

### Submission concerning classroom disruption

Ask yourself what has changed in the last three decades that might have led to more disruptive classrooms compared with an earlier generation. I believe there are many reasons for the disruption: social, individual, structural and economic.

As a parent of two children who have now completed their schooling, I observed in class and through social interactions outside school the disruptive behaviour that this enquiry is perhaps concerned about. I want to draw your attention to one solution, at school level and at community level. **Foods with unhealthy additives, colours and preservatives** should be banned from school canteens and indeed from the Australian diet. There is an active Australian group (with over 20,000 members) called Failsafe that has promoted healthy eating for school children and for families. See the website <https://www.fedup.com.au/> for a wealth of information and individual stories of people who have been helped by changing their diet. Their stories include some from teachers in particular. Food additives do not just affect a tiny minority of children: at some level, various food additives affect most people in society, but people have not realised the links between their headache, restless legs, or irritability and the particular biscuits, or snack foods that they ate earlier in the day or week.

Children eat food from school canteens because their parents are time-poor and because of peer pressure to do as others are doing. Many school canteens say they are providing “healthy choices”, but if they still serve packaged foods, then the healthy choices are not effective.

Foods that are pre-packaged, quick to serve, and are preserved for long shelf life are convenient for school canteens to stock and serve. But we as a community need to do better for our childrens’ sake. As a volunteer parent working on school canteens as well as sports tuckshops, I have been deeply frustrated by the quality of food provided to, and indeed expected by, kids. I have observed myself, how crazy and unmanageable a group of children become on highly coloured junk food at parties. It affects almost every child, not just a small minority, yet many parents would not be aware that their children reacted badly to artificial colours or preservatives, and would say incorrectly that “it’s the sugar”.

The Food Standards Australia and New Zealand authority is letting our kids (and everyone in the community) eat food additives that are not permitted in the EU or North America. Our children are just as sensitive to these additives as are children in the EU or North America. I want to see the standards on food labelling tightened considerably (so that additives that are added to additives are also listed), AND I want to see most artificial colours banned from all foods. They offer no actual nutritional benefit to anyone, and they do harm to some people.

If you did this, then teachers would have easier classrooms to manage. It would not solve every problem, but it would help.