

**INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND
CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Partially
Confidential

The problems in education at the moment are multifaceted.

1. Students, with emotional dysregulation issues, who need smaller classes and more individual attention are being placed in settings where their special needs cannot possibly be catered for and everybody, regular students, special needs students, teachers and executive are all suffering. Quality teachers are leaving the profession in droves and classrooms are no longer always being taught by appropriately qualified teachers.

2. I am specifically referring to students who become emotionally dis-regulated and need the rest of the class to be removed while the specific student is dealt with, or that specific student monopolises all the teacher's time, meaning content can't be taught. The real reason why results for ALL subjects and grades are getting worse is because we are having to accommodate more students with complex needs in the regular classroom.

3. If you look closely at the timeline of education standards dropping, you will notice that it got much worse since the policy for students with disabilities changed to allow many more students with special need to be in the regular classroom. I am not referring to Deaf, Blind, physically or intellectually impaired students etc, who can be catered for.

4. Students who have chronic behaviour issues cannot be catered for in the regular classroom. Sadly, these students are seen to "get away with their behaviour because they have a disability" and other students copy them. Often these students have an educational plan that allows them to bypass regular consequences. This has had the effect of watering down consequences for all students. The rest of the students are simply not getting the attention and education THEY deserve, and the DATA is now showing this as a result.

5. When aggressive students turn a room upside down, the other students in the classroom are constantly being traumatised. They have no control over the situation. Imagine if you were a student who comes to school to escape domestic violence, only to be confronted with it at school too. If we are not careful, we will have a whole generation of traumatised adults in ten years. There is a possibility of litigation in the future when parents realise why their children are not learning or get injured by another student. (I have seen a student hit at least 10 students over the head with a chair, another student cut another student with a handmade knife, another smashed another child's head into a brick wall.)

6. The government has everyone believing WE have a moral imperative to deal with these students in mainstream education but in actual fact is, the government is shirking their moral responsibility. This also means teachers are reluctant to express their real concerns, about students with disabilities, for fear of being labelled discriminatory.

7. There is also the trend to promote staff younger and younger. They simply don't have the experience needed to navigate the complexities of running a school. Many teachers express feelings of being unsupported by administration, stating that they are often blamed for student misbehaviour. As a result, some leaders may resort to avoiding proper discipline or failing to implement appropriate consequences. In this scenario, parents are often appeased rather than being held accountable for

their role in managing their child's behaviour within the school. School principals MUST be strong and capable of defending their staff and creating a culture of support and respect for their teachers.

8. The Positive Behaviour for Schools program has proven ineffective. Educators do not see it as a valuable tool for managing student behaviour. There is an absence of consequences for inappropriate actions, and pressure from parents and society appears to be sidestepped in the interest of maintaining harmony. Additionally, the push for schools to lower their suspension rates complicates the situation further.

9. Moreover, funds are being injected into the system, yet they have not effectively reached the classroom. This has led to an increase in teachers receiving executive salaries and time away from class, but it seldom translates into positive outcomes at the classroom level. While money has been allocated for curriculum development, the constant changes have overshadowed the pressing need for professional development focused on behaviour management and organization, particularly as many teachers are new to the profession.

10. The curriculum is increasingly being introduced at lower grade levels. Teachers are now expected to cover material that often exceeds the developmental stage of their students. Kindergarten was once a time for educators to teach children HOW to engage in school. In the past, students focused on learning to socialize, adhere to rules, and cultivate a love for learning, among other foundational skills. These skills are the very same things teachers are saying students are missing in higher grades.

11. Pressure to improve Literacy and numeracy results have diminished the enjoyment in education. Without any fun elements, how can we motivate students who face academic challenges to attend school? Numerous studies indicate that creative arts and extracurricular activities help relieve stress and aid in processing and recovering from trauma. In early childhood, play is crucial for holistic brain development, allowing children to enhance their fine and gross motor skills, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork. Interestingly, the very skills that are lacking and the rising anxiety levels are precisely what educators are increasingly observing.

12. Lastly, the government needs to work hard to promote respect among the community and support teachers in their roles.

Please note- I am a retired Assistant Principal (20 years) who has worked for the NSW Education Department for 37 years. I was also a Relieving Principal for several years. I felt unsupported by my director on several occasions when it came to enforcing consequences. The Director also favoured appeasing the parents instead of applying appropriate consequences.

I have taught in an international school, and as a retired teacher, worked in several schools casually. The trends I site above are things I have noted across my experience. The education landscape has changed rapidly, particularly since 2012 (Local Schools, Local Decisions & Disability Standards for Education) to the point that it is not sustainable anymore. At one school three teachers were on stress leave out of seven, due to ineffectual management of students with diagnosed disabilities. Many teachers do not feel they have a voice for reasons already mentioned above.