Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

31 March 2023

Dear Committee,

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Education and Employment References Committee's inquiry into **the issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms**.

SVA is a not-for-profit (NFP) organisation with the mission to alleviate disadvantage, towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives, advocating for change and influencing systems.

Improving educational outcomes for students experiencing disadvantage has been a major focus for SVA since our founding twenty years ago, in recognition of its importance in improving outcomes across the life course. To this end, SVA has incubated a national education evidence venture, [Evidence for Learning](#) (E4L), whose work has particular relevance to this inquiry.

The E4L initiative helps great practice become common practice in education by helping schools and early learning settings to build, share and use evidence on what works to improve outcomes for children and young people. It has been enthusiastically supported by teachers and leaders, who have indicated that E4L has empowered them to lead their own learning and become more effective as professionals, in an efficient way.

Established in 2015, E4L seeks to improve the quality, availability and use of evidence in education by collaborating with education researchers, policy makers, systems leaders, educators, professional learning providers, philanthropists and the wider community. E4L holds the exclusive Australian licence to education research, assets and tools produced by the United Kingdom's Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and localises these for Australian educators. Over the last seven years, E4L has delivered over 400 professional learning events directly reaching over 12,000 educators. E4L has over 18,000 users, most of whom are educators, frequently accessing free materials via the E4L website. Our input to this inquiry is based on this experience, and in particular a recent project on effective behaviour support in schools.

In February 2023, E4L published a guidance report entitled '*[Effective Behaviour Supports in Schools](#)*' – provided as Attachment A to this submission. This report is based on the [best available international research evidence synthesised by E4L's partners at the EEF](#) and is designed to support teachers, school leaders and school systems to understand and implement this evidence in their schools and classrooms. It is informed by an advisory panel of Australian education academics and practitioners, including Dr Katherine Dix (Australian Council for Educational Research), Karina Stocker (Docklands

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Primary School), Tom Cain (Monterey Secondary College), Sarah Richardson (Australian Education Research Organisation) and Dr Russ Fox (Monash University).

Based on this work, we would like to bring two specific issues to the Committee's attention:

- What the best available evidence says about effective behaviour support in schools
- The importance of supporting educators to understand and implement evidence-based practice, including in managing the issue of classroom disruption.

We note the critical importance of safe, orderly classrooms to the learning and wellbeing outcomes of Australian students. The introduction to E4L's report (p.3) summarises recent survey data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Australian researchers on the impacts of disruptive classrooms on Australian teachers and students. We expect that the Committee will be familiar with this research, so will not cover this further here.

Evidence on what works

We recommend that the Committee considers the best available research evidence on behaviour supports, and uses this evidence to inform its recommendations. Specifically, we would like to draw attention to some of the key evidence-based recommendations in the 'Effective Behaviour Supports in Schools' report. Further detail about each of these is in the attached report.

1. Improving classroom management usually involves intensive high-quality, ongoing and targeted professional learning with teachers reflecting on their classroom management, trying a new approach informed by the evidence, and reviewing their progress over time. Specifically:

   a. Professional learning and support in the following areas is particularly important based on what we know works to support behaviour in schools: knowing and understanding students and their influences; teaching learning behaviours alongside managing misbehaviour; using strategies and routines in the classroom to support expected behaviour; and understanding how and when to use specific strategies to support students with complex behaviour needs.
   b. Classroom management tends to be more of a problem for teachers earlier in their careers than for those with more experience. While all teachers are likely to benefit from support, early career teachers may require tailored support – such as coaching and mentoring with more explicit learning about classroom behaviour strategies – to help them create a positive classroom climate while they develop their craft.

2. It is important to consider how effective teaching and learning practices (such as those described in E4L's Teaching & Learning Toolkit and Guidance Reports), and classroom conditions, support learning behaviours including whether students are able to successfully engage with lesson content and access appropriate learning supports.
3. Behaviour approaches are more likely to impact academic outcomes if implemented at a whole-school level. School-wide supports and initiatives should be used to build expectations and norms around behaviour. These supports include school leaders ensuring the school's approach to behaviour is clear and consistently applied; working in partnership with families and communities; and providing whole school professional learning.
4. While universal behaviour systems provide an important foundation, targeted approaches should be used to meet the needs of individual students with more challenging behaviours where appropriate.

5. A focus on effective implementation of behaviour supports is important. This involves consistency and coherence across a school; time to embed approaches, policies and processes; and monitoring and evaluation of any approach being implemented to best understand the impact on students and identify where any adjustments are needed.

Supporting educators on evidence-based practice

Our experience with E4L has demonstrated that there is significant demand from Australian education sector stakeholders for practical, unbiased support to understand and implement evidence-informed practices. This demand seems especially high for resources on effective behaviour support in schools. In the four weeks since the publication of E4L's recent report on behaviour, it has been accessed over 6,000 times. This is around three times the first monthly equivalent of other E4L resources, demonstrating the interest in this topic.

Educators, educational leaders, and those who support them, need the capability to use evidence to inform their decision making about how to improve learning outcomes for students. Educators need to use rigorous, relevant and accessible evidence to inform their practice. Educational leaders need to use high-quality evidence to inform their annual improvement planning and decision making.

We know from E4L's research investigation on *Getting Evidence Moving in Schools* that the work of using evidence to inform practice is complex, and it requires deliberate effort and multiple stages and actors.[1] Professional learning providers and other supports can assist schools in putting evidence into practice to improve teaching and learning. Systems should consider how to facilitate school-based evidence mobilisation enablers such as guidance in finding relevant, high-quality research; guidance in adapting evidence to the school or classroom; access to external expertise of professional learning providers; support from and discussion with colleagues related to rigorous evidence; support from school leaders for putting evidence into practice; and having regular, job-embedded meeting time to use evidence.[2]

The Productivity Commission has previously noted the importance of building an evidence-informed education workforce, and equipping teachers to make effective use of what we know has the best chance of impact. We encourage the Committee to consider how educators and school systems can be supported to effectively understand and implement the best available evidence on behaviour supports, including considering how recommendations made by the Committee will be effectively implemented.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry and welcome the opportunity to further discuss the insights summarised here.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Flynn
Director, Public Affairs

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[1] E4L's Getting Evidence Moving in Schools research and professional learning project ran from 2019-2022. All findings from the project are available from the E4L website.
[2] These are the most common enablers of evidence mobilisation in schools from the Getting Evidence Moving in Schools research investigation.