reconciliation in education

Strengthening the Australian Curriculum to support reconciliation in education, and a positive relationship between non-Indigenous students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is a step towards a reconciled nation.

We support the calls from First Nations peoples and educators for a stronger focus on the inclusion of First Nations' histories and cultures, and for greater truth-telling in the Australian Curriculum.

A key recommendation in the curriculum review is to strengthen the existing [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority](#). Aligned with two key goals from the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, the cross-curriculum priority is relevant to all learning areas and year levels and seeks to:

- provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the ability to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in the curriculum;
- and allow all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

We support the [proposed revisions](#) that strengthen these goals.

According to [Reconciliation Australia's Australian Reconciliation Barometer](#), over 80% of the Australian community believe it's important for First Nations histories and cultures to be taught in schools.

Each and every day, students across the country are engaging in a process of discussion, analysis and synthesis of historical and contemporary information to learn more about themselves as Australians and Australia's place in the world.

Learning about the histories, cultures and contributions of Australia's First Nations peoples is fundamental to learning about what it means to be Australian.

Curriculum changes that better honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and acknowledge the truths of Australia's shared history, respond to growing recognition of the education sector's responsibility to do more and do better to drive reconciliation across our nation.

Join us in supporting meaningful change by reading the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures consultation document](#) and [completing the short Feedback Survey](#) on the cross-curriculum priorities by this Thursday 8 July 2021.

Christine Cooper  
Federal Secretary  
IEUA



Peter Anderson  
Director  
NIRAKN



Malcolm Elliott  
President  
APPA



Correna Haythorpe  
President  
AEU




Karen Mundine  
CEO  
Reconciliation Australia



Dyornne Anderson  
President  
NATSIPA







# di·scrim·i·na·tion

# A COSTLY BILL

**The proposed Religious Discrimination Bill would enable independent schools to fire staff or turn away students who don't align with their religious values and beliefs, writes IEU VicTas Branch Industrial Officer Jessica Mekhael.**

Before the pandemic, 'religious freedom' was a hot topic on the Morrison Government's political agenda. It's creeping back, with key stakeholders pushing to enact the contentious Religious Discrimination Bill before the next election.

An overview of the Bill published on the Attorney-General's website indicates that it is designed to prohibit discrimination "on the grounds of religious belief or activity in key areas of public life".

The Bill resulted from the recommendations of the 2018 Religious Freedom Review, conducted by a former minister in the Howard Government, Philip Ruddock. The findings from the review remained dormant until the Israel Folau controversy catapulted the issue into the media spotlight. Folau's Rugby Australia contract was terminated after the star player posted on social media that homosexuals, adulterers, atheists and other "sinners" would go to hell.

Following Folau's social media post, public debate raged about the rights of religious individuals to express themselves and the rights of minorities, especially in the LGBTIQ community, who could be vilified or degraded by such expressions.

The Bill proposes that religious bodies, including schools, can engage in conduct, in good faith, "that a person of the same religion could reasonably consider to be in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of their religion or to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of the same religion".

## **Right to act**

Simply put, individuals such as Folau, as well as organisations and charities, would have the right to act on their religious beliefs, even if those acts were discriminatory under other laws.

Supporters of the Bill hold that existing anti-discrimination legislation will continue to protect those who are discriminated against based on 'protected attributes'. Protected attributes include race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age and religion.

Current anti-discrimination laws already provide religious bodies with the protections proposed through similarly worded exemptions in the current legislation.

The Bill will allow religious bodies including schools, charities and businesses a 'positive right' to discriminate under the guise of religious freedom, thereby reducing the rights of people already susceptible to discrimination.

It also allows such bodies to make claims of religious discrimination.

The Commission strongly supports "enforceable protections against religious discriminations for all people in Australia".

But it says the exemption for religious entities "undercuts protections against religious discrimination" and the Bill "would provide protection to religious belief or activity at the expense of other rights".

Under current legislation, religious bodies cannot actively discriminate based on their religious beliefs. They can only do so through applicable exemptions.

### Hiring and firing

But the proposed Bill would ensure that religious bodies and individuals would be free from the operation of current Commonwealth, state and territory anti-discrimination laws.

It would directly affect staff and students in schools, which could hire and fire staff or turn away students who don't align with their religious values and beliefs.

Religious schools would be able to dismiss gay teachers, unwed mothers, or refuse to enrol trans or gender-diverse students.

Unfortunately, this already happens.

*The Age* recently reported that Victorian teachers had been sacked by religious schools after coming out as gay, an action which is "perfectly legal under most state and federal laws, which give religious organisations and their schools exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation".

The IEU VicTas Discrimination Survey reported that 48 percent of Victorian Catholic secondary education staff had witnessed or been subjected to discrimination in their workplace.

These employees need more, not less, protection.

The Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act* makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, marital status or pregnancy, but the exemptions under that Act provide protection for religious educational institutions.

### Lawful discrimination

It is not unlawful for schools established for religious purposes to discriminate against an employee in certain circumstances, or against a student, if the school discriminates in good faith to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed.

Similar provisions exist under the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act*, which provides an exemption to religious schools to discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation where the discrimination "conforms with the doctrines, beliefs or principles of the religion, or is reasonably necessary to avoid injury to the religious sensitivities of people who follow the religion".

In workplaces, the *Fair Work Act* 2009 also applies, and states that an employer must not discriminate by taking 'adverse action' such as dismissing an employee or not hiring a prospective employee because of attributes, including sex, sexual orientation or religion.

However, employers can get away with discrimination under the *Fair Work Act* if the action is not unlawful under local anti-discrimination law (for example, because of the exemptions); if it is taken because of the inherent requirements of the position concerned; or if the action is taken by an institution conducted in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed.

Even in Tasmania, which does not have a religious exemption in its discrimination laws that allows discrimination based on sexual orientation, sex or gender identity, if you are dismissed by a religious school because of sexual orientation, and you bring an action under the general protections of the *Fair Work Act*, you're unlikely to succeed.

The school can say the discrimination was "taken in good faith and to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that faith" as permitted by the *Fair Work Act*.

### There is hope

A group of Liberal MPs have warned Attorney-General Michaelia Cash they oppose the bill as it stands.

Liberal MP Dave Sharma told the Nine Network, "The bill should be narrowly cast so it provides the same level of protection against discrimination based on religion that people have on race and gender. But it shouldn't go any further than that."

Liberal MP Warren Entsch said, "I haven't spent 19 years of my political career removing discrimination from one section of our community to allow it to be reimposed under the auspices of this bill".

***"Simply put, individuals such as Folau, as well as organisations and charities, would have the right to act on their religious beliefs, even if those acts were discriminatory under other laws."***

### Fear and uncertainty

In Victoria, Deb James, General Secretary of the IEU VicTas Branch, has written to the State Government urging it to remove religious exemptions contained in its *Equal Opportunity Act*.

"Faith-based schools have the resilience and capacity to operate in the absence of any religious exemptions. The current exemptions, however, act as a threat that could be used, and many of our members experience fear and uncertainty about being open about their identity," James says.

If the federal Bill becomes law, discriminatory conduct will be considered 'religious freedom' if it falls within the scope of the Bill.

The Bill privileges religious belief over other human rights and gives new privileges to people of faith and religious body employers, while overriding existing protections from discrimination for LGBTIQ people and others who have fought so hard to attain equality in our society.

It would be a tragedy to see the rights of those most susceptible to discrimination eroded in a secular society that should value equality for all.



# STOP IT BEFORE IT STARTS **SEXISM IN SCHOOLS**



*Our Watch Chief Executive Patty Kinnersly*

**Over the past 18 months, IE has reported on sexism in boys schools. Now there are practical tools available to help transform these troubled cultures, writes journalist Will Brodie.**

Unfortunately, some schools have an issue with harassment of teachers.

For years, certain boys schools have been beset by sexism scandals. There have been stories of schoolboys 'rating' girls and posting nude images of them online, setting crude 'challenges' for muck-up days, and indulging in sexist chants and comments on crowded trams and buses.

The issue escalated in the public consciousness earlier this year when more than 30,000 people signed a petition launched by former Sydney schoolgirl Chanel Contos calling for sexual consent to be taught in schools from a young age.

Contos's petition produced a stunning response, with thousands of young women relating distressing tales of assault and abuse, many involving private school boys.

#### **Breaking the silence**

Soon after, a Monash University study found that female teachers in boys

schools can be vulnerable to sexual harassment. The study, conducted by Monash's Faculty of Education, interviewed 32 female teachers working at three boys schools.

Co-lead author George Variyan, a lecturer in educational leadership, wrote that female teachers can face the worst aspects of schoolboy behaviour on a routine basis.

"Reports of up-skirting, distribution of humiliating material and gossip, stalking, and surreptitious video-recording are examples of teachers' experiences in elite private boys schools that continue to go largely

unreported," Variyan said.

He said female teachers in his study who experienced sexual harassment from boys were blamed, had their teaching methods questioned, and saw harassing behaviours "minimally punished or excused entirely".

He believes harassment is sometimes hushed up because of market forces and fear of reputational damage.

Variyan doesn't believe all boys schools can necessarily effect fundamental change "from better schooling programs alone".

Emeritus Professor Jane Kenway says a "consistent chain of events" follows the exposure of bad behaviour in some schools. This includes minimisation of brand damage, attributing the scandal to a few bad apples; cosmetic changes and disciplining of individuals; and minor policy adjustments until the next media storm.

But deeper and more lasting change is needed.

### Foundational shift

"Despite how 'very seriously' all these matters are taken by executives releasing media statements, sexism and entitlement seems entrenched in schools and universities," Jane Gilmore wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2017.

Commentators say it's the parents' fault. It's society's fault. Schools can't be expected to do all the heavy lifting.

But there are experts who say change is not easy, but it is possible.

Chris Hickey, Professor of Health and Physical Education at Deakin University told *The Guardian* hypermasculine or misogynistic cultures flourish if unchecked.

"But these cultures are not a given," Professor Hickey said. "They're not unchallengeable."

Hickey said one boys school had addressed its hypermasculinity problem by "hiring more female senior professional staff, foregrounding the arts, changing the physical environment and valorising the rugby archetype less".

National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds recommends sex education for parents run by schools, "well before the children are at the age of consent".

"Get the parents on the same page as what the school plans to teach."

### Pivot to prevention

Our Watch Chief Executive Patty Kinnersly says if we engage younger children in age-appropriate educational content "they have the skills to reject aggressive behaviours

and discrimination and form attitudes, beliefs and behaviours based on equality and respect".

In Victoria, Our Watch helped develop the Respectful Relationships Education program with the state government.

"Gender-based violence is preventable," that program states.

Its 'toolkit' for cultural change in schools says the key drivers of gender-based violence are:

- condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence
- stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- disrespect towards women and male peer relations that emphasise aggression.

To succeed, education about respectful relationships must:

- address each of the above drivers
- have a long-term vision
- take a whole of school approach
- use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum
- provide resources and support for teachers.

**"Discussions of life, love and relationships should be as important as maths, English and science."**

### Solidarity is essential

Union solidarity and support is also vital for teachers who feel they will be sidelined if they speak up as a lone voice on harassment.

In presentations to members, the IEU offers practical suggestions for creating workplace change: address gender-based violence in workplace policies and procedures; call out bad behaviour; demand clear school policies on what is and is not acceptable; promote an awareness of one's own biases and behaviour; enact a safe, transparent process for the

reporting of harassment; and push for gender balance in leadership.

Respectful relationships toolkits emphasise the importance of interactivity and active learning, rather than passive reception of information.

The International Labour Organisation's workbook *Violence and Harassment in the World of Work* says active learning is "based on co-operative tasks designed for participants to learn from one another, sharing experiences and ideas based on problem-solving and working together to solve common problems aimed to build confidence and develop skills and knowledge in a supportive environment".

### Expert advice

There is no shortage of expert advice for those truly seeking change.

Sex Education Australia says it's at puberty that "gendered codes of behaviour become suffocatingly strict".

"High school is when young people are trying their hardest to fit in and establish their identity, including what's expected of their gender."

Non-profit organisation Man Cave offers advice on how to engage boys aged 12-16 to foster healthy masculinity.

Kinnersly says young men need a supportive school culture that shows them there are many ways to be a man.

"Research shows that rigid stereotypes about men, such as always being the tough, dominant, stoic type, underpin an unhealthy ideal of masculinity, which helps maintain gender inequality and contributes to violence against women," Kinnersly says.

Dr Arne Rubinstein, chief executive of the Byron Bay-based Rites of Passage Institute says, "discussions of life, love and relationships should be as important as maths, English and science".

Five years ago, author, academic and gender expert Professor Catharine Lumby championed another innovative idea: get boys listening to girls.

"A successful model trialled by a Sydney school involves bringing in Year 11 girls to talk to Year 9 boys and giving them permission to ask questions about what girls like and want," Professor Lumby said. "Simple but brilliant."

There are plenty more ideas, research and plans emerging to help improve school cultures, and thereby students' futures and society as a whole.

If this article has raised issues for you, contact **1800 Respect national helpline: 1800 737 732**



# On best behaviour

**How can we best equip graduate teachers to manage behaviour in classrooms? IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Professional Officer Pat Devery explores the politics and practices.**

"It would come as no surprise that practising teachers consistently report behaviour management concerns as one of the greatest stress contributors to their working lives," says teacher and school consultant, Dave Vinegrad.

Vinegrad is Director of Behaviour Matters, a Melbourne-based organisation that focuses on improving and sustaining positive relationships in schools, businesses and community organisations.

Yet Vinegrad regards himself as a teacher first, consultant second, and largely views the issue of behaviour management through the lens of school culture. "An understanding of behaviour management needs to operate at all levels," says Vinegrad. "This includes school leaders, staff, students, parents, and policy makers."

## **Align policy with practice**

According to Vinegrad, schools have recently been very successful in aligning their teaching and learning outcomes with student wellbeing policies. But they have been less successful in lining up their discipline processes and policies in a similar vein.

Research supports promoting and developing of "relationships for learning"; however, many school-based discipline policies inadvertently harm relationships by working against other policies.

As a simple example, a teacher might observe that their morning duty consists of standing at the school gate handing out demerits for students not wearing the correct uniform. The same teacher is then expected to spend the day developing positive learning relationships in the classroom.

Vinegrad believes punitive or retributive discipline policies stand in stark contrast to contemporary values about teaching and learning, and this is what schools are grappling with.

## **Problems with preparation**

This disparity between student discipline policies and stated teaching and learning outcomes is often sheeted back to teacher quality, hence the

current discussion surrounding initial teacher education (ITE) and its role in preparing teachers to handle all sorts of behaviours, in and out of the classroom.

The NSW Government made a submission to the recent national review of ITE which, among other things, called for beginning teachers to be given more access to behaviour management training. The submission went on to identify a lack of behaviour management skills in early career teachers, and this was linked to their increased stress levels and job-related anxiety.

And yet the data does not readily translate into policy. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) recently decided to exclude behaviour management from its restricted priority list for accredited professional development courses, despite the union arguing strongly for its inclusion.

There is a school of thought that behaviour management might fall under the student/child mental health priority area. But when teachers are telling their union this is a high priority concern, it is troubling that their voice is being ignored by policy makers.

## **Make it a priority**

The dynamic nature of behaviour management issues, combined with ever-evolving community expectations, means teachers will develop and refine their approach to behaviour management throughout their career.

The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch believes behaviour management should be included among NESA's priority areas (along with child safeguarding, but that is for another conversation). It should be afforded Accredited PD status.

Vinegrad believes part of the answer lies in developing school leaders, as well as quality teachers. But we don't just want experienced teachers, he says, we need expert teachers; teachers who get to study and understand the current research and develop reasonable and appropriate policies that align with current teaching and learning objectives.

This is a constant and ongoing process involving a shift in how professional development for teachers is organised, Vinegrad says. Teachers learn best from other teachers, and we

need to stop the 'next shiny new thing' approach or a 'train and hope' model that Vinegrad sees regularly in his role as a consultant.

## **Articulate your values**

Unless a policy translates into the classroom it is likely to have a limited impact. Expert teachers, therefore, need the time and resources to mentor and model their learning back in schools. When working with pre-service, graduate or inexperienced teachers, Vinegrad says, mentors also need to be clear about what they want them to learn.

So how do we go about this? Schools, observes Vinegrad, are inherently values-driven organisations. These values are often articulated in flags, signs, billboards, and school mottos and mission statements on their websites. These values also need to be reflected in their policies. "Base your discipline policy on your values and that will help to build and develop healthy relationships," says Vinegrad.

Developing this policy framework, however, requires considerable time and effort. Schools need leaders who are prepared to dedicate the time and resources to this process, and find the confidence to proceed with the many difficult conversations required to set out their vision for the school.

## **Build relationships**

So, what might a contemporary discipline policy entail? According to Vinegrad, once a school has worked at building relationships, it then needs to establish what effective consequences are based on its values.

Policies also need to be flexible – and this has been tested recently with students returning to schools after extended periods of lockdown.

"Some schools have tried to use their prohibitive or retributive approaches when their students who have forgotten how to 'do people' and have disrupted the return to the classroom," says Vinegrad.

He fears schools that focus too much on a return to curriculum instead of a return to relationships will manage the balance of academic outcomes with mental wellbeing less successfully. This is not a "soft-headed notion of ice breakers and kum-ba-ya moments, but



***“If a student is performing poorly in tennis, do we send them to a tennis detention or a tennis clinic? We are educators, not law-enforcement officers.”***



re-establishing the non-negotiables, boundaries and limits, routines and procedures and remembering how we need to treat each other”, he says.

Many schools, Vinegrad explains, have implemented approaches including restorative practices, school-wide positive behaviour support, positive education, zones of regulation, and trauma informed approaches, all of which support and advise a move away from ineffective punitive consequences to responses that educate and teach young people how to be successful in the complex social settings that are classrooms and playgrounds.

“If a student is performing poorly in tennis, do we send them to a tennis detention or a tennis clinic?” asks Vinegrad. “We are educators, not law-enforcement officers and the failure to apply learning theory to managing behaviour means many schools don’t walk their talk.”

Adults working in schools would

never tolerate being treated the way some discipline policies treat students. Why, Vinegrad observes, is it so hard to shift the lens?

#### **Attention not detention**

Contemporary education is about teaching young people to be self-disciplined and able to self-regulate. When this succeeds, we maximise mental health outcomes not only for students but teachers as well.

If discipline is guided by deeply held beliefs about punishment (making someone suffer) and compliance, then we need to rethink how we integrate best practice not only into teaching, learning and wellbeing but also into behaviour management policy. It comes down to “Does your definition of discipline mean one thing, yet you do the other?” Vinegrad says.

Linking research to discipline policy just as schools have done with teaching, learning and wellbeing

across school communities is crucial in discussing the mental wellbeing of students and teachers. It also requires committed school leaders to dedicate the resources needed to shift school cultures where required.

Vinegrad offers the example of Sally, a Year 3 student who is running around the playground slapping and hitting other children from her class. What would the research indicate about her needs being met by her behaviour? Is your policy up to scratch to educate Sally about how we need to treat each other? As a teacher, what would you say and do to achieve outcomes aligned to your school’s vision mission and values? What would be an effective consequence?

This incident had a happy outcome, with support staff spending a few hours with Sally teaching her how to interact in more appropriate and friendly ways with her classmates. What would a stern warning or detention have taught Sally?



# Classroom conduct IT TAKES GRIT AND GOOD MANAGEMENT

**There are ways to help teachers ensure all students are guided, supported, and enabled to shine, writes teacher and learning diversity and wellbeing leader Sally Lentini.**

Teacher, psychologist, and parent educator Hiam Ginott wrote in *Teacher & Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers*, (1972): "As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all cases it is my response that decides whether a situation will be escalated or de-escalated or a child humanised or de-humanised."

An effective teacher or educational support officer makes management of students appear effortless. There are many disruptions and outbursts during a term or a year, but these can be kept to a minimum if teachers employ some subtle techniques to create a positive culture in the classroom.

## **Build positive relationships**

Building an effective classroom culture starts with relationships and knowing how young minds work. Students need to feel safe and secure, and they will respond well if they know you care and they are a valued member of the class. When building these relationships, it is important to

get to know the students and genuinely appreciate them. This will build trust.

But having a strong relationship with students does not mean there are no boundaries. The classroom needs to have clear behavioural and social expectations to make students feel safe and part of the learning environment.

At my school, St Fidelis in Moreland, Victoria, a focus on "The Agreed Ways" and "The Learning Dispositions" at the start of the year helps students understand what is expected of them. These expectations, reinforced by weekly awards, also guide staff as they get to know each student's individual needs, interests, strengths and how they learn.

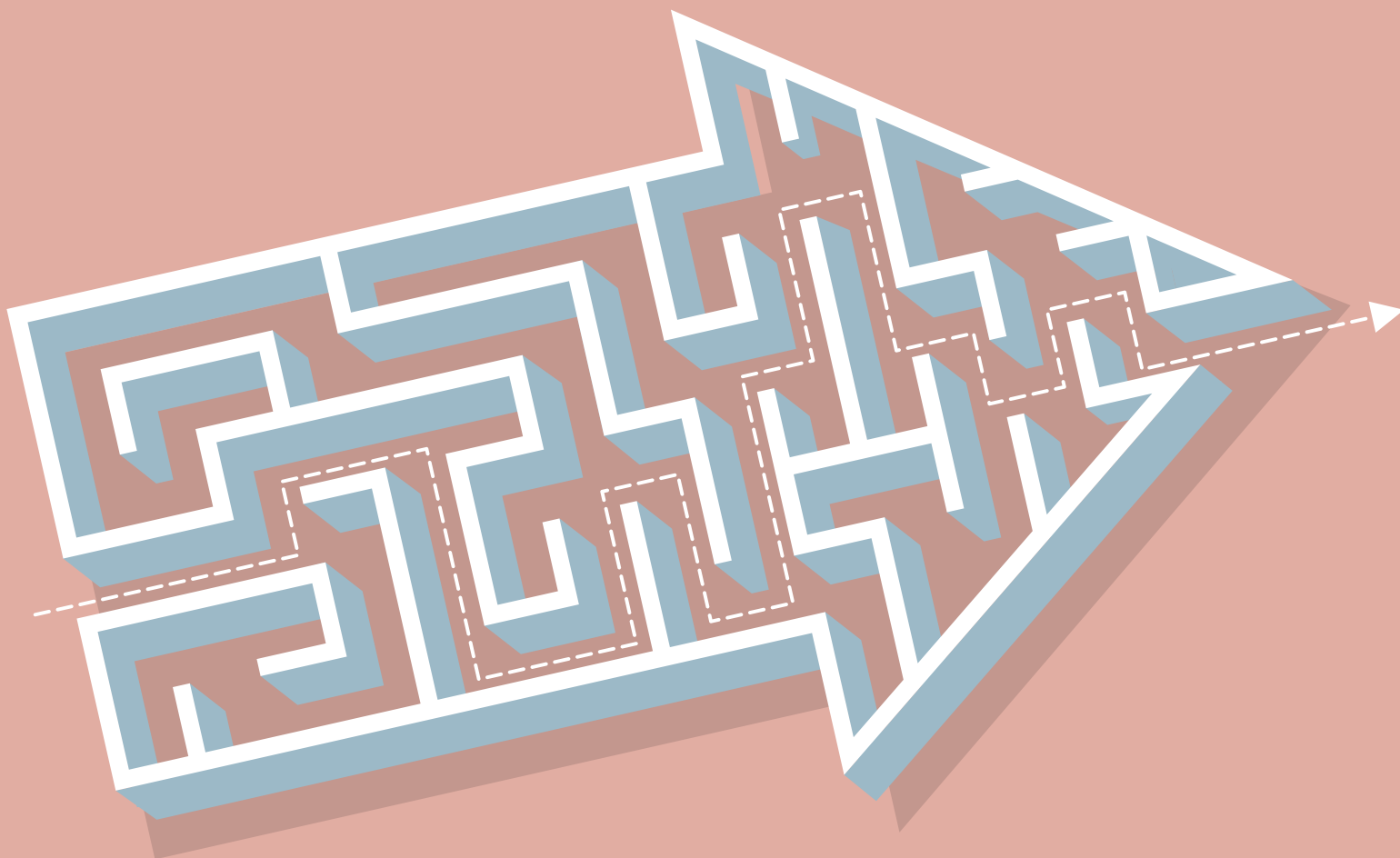
Once students understand behavioural standards, staff need to follow up consistently and fairly when these are not met.

Building trust between teachers and student takes time. Everyone needs to treat each other with respect and dignity. Whilst acting as a role model, teachers must be careful not to become too enmeshed with students.

## **Spot it at the source**

A student whose behaviour is getting out of control has an unfulfilled need. Find and interpret the student's need and their behaviour will improve.

***"A student whose behaviour is getting out of control has an unfulfilled need - find and interpret the student's need and their behaviour will improve."***



Whether the need is academic, emotional, or social, 'acting out' is often their way of communicating a need to you.

Some students don't have the necessary social or language skills to communicate what they need or want. It takes time for them to be able to follow rules or explain how they are feeling. The rules need to be taught explicitly. Give specific praise and reinforce the behaviour you expect.

Some students may misbehave if the rules are unclear, inconsistent, or if there are too many rules to follow. Such a student may appear stressed, frustrated, angry or overwhelmed. If this happens, the teacher needs to be calm to de-escalate the situation, not react and escalate it. It is also imperative that teachers not take what students do or say as a personal attack on them.

### Specialised strategies

Despite the best efforts and intentions, schools often require specialised strategies to address student needs for healing, growth, and achievement.

The Berry Street Educational Model addresses "students with complex, unmet learning needs". Its training asks us to consider ambulance drivers who attend an emergency. They keep calm, walking towards the emergency, keeping everyone safe and reassuring the family or members of the public involved in the situation. They ask family members to sit down, they clear the space, and they do the work.

This approach can apply in classrooms. When there is chaos, the adult must be in control. Be calm, say as little as possible and be empathetic.

If a student is unruly, you can say: "I understand that you are angry or upset but I need to keep you safe." Give the student space and meet them at their point of need.

### Respond rather than react

Successful classroom management requires a teacher to be proactive not reactive. After establishing behavioural expectations, set goals and build a positive and safe learning environment in which students want to come to learn.

Consider non-verbal communication such as eye contact, body language, how you speak to the students, your tone of voice, and how you position yourself in the classroom. Make sure you circulate throughout the classroom, give feedback, support, and help all students. Think about the impact of your demeanour on the classroom culture.

Learning about your students on every level is crucial, helping them connect with you and each other.

Ultimately, the teacher sets the tone of the classroom. You can make a student feel valued, safe, and important.

Your job is to project confidence, foster a have-a-go attitude and build rapport. This will ensure you build a classroom climate that is respectful, where everyone is treated with dignity and your students have the best chance to learn.

***Sally Lentini has taught in three different countries and in Catholic and government schools. She has experience as a Deputy Principal, Special Needs Coordinator, restorative practices circle coach, educational coach and literacy leader.***



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