

importance of young people being able to get a job, pointing to his government's

focused instead on securing cheaper drugs and new concession cards for seniors and extended relief for retirees.

Stay kind and resolve to do better. Jessica Irvine is a senior economics writer.

How to treat the root cause of bullying

Post-remote learning, Victorian teachers are reporting unprecedented levels of student violence, aggression, disruption and the breakdown of an already thin remnant of social cohesion.

The evidence is in almost every school. Teachers are reporting a distinct *Lord of the Flies* effect where the habits of co-operation and collaboration have been replaced by competitive and sometimes downright nasty behaviours as students look to re-establish their place in the pecking order.

They say many children can't play a basic game, like basketball, without it descending into tantrums when results don't go their way. Other students can't compete without bullying creeping in.

Teachers are trying hard to solve this problem. But they are at breaking point themselves and our responses when we're exhausted tend to be kneejerk, populist or reflective of an old-school disciplinary crackdown that we hope will "straighten these kids up". But they don't straighten up.

These traditional models, under the pressure of staff absences,



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exhaustion and disaffected kids, have been exposed as not only unratified, but fraudulent. Our teachers deserve a better return on the time and effort they get from flawed, control-oriented strategies.

What our students need is continuity in their learning and a healthy dose of the time and space required to relearn the ways of working productively together. And our teachers and principals are sick of implementing new bullying awareness and behavioural programs for so little return.

This leaves those of us interested in education policy at a fork in the road. When schools like Greater Shepparton College hit the headlines due to fights recorded on mobile phones going viral, can we resist the urge to spark a crackdown or throw another program at these dedicated, yet utterly exhausted, professionals to implement?

Can we, for once, not blame these educators and instead help them in

establishing a culture where students are more likely to succeed and co-operate than fail and turn on each other?

Even when looking at the most concerning of student behaviours, we get it wrong with embarrassing monotony. The global count on anti-bullying programs is now out beyond 9000. That's 9000 times that a clever person in an ed-entraprise, an education

department or a think tank has had the brainwave of a new intervention that will end bullying. That's also 9000 times they've been wrong and wasted the scarce time of teachers. Bullying isn't simply a behaviour that can be deprogrammed from students. It's a cultural phenomenon. The culture of a school tells you whether bullying is

easy or normalised, or not. And for this very reason, parents of both bullying victims and perpetrators are inclined to change schools when their attempts to stop it fail.

Yet, we seem obsessed with "awareness raising". I believe we're all aware that school bullying is a huge problem. Now what?

The University of London looked into this in 2012 when it explored

1378 schools that were performing admirably to counter bullying. It found the most common feature was "a restorative culture and ethos".

This means issues are addressed by students making amends with those that they've negatively impacted rather than spending hours plotting revenge in detention.

And while we already have access to these restorative practices in Australia, our challenge is making them culturally normalised and habituated. Implemented as the underpinning of a school's culture, these restorative practices build the empathy and responsibility required to co-operate with others and solve problems together.

It's more than possible to help schools make the critical restorative shifts required for long-term recovery and results.

We'll need to train ourselves to worry just a little less about the behaviour of the day and a little more about why it's happening. It's way beyond time to treat the root cultural causes of misbehaviour, rather than the recent symptoms.

Adam Voigt is a former principal and founder and CEO of Real Schools.

toddler so they can cross a road solo. This show seems to highlight the chasm between both parenting and city planning in Japan and Australia. One problem is our suburbs haven't been designed in a way which enables kids to safely get around.

Rebecca Clements is completing her PhD at the University of Melbourne looking at parking policies in Japanese and Australian cities and has devoted part of her doctorate to the TV show.

She says Japanese roads and street networks are designed in a way that enables children to walk safely. Speed limits are low, drivers are taught to give way to pedestrians and on-street parking is rare, giving better visibility for drivers and pedestrians.

"The Japanese approach shows the possibilities we can have when we look at low car neighbourhoods as a specific approach," Clements says. "Prioritising children in the way we think our streets should be and looking at places that do that well is what we should be doing."

Watching *Old Enough!* has shown me I need to loosen up my parenting and that my children are definite under-achievers. The chances of them coming back from the shops with curry and not \$10 of mixed lollies and a Beanie Boo, or indeed coming back at all, are slim to none. But I'd be less worried about sending my kids out by themselves if Melbourne's city planners took some inspiration from Japan.

Cara Waters is city editor for *The Age*.

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