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# Teachers need help with kids' increasingly complex needs

West Australian, Perth

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If you have a teacher, principal or child in your life, you will know that classrooms don't look, or feel, the way they did a few years ago. More students present with attention, anxiety and behavioural challenges.

Between six and 10 per cent of children in every class are estimated to have ADHD, and that's only those formally diagnosed. More families are coping with trauma, domestic violence, financial stress and housing instability. Teachers are trying to be educators, case manager and crisis responders, often at the same time.

Talk to teachers across WA and a pattern emerges. They're juggling classrooms full of children with complex needs, while managing administrative demands and trying to give each student individual attention. Many feel they're doing this with too little time, too few specialists and too much paperwork.

Recent data from the Australian Education Union reinforces what educators are experiencing. Almost every principal surveyed in WA said student needs have become more complex, with wellbeing and mental health now the most pressing challenges in education. Teachers are spending more time managing behaviour and paperwork and less time on the deep, human work of teaching.

There is no single solution to these challenges, only a web of interconnected strategies that must stretch across

government, schools, homes and philanthropy.

In many communities across WA schools have become de facto wellbeing hubs as they're increasingly called on to respond to complex mental

health, behavioural and social issues. These pressures are often compounded in regional and remote areas, where access to allied health and specialist services is limited. Expecting schools to shoulder this alone isn't realistic, nor is it fair.

At Australian Schools Plus, we see this complexity every day through our partnerships with educators and education departments across the State.

Right now, we're working with the WA Department of Education through a co-design process to identify the most impactful ways we can address student wellbeing in WA.

Our Every Child, Every Opportunity report found that wellbeing has become the top priority for schools across Australia, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Among the report's policy

recommendations was the introduction of dedicated wellbeing co-ordinators, an initiative the WA Government has recently announced. These roles will help schools weave academic and emotional support together to strengthen outcomes for students and teachers alike, but success will hinge on role clarity, robust training and supervision, strong service linkages and measuring what matters such

as wait times, attendance and engagement, not headcounts.

Wellbeing challenges don't stop with students. Teacher stress and burnout have reached record highs, with many struggling to balance administrative load with the emotional labour of supporting students in crisis. The minister's recent announcement of wellbeing supports for school leaders is an encouraging step, but it must form part of a sustained, system-wide effort that also reduces administrative burden and creates time for professional learning that sticks.

If we want to strengthen the fabric of education, we must look at every thread that holds it together: student support, teacher wellbeing, family engagement and community partnerships. It will take co-ordinated investment and collaboration across government, independent, and philanthropy sectors to ensure that no thread carries the strain alone.

When we strengthen every thread — from teachers to students, families, and entire communities that make up our schools — we create something stronger than any of us can do alone: a fabric that can hold, even under pressure.

**Lee Casuscelli is the director of education at Schools Plus**