

Western Australian Education Support Principals and Administrators (WAESPAA) is a professional association representing the interests of the Education Support sector in all schools. WAESPAA is formally recognised by Government, the Department of Education and the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA).

The purposes of the Association are:

- to promote the role and status of education support administrators;
- to advocate for a range of educational services for students with disabilities;
- to promote the professional development of education support administrators and key personnel;
- to promote research and excellence in education support;
- to liaise with other organisations whose views and activities affect the development and standing of education support services and facilities;
- to provide a forum for the development of policies and exchange of ideas that relate to students and staff in education support; and,
- to promote, whether directly or by way of joint membership agreements with other associations, the interests of education support administrators.

<https://www.waespaa.com.au/>

B, the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention:

It has impacted on teacher safety is significant in both education support settings and in local school settings. We are seeing that more and more local schools are not equipped to meet the individual needs of our very complex young students in their environments. There is then a request for an enrolment into education support even when these students needs/ diagnosis does not fit the education support model of education.

Teachers in education support settings are finding themselves in a position where they are dealing with increasingly complex and violent students. They are required to be ready to follow risk management plans to provide duty of care to students. This can result in being physically assaulted whilst protecting students from those in an escalated state, in addition they can experience psychological distress when witnessing violence or being verbally assaulted.

Students with extreme behaviours due to disability, and lack of self-regulation strategies are placed into classrooms / school without the adequate resources to assist classroom staff. Limited understanding of the use of sensory specific areas and sensory regulation skills can just add to the dysregulation of students. Limited access to therapy support within school - all reliant on the NDIS and limited, to no additional funding for professional development and additional staff does not help. Some of the students require two staff on them throughout the day due to the frequency of their aggressive behaviours, punching, biting, kicking hair pulling without additional resourcing. The only support provided by Department of Education is consultancy support.

It is recognised that when working with students with special needs, autism and intellectual disabilities violence towards staff is often a factor that needs to be considered. Students may have a meltdown on occasions in a classroom and staff have a duty of care to make sure the other students are safe. This may mean that staff need to put themselves in dangerous situations, such as standing close by or using a physical restraint an escalated child, in order to evacuate the classroom. Students

in high schools are often adult size and very strong. They are often bigger and stronger than teachers and education assistants, particularly females.

An example would be a male student, who is 180cm tall was asked to log off a computer. He objected and started to trash the room, kicking and throwing everyday objects around the room and at staff and students. The teacher was forced to remain in the doorway to prevent the student assaulting other students and staff as they left the room. The student grabbed the teacher and put his hands around her throat and attempted to strangle her. Other staff had to physically intervene to release his hold on her neck. The teacher sustained severe bruising on her neck and was unable to breathe during the assault. This is not an isolated incident and this student, who has autism and intellectual disabilities regularly assaults staff, making them fear for their safety.

Disorderly classrooms significantly impact work satisfaction for teachers, support staff and administrators. There have been increasing demands of accountability, organisation and reporting. Students with disability are entering education support settings with higher support needs, placing additional demands on teachers to organise a broader scope of practice, curriculum strategies, teaching practices. This also includes the organisation of human resources in the classroom, dealing with outside agencies, other governmental departments. These demands can often be overwhelming.

Staff are sometimes fearful of students and request not to work with them, which is difficult to manage at school level. They take leave, including sick leave and workers comp leave and despite having access to the Employee Assistance Program they often become disillusioned and frustrated. Staff feel they unable to teach the rest of the class properly when one or more students in the class has extreme behaviours, and express concerns that other students are missing out on their learning programs due the requirement that they manage the behaviour of particularly disruptive students.

Teachers, and support staff, are burnt out from dealing with extreme behaviour within education support settings, where the demands of the job are very high and extremely physical. People don't want to keep working when they are always being hurt or are mentally exhausted., particularly when stress and mental health issues impacted other areas of their lives. There can often be a high turnover of staff due to this which leads to lots of new staff being sought which also changes dynamics in a class as they are unfamiliar with students - often causing students to become more anxiety etc and so the cycle continues.

The Teacher shortage has just added to this as often schools have to take staff who have neither the skills nor the understanding to support our most complex students. For other despite their job being permanent 20-30% of teachers leave education support settings each year, citing student behaviour as the primary reason for leaving. Older staff express concerns that they may be left with permanent physical injuries, which will impact their quality of life.

(c) teachers' views on whether or not they are sufficiently empowered and equipped to maintain order in the classroom and what can be done to assist them;

Teachers are not psychologists. They are trained to deal with minor disruptive behaviour, but constant disruption or violence is beyond their ability as they have a duty of care to the other 30 students in the room. They are also not training in supporting the ever-increasing incident of students with significant mental health issues.

They do have adequate classroom management skills, however at times it can come to a power struggle situation between the student and teacher. Debrief after a critical incident helps, having a comprehensive Risk and Behaviour Management Plans helps, but this is time consuming.

Through mentoring and coaching support staff are empowered, however when demands are placed on staff from all levels, it can be difficult to maintain the level of support in the heat of the moment or it must be spread out to thinly due to lack of staffing and funding.

Overall staff feel empowered, but not equipped to maintain order in their class. There is a need for greater training and resourcing, resourcing that matches the level of need of the student not a one fit model.

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

Initial teacher education does not prepare teachers for the classroom or for the real life as a classroom teacher. They are not taught how to manage behaviour particular for students with a disability or given workable strategies to help support these students. What they do get is the theoretical version of a classroom from tutors who have not been in a classroom for many years.

Teachers need to have excellent behaviour management skills, which need to be developed in a class situation, and cannot be learnt just from a course. Students understand the limitations of teachers, and some are very good at exploiting those that they see as 'weak'. New graduates are especially vulnerable, especially in a secondary school setting when they may only be a few years older than their students. Some teachers fear repercussions from student and their families, if they reinforce their behaviour plans. Many teachers are not prepared for the changing behaviour of students and therefore are not able to maintain an orderly classroom. Knowing that they must face the same students over and over is very disempowering.

Initial teachers with little life experience present with limited skills and strategies to manage classrooms. Many have limited literacy skills let alone understanding of how to teach them. Enthusiasm is not enough.

Teachers must have a willingness to learn and apply skills at a rapid pace, be FLEXIBLE and ready to pivot if things don't work out. More and more initial teachers have less interpersonal skills and strategies for effective communication. The number one skill teachers must have is the ability to communicate with staff in the classroom and parents effectively. There needs to be more done to support them to be able to cater to the range of learning needs in a classroom to ensure full inclusion.

Inclusion needs to be more than just putting all children in one classroom. It needs to include specific learning of social skills with the student on how to be successfully included. This means also being able to differentiate the learning and social capabilities of their students when preparing lesson activities.