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Expert calls for support to tackle classroom behaviour

Providing additional support to teachers and principals in controlling escalating poor behaviour in Australian classrooms is vitally important, according to a visiting UK school behaviour expert.

Tom Bennett, the independent behaviour adviser for the UK Department of Education, has travelled to Australia to deliver three provocative lectures sponsored by The University of Notre Dame Australia on classroom behaviour – one of the biggest issues facing schools.

Poor classroom behaviour ranges from violence against staff and students, theft, vandalism and the sale of drugs to shouting, distracting teachers and other pupils, walking out without permission and using mobile phones.

Mr Bennett said many of these problems could be “nipped in the bud” by good classroom management practice, including having clear and consistent guidelines on how students are expected to behave, clear boundaries and predictable penalties, and a culture of positive praise.

“Children flourish in environments that are safe, calm and dignified, and leaders and teachers need the powers to be able to create this,” he said.

“This means having boundaries, clearly taught behaviours, consequences and penalties for children who deliberately misbehave, as well as support for children who need extra help getting there.

“The idea that all children will behave if we simply ask nicely, or hope that they will, is sadly utopian, as is the idea that therapeutic strategies are all that is needed to transform every child that misbehaves. Students need love and boundaries, with both, they thrive.”

Titled ‘The State of Education’, the trio of lectures will cover historic and current myths in school behaviour, the systems that promote the best behaviour and how future teachers can be prepared to make good decisions.

The lectures are being held on May 8 in Fremantle, May 14 in Sydney and May 16 in Melbourne.

Student survey results from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment tests show Australia ranks very poorly when it comes to classroom behaviour.

And the recently released Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey by the Australian Catholic University found high levels of stress among school leaders associated with actual or threatened violence, from both parents and students.

Notre Dame's Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education and Philosophy & Theology, Professor David de Carvalho, said effective classroom management was arguably one of the most important issues facing Australia's education workforce.

"It has implications not only for the effectiveness of student learning, but also for teacher and principal wellbeing, recruitment and retention," he said.

"Tom Bennett's lectures will be both informative and provocative, and it's vitally important that all those involved in schooling critically engage with the ideas that he will putting forward."

For more information or to register for a lecture, visit notredame.edu.au/tombennett

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