

## **A critical policy analysis examining how the AITSL Professional Standards guide teachers to maintain student discipline**

Anna Sullivan<sup>1</sup>

Neil Tippett<sup>1</sup>, Jamie Manolev<sup>1</sup>, Bruce Johnson<sup>1</sup> and Barry Down<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UniSA

Exclusionary disciplinary practices, which include suspensions and exclusions, are commonly used within Australian schools as a way of managing the behaviour of students who disrupt the good order or threaten the safety of staff and students. Despite strong evidence which shows the significant negative impact that school exclusions can have on children's health, wellbeing and academic achievement, little research has examined the policy and political frameworks that guide how these practices are used.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers is a key policy document that informs teachers' practice by articulating what teachers are expected to know and do, including how to manage unproductive student behaviour. As a political artefact, the Professional Standards are neither neutral nor value free but rather reflect a particular vision, conception and practice of teaching. In this paper we consider how the Professional Standards frame the problem of discipline in schools, and the implications of this for teachers' practice.

We conducted a critical policy analysis of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Drawing on Bacchi's framework for critical policy analysis, we use a series of guiding questions to examine how student behaviour is understood, what teachers are expected to do, what assumptions are made, who benefits and who doesn't, what silences exist, and the broader policy context. That is, we conducted an analysis to understand how the Professional Standards guide teachers to manage their classrooms and the behaviour of their students.

The findings suggest that the Professional Standards frame the use of discipline practices as part of a broader discourse of safety. The Professional Standards promote a 'management' approach to discipline which encourages punitive and exclusionary discipline practices. The Professional Standards overlook opportunities to encourage teachers to develop knowledge and implement strategies aimed at prevention, engagement, de-escalation and supportive intervention. Moreover, analysis showed that there is a silence related to the discipline of particular groups of students including boys, students with a disability and Indigenous students who are known to be disproportionately affected by the use of exclusionary practices.

In conclusion, this study offers an important insight into how a national policy that guides teachers' practice might be contributing to high levels of exclusionary practices in Australian schools.