

## Senate Inquiry into the Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian School Classrooms

The focus of the submission was the role of qualified special educators in supporting teachers and students, particularly in relation to preventing and addressing problem behaviour. Specifically, we addressed what can be done to assist classroom teachers and the actions that could be taken to improve the quality of the support provided to teachers and students. We contend that poor achievement in literacy and numeracy is related to problem behaviour, and a proactive approach to behaviour will likely improve academic learning in schools.

### Evidence-based Approach to Behaviour Management

InSpEd endorses the adoption of proactive and positive approaches to behaviour in schools, currently adopted in Australia. Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (PBIS) is an evidence-based, whole school approach based on the principles of applied behaviour analysis. It has robust research support and has been shown to improve academic outcomes and behaviours for all students, including in schools in impoverished areas.

- PBIS is a tiered approach with the lowest tier (Tier 1) supporting all students to develop, teach and acknowledge appropriate values and behaviours across all school contexts.
- In the second tier, students who are experiencing difficulty receive small group interventions targeted at their area of difficulty (for example, teaching social skills for appropriate play in the playground).
- In the third tier, which applies to the small minority of students with on-going and more serious behaviour problems, individual assessment using functional behaviour assessment leads to an individualised intervention plan.

More detail on PBIS and the research base supporting it may be found at <https://www.pbis.org/>.

### The Role of the Qualified Special Educator

Regular classroom teachers will benefit from expert support provided by qualified special educators to assess students and implement effective interventions to address academic, literacy, communication and social skill needs as well as related behaviour problems.

To draw a parallel with the medical profession, we do not expect general practitioners to be expert in specific specialist areas. Specialist knowledge, over and above that possessed by a general practitioner is required to treat and support some people and GPs can manage ongoing care and support when advised by a specialist. The same is true for the education of students with disability and those with more complex behaviour problems. **Specialist teachers can provide the advice and support needed by classroom teachers, and classroom teachers should not be expected to be expert in supporting students with disabilities or emotional and behavioural problems.**

Evidence-based practices that fall within the remit of special educators include practices drawn from applied behaviour analysis and integral to PBIS (functional assessment and positive behaviour intervention and supports), direct, explicit and systematic instruction in academics, social and communication skills. They are also specialists in assessment and monitoring of interventions to ensure successful outcomes.

The provision of at **least one qualified special educator in every school** would provide a valuable resource and support for regular educators and school leaders in meeting the needs of students with disability and also those with academic or behavioural difficulties.

### **Need for more qualified special educators**

We note the evidence that there is a lack of qualified special/inclusive educators in Australia. A number of reports and inquiries have expressed concern about the lack of specialist support. There are also no Australian Institute of School Leaders (AITSL) standards outlining the desired competencies for specialist teachers as there are for regular classroom teachers and executives.

### **Conclusion**

InSpEd endorses proactive approaches to behaviour in schools, particularly the PBIS model. We believe this model will be best implemented when each school has a qualified special educator to advise and support teachers in assessing academic and behavioural difficulties and developing evidence-based interventions.

### **Suggested Reference**

O'Neill, S., & Stephenson, J., (2014). Evidence-Based Classroom and Behavioural Management Content in Australian Pre-service Primary Teachers' Coursework: Wherefore Art Thou? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3), 1-22.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n4.4>