

School rules and routines are back, but this isn't old-fashioned discipline

A Canberra school is trying a new program to create calmer classrooms.

Sarah Lansdown

The bell rings at St Clare's College and the girls line up at the door of their first class of the day.

Gina Argar greets her year 7 English class at the door. The students walk in with their equipment and stand behind their desks.

She says they will need to get out their reading books for their lesson and the girls take their seats.

The girls Catholic high school began implementing consistent rules and routines across the whole school from Term 1 this year.

Instead of every teacher having a different way of starting and ending classes and gaining the students' attention, they are all following the same script.

Principal Dr Ann Cleary said classrooms have become more calm and orderly as a result of adopting a program called Classroom Mastery.

"We're about 15 weeks in and we have seen quite a dramatic change, I would say, to the whole culture of the school," Dr Cleary said.

The school is one of 10 in the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Archdiocese to be trialling the evidence-based classroom management program.

Experts say it's an approach more schools should be adopting after it was revealed that Australian classrooms were among the most disruptive in the world.

New data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2022 found 40 per cent of Australian students reported noise and disorder in most of their classes. The only OECD countries to have a worse disciplinary climate were New Zealand and Sweden.

Addressing the chaos in Australian classrooms is firmly on the national agenda.

Teaching behaviour

YMCA Western Australia chief executive and founder of Classroom Mastery, Dr Tim McDonald, led a groundbreaking study linking student achievement with behaviour and wrote a bestselling book on the classroom

management. He presented to the meeting of education ministers in Perth in April where they agreed addressing disruptive behaviour was of paramount importance.

"The ultimate goal is to support and assist teachers in developing calm, orderly and predictable classrooms so that we can increase the amount of learning time," Dr McDonald said.

As part of the Classroom Mastery program, teachers receive professional development on how to create specific routines for entering and exiting the classroom and how to gain students' attention.

The key, Dr McDonald said, was to ensure students were explicitly taught how to behave and to have consistency throughout the school.

"Behaviour is learned. We're not born with

It's not being authoritarian. It's just being practical that we want to use every minute we can for great learning.

Director of Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn Ross Fox

it. It's not sort of biologically there as primary knowledge. Therefore, we have to teach it," he said.

Rather than giving teachers a broad model, Classroom Mastery focuses on explicitly teaching individual teachers specific skills. Teachers are given scripts to ensure every staff member is on the same page.

A few weeks after the initial professional training, Sara Wiggins goes into schools to help coach teachers in the classroom.

She's been travelling all over the country training teachers in classroom management. Classroom Mastery has about 1600 coaching sessions planned between now and end of the year.

The demand is so great because teachers do not necessarily learn these skills in university.

Australian Education Research Organisation chief executive Dr Jenny Donovan said this skills gap was a major reason why teachers were leaving the profession.



A Year 7 class at St Clare's College lines up for an English lesson. Pictures by Karleen Minney

Peter Dutton is a Tony Abbott tribute band: Albanese

Steve Evans

THE Prime Minister has delivered a searing, somewhat sneering, indictment of Peter Dutton.

Anthony Albanese said his opponent was "a bit like a Tony Abbott tribute band."

And in a reflection on his two years in power, he took a swing at some right-wing journalists: "There are some journalists who are more stenographers," he said on a podcast for ANU professor Mark Kenny.

Mr Albanese also made

what sounded like a cry from the heart about the pain of social media.

"I have found over recent times, perhaps because of the position I'm in, but the level of hatred which is there and the things that people will say on the internet, in social media, in comment sections.

"I try not to look anymore. I just find it extraordinary. I can't believe that people would face-to-face say that to anybody else. Reprehensible, violent, threatening. It can be quite extraordinary.

"I think the debate about

our youngest Australians and access to social media will broaden very quickly into a debate about social media in general, what the impact is, what the impact of the internet is, and to a debate about our society.

"One of the things I've been wondering about is whether people's isolation during COVID, where we lost the capacity for health reasons, to have that social interaction, whether that exacerbated some of those issues that can occur with isolation.

"We need to find ways in

which people can engage with each other. We're social beings."

Mr Albanese was reflecting on the *Democracy Sausage with Mark Kenny* podcast.

Mark Kenny asked the Prime Minister what he made of Mr Dutton. He wasn't complimentary.

"I think he leads a really ordinary team. His priority has been keeping his party room together and that's a party room that has shifted further and further to the right."

In the podcast, Mr Albanese laments the state

of some journalism: "You do have a blurring of news from opinion."

"There are some journalists who are more stenographers, in particular on the right wing. They are a cheer squad."

He cast his mind back to a different time. "I know that when years ago, people like Alan Ramsey wrote one column every Saturday and then had a smaller one on a Wednesday, and it was a considered piece. There was research. It was people that had been spoken to. Some

journalists do that now, too, but it is far less frequent.

"And I think one of the things that that means is that for some of the publications you look at a front page and say well, that'll be gone tomorrow because there isn't substance to it."

He deplored the state of current debate. "I worry about the state of political discourse and polarisation. Whereas, previously I think people shared some of the same experience. They read the same newspapers. They watched the same TV news."



St Clare's College principal Dr Ann Cleary has noticed a difference in the school culture since implementing the Classroom Mastery program.



A Year 7 English class receives instructions from their teacher at the beginning of a lesson.



St Clare's College students Evie Williams, Hannah Williams, Edith Baggoley, Phoenix Hamlin, Amy Skinner and Sienna Hamlin.

Her organisation was commissioned by the Australian government to write practical guides for teachers on how to follow the research on what really works in classroom management.

The free guides explain how to set up the classroom, how to teach rules and routines as well as what to do when student were being disruptive.

"It's pretty basic and fundamental stuff, but it is not advice that is being typically given to teachers when they do their training so they're finding it extremely helpful," Dr Donovan said.

The aim was to reduce all of those disruptions in the day, which can add up to a lot of time wasted that could be spent on teaching and learning.

"The classroom is the teacher's space. It's

the teachers domain. So it's up to them to be really clear about what are the rules in this classroom."

'It's not about old school ways'

Some may see the presence of rules and routines as going back to old-fashioned school discipline, but Dr Donovan said was not the case.

"It's one of the big frustrations and some of the media about this in the past has really mischaracterised it in this way," she said.

"This is actually based on really good and recent research and I think because we're suggesting rules and routines and lining up and being quiet, it's evoking for people this kind of '50s-style silence, and if you step out of line, you get caned or something. It couldn't be further from that."

Dr McDonald agrees.

"It's not about old school ways. It's going it's not going back to anything," he said.

"What we're just saying is that teaching is really complex. Teachers do an amazing, amazing job in schools. And all we're trying to do is to give give teachers what we know expert teachers do every day and that everyone gets to experience that in the school."

Director of Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn Ross Fox said the system decided to trial this whole-school approach because teachers were spending up to 20 per cent of class time settling their students.

"You're looking at potentially thousands of hours that could be productive learning time that are lost or squandered," he said.

All of the 10 pilot schools opted into the program this year. However, there were

reservations among some educators about writing down one set of school rules.

"There is a philosophical bridge to cross if you like, because, in some instances, people get to writing down the rules and they have a philosophical objection to rules existing," Mr Fox said.

"[Some teachers say] we should never do that because that would be an instrument of control of the students. And so that becomes a barrier to how you can provide consistent, calm, safe classrooms."

Mr Fox said setting the expectations at a whole-school level was so students knew that every teacher expected the same behaviour and would enact the same consequences. Teachers followed a script to take the emotion out of dealing with disruptive behaviour.

"It's not being authoritarian. It's just being practical that we want to use every minute we can for great learning," he said.

He said school leaders who were part of the program had already seen a difference and were spending less time dealing with behavioural problems.

Diverse needs

While it may seem like a one-size-fits-all solution, Dr Donovan said consistent rules and routines were beneficial for students with diverse needs.

"It is amazing how well these approaches work for all students, including students who are neurodivergent," she said.

"In fact, for some [students with] autism spectrum disorder this can be so much better for them because what they can't cope with is the chaos or the noise or the unpredictability of a classroom that is disrupted."

A group of Year 9 and Year 11 St Clare's College students said the change to school routine was an adjustment but they'd noticed less time was being wasted in class.

Year 9 student Sienna Hamlin said she saw an improvement in her grades.

"I actually have seen a little bit of an improvement in my grades so far. I think that's because I'm gaining a lot more in my learning environment, which I'm pretty happy about," she said.

Dr Cleary said her school decided on its own system for calling the student's attention. The teacher counts down from five and says "We seek" and students respond with "wisdom" - the school's motto.

It might seem counter-intuitive but having the same rules and routines across the school has created a stronger sense of community, she said.

"There's been a really positive reflection from students when they talked to me about 'I don't know what it is Miss but something's changed this year.' And so that is really uplifting."

Residents will be fine with nuclear plants, says Dutton

Andrew Brown

AUSTRALIANS with homes near coal and gas facilities would be receptive to living close to nuclear power plants, the federal opposition says.

Peter Dutton has played down community concerns over plans to build nuclear power plants near former coal or gas sites.

The coalition has announced plans to add nuclear to Australia's energy grid by building several

reactors, should it win the next election.

Speculated sites include the NSW Hunter Valley, Victoria's Latrobe Valley, Collie in WA, Port Augusta in SA and parts of Queensland.

"When you look at the communities where there is a high energy IQ, that is where they've got a coal-fired power station now, people are in favour (of nuclear) because they understand the technology," Mr Dutton told Nine's *Today* program on Friday.

Man jailed over \$395m NDIS fraud

Cassandra Morgan

A JUDGE has jailed a businessman over a "breath-taking" National Disability Insurance Scheme fraud that conned international investors into handing over tens of millions of dollars. Demetrios "James" Charisiou was jailed for up to 12 years on Friday after he duped two Korean-based firms into giving his company LBA Capital almost \$395 million in credit under the guise of investing in NDIS-supported properties in Melbourne.

None of the properties were purchased and most of the money sat in accounts, however the 63-year-old man used some of the money to pay off his mortgages. The 2019 ruse was sophisticated and complex, with Charisiou faking documents to get the money, Justice John Champion told the Supreme Court on Friday. Charisiou also met with representatives from the companies - JB Asset Management and KB Securities - when they flew out to Melbourne, the

judge said.

As a successful businessman with an inflated sense of ego, backing out of the NDIS deal with investors was not an attractive prospect for Charisiou, Justice Champion said, acknowledging the former KPMG adviser lost his career, reputation and the prestige that came with his previous success.

Charisiou was the director of Living Bright Australia.

About \$38 million of the almost \$395 million was the subject of charges against him, relating to two

properties as prosecutors failed to prove Charisiou's deception was behind later transactions.

He pleaded guilty to two counts of using false documents and two counts of obtaining financial advantage by deception.

Charisiou has paid back most of the \$395 million but \$6 million had been left unaccounted for, the judge said.

He sentenced Charisiou to 12 years in jail, with a non-parole period of eight years.