

Senate enquiry into increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms

I would like to make Specific reference to the following two terms of reference.

(b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention;

(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;

I have been a teacher for 25 years. Although rare, I have experienced both threats of violence and verbal abuse in a classroom setting. In my experience, the school expectation has been to deal with any such issue at a classroom level between teacher and student. Raising issues of behaviour to school management has resulted in a loss of control of outcomes. Further, asking others to intervene at a senior level has generally been perceived as evidence that a teacher is unable to cope with the professional demands and expectation to manage classroom discipline. This can and has caused reputational damage to teachers within a school setting. In particular, the outcomes following referral to senior staff have generally resulted a brief removal of a student from a class to have a discussion prior to the student returning to the original class setting. This is often without any debriefing of a classroom teacher nor any significant change in future student behaviour.

Consequently, to assist me as a teacher and to empower teachers to maintain order within a classroom I propose that at a classroom level, teachers be empowered to decline to teach a student following a significant incidence of threat or abuse. This would match the ability of other workplaces to decline service to an abusive or threatening customer. This would not be the same as school exclusion or expulsion as it would be at a classroom level. It would still allow for the possibility for a student to be moved to another class within the same school. The exposure of teachers to repeated abuse is workplace violence and has a negative impact on teacher safety. It should not be tolerated in any workplace.