Facing the Facts about safety in schools



Improving behaviour and reducing violence and aggression

Every member of every school community should feel safe, confident and able to engage in their learning or work. To achieve this a comprehensive and strategically coordinated approach must be implemented urgently. The causes of inappropriate behaviour, violence and aggression are manifold, requiring a commensurate response. Familiar responses such as teacher training, professional learning and effective policies and procedures are necessary, but not sufficient.

Reviewing and aligning strategies

There is an urgent need to review the *Quality Teaching Strategy, Behaviour Management Strategy and Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* to ensure they are complementary and effectively implemented. By aligning these strategies, the system can support schools to each create a cohesive framework that supports both students and staff, fostering a safer and more productive learning environment. The effectiveness and alignment of *Let's Take A Stand Together* should also be reviewed and the approach updated.

Minimising disruptions

Implementing common, fit-for-purpose routines is crucial to minimise low-level disruptions in classrooms, walkways and school grounds. These routines protect the rights of all students to a safe and learning-focused environment. Consistent and clear expectations help reduce distractions and maintain order, allowing students to focus on their education. The system needs to provide guidance and support for evidence-based approaches fit for adaptation to particular contexts. Reducing low-level disruption improves classroom and school climate, reducing aggression that can escalate from minor incidents.

Enhancing support services

Strengthening the capability and capacity of school psychologists and other specialists is essential for supporting school leaders in managing student behaviour effectively. We need an increase in both the number and capability of school psychologists and behaviour consultants. These professionals provide professional learning to build positive school environments and deliver preventative, restorative and responsive teacher training. This training would equip teachers to handle extreme student behaviour issues, such as violence, refusals, defiance and responses to complex needs and

developmental trauma.

Appointing health and wellbeing coordinators

The appointment of student health and wellbeing coordinators in all schools is another critical step. These coordinators should focus on the overall health and wellbeing of students, addressing physical, mental, social and emotional needs. By providing targeted support, they will help create a more supportive and nurturing school environment, reducing potential drivers of poor behaviour. Hurt people hurt people. It's not an excuse; it's a reality to be dealt with.

Reducing class sizes

A targeted reduction in class sizes is needed to improve the climate and culture in classrooms and schools. Smaller class sizes mean less disruption, more order, increased safety, higher engagement, greater satisfaction and reduced conflict. This change would also free up more time for teachers, school leaders and other staff to focus on educational outcomes and student support.

Reforming support services

Reforming the provision of support services to make them more accessible, responsive to local needs and better resourced is vital. These services should support schools' administrative and educational needs, and they should be joined up with community services to support child and adolescent mental health, wellbeing and special needs. Thus, Department of Education support services need to be strengthened in each education region.

Interagency collaboration

Interagency provision for the placement and treatment of students whose behaviour and mental health issues cannot be safely managed within a school must be addressed. In addition, expanding Alternative Learning Settings to a minimum of two per region would provide these students with the necessary support and resources.

Comprehensive strategy for students with disability

Students with disability need particular care and support – but disability is not an absolute defence for acts of aggression and violence. A comprehensive strategy for students with disability is essential. This strategy should clarify the principles of inclusion, deliver funding for students with special needs tied to functional behavioural assessments rather than medical diagnoses and provide guidelines for effective case management. It should respect the rights of both the included student and their classmates, offering access to professional learning and specialist staff with expertise in educating students with disabilities. Clear system-wide guidelines and processes for making decisions on the optimum placement of students with special needs are also necessary.

We need change

Keeping our schools safe demands targeted programs in concert with broader reforms. It is time to face the fact that we can't delay safer, more inclusive and more effective learning environments for all students and staff. Just responding to ever-increasing poor behaviour, aggression and violence is not cutting it – together, we need to change environments, behaviours and attitudes.



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