

The Behaviour Workload Index

2026 Edition — Full Report

An annual benchmark of behaviour management time and practice in Australian schools

Conducted and published by AchievoEDU

September 2026 · n = 184 Australian educators · 17 August – 11 September 2026

AchievoEDU Research Team

Executive Summary

The Behaviour Workload Index is a new annual benchmark survey measuring how much time Australian educators spend on behaviour management, where that time goes, and whether current tools and systems help or hinder. This is the first edition, based on 184 responses collected over a four-week window in August and September 2026.

Five findings stood out:

- Negative and incident-related administration takes up far more time than positive recognition administration. 44% of respondents spend 2+ hours a week on negative admin, compared with just 6% who spend that much on positive admin.
- Digital tools are not a guaranteed time-saver. 62% of respondents say their digital system makes no difference to their workload, or makes it worse. Fragmentation across multiple disconnected systems, not the paper-versus-digital divide, looks like the bigger driver of wasted time.
- Recognition happens frequently (75% recognise positive behaviour multiple times a day) but confidence that it reaches the students who need it most is mixed, with over a third of respondents doubtful or unsure.
- Half of respondents (50%) rate their school's current behaviour management approach as ineffective. The dominant explanation in open-text responses is inconsistency and lack of follow-through from leadership, not dissatisfaction with a specific tool or system.
- Perceived effectiveness varies sharply by role. Deputy Principals and Principals in this sample rated their systems far more positively than Heads of Department and classroom teachers, a gap worth further investigation.

This report presents the full methodology, respondent demographics, and detailed findings, including cross-tabulated analysis by school type, role, and tracking method. It is intended as the first of an annual series, repeated with the same core questions each year to track change over time.

Methodology

The Behaviour Workload Index is an anonymous, voluntary online survey open to all Australian educators, including classroom teachers, coordinators, heads of department, and school leadership.

Distribution

The survey was distributed over a four-week window, from 17 August to 11 September 2026. Primary distribution was through statewide Australian teacher Facebook groups, targeted deliberately across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory, and the ACT, in order to counter an early skew toward the survey's home state of Queensland. This was supplemented with direct professional outreach and posts on LinkedIn.

Because early responses (the first 17, collected within hours of launch) were drawn almost entirely from the researcher's home professional network in Queensland, the survey team made a deliberate campaign decision to seek out and join teacher Facebook groups in other states specifically to correct this. The state distribution in the final sample reflects that adjustment, though the sample still skews toward Queensland relative to its share of the national teaching workforce.

Sample

The final sample includes 184 responses. Full demographic composition is presented below.

Category	Breakdown	n	%
School sector	Government / State	149	81.0%

Category	Breakdown	n	%
	Catholic	19	10.3%
	Independent	15	8.2%
	State Special school	1	0.5%
School type	Primary	98	53.3%
	Secondary	66	35.9%
	Combined	18	9.8%
	Special Education	2	1.1%
State / Territory	QLD	76	41.3%
	WA	38	20.7%
	NSW	36	19.6%
	VIC	24	13.0%
	SA	6	3.3%
	NT	2	1.1%
	ACT	2	1.1%
Role	Classroom teacher	151	82.1%
	Head of Department	20	10.9%
	Deputy Principal / Principal	7	3.8%
	Year Level Coordinator / Dean	6	3.3%
Years of experience	20+ years	63	34.2%
	6–10 years	35	19.0%
	11–15 years	30	16.3%
	3–5 years	23	12.5%
	15–20 years	21	11.4%
	0–2 years	11	6.0%
	Preservice teacher	1	0.5%
School size (enrolment)	500–1000	56	30.4%
	200–500	54	29.3%
	1000–1500	33	17.9%
	Under 200	24	13.0%
	1500+	17	9.2%

Limitations

This is a self-selected, non-probability sample recruited through professional networks and social media, not a stratified random sample of the Australian teaching workforce. Even after a deliberate campaign effort to broaden geographic reach, the sample still over-represents Queensland (41% of respondents, versus roughly 20% of the national teaching workforce) and classroom teachers relative to school leadership. Findings should be read as strong, real patterns worth taking seriously and investigating further, not as precise national averages. Demographic breakdowns are reported in full above so readers can weigh the findings against the composition of the sample themselves.

AchievoEDU customer schools were not excluded from distribution but were not specifically targeted either; the survey was framed throughout as an independent benchmark, not a customer satisfaction survey, and no respondent identifying information was collected.

Finding 1: Where the Time Goes

Respondents were asked for an overall estimate of weekly behaviour admin time, then asked to separately estimate time spent specifically on negative/incident administration and positive/recognition administration.

Overall weekly time on behaviour administration

Time range	n	%
Under 30 minutes	12	6.5%
30–60 minutes	21	11.4%
1–2 hours	44	23.9%
2–5 hours	65	35.3%
5–10 hours	31	16.8%
10+ hours	11	6.0%

58% of respondents (107 of 184) spend 2 or more hours a week on behaviour administration in total.

Time spent on negative/incident administration

Time range	n	%
Under 15 minutes	8	4.3%
15–30 minutes	14	7.6%
30–60 minutes	31	16.8%
1–2 hours	50	27.2%
2–5 hours	54	29.3%
5–10 hours	21	11.4%
10+ hours	6	3.3%

Time spent on positive/recognition administration

Time range	n	%
Under 15 minutes	54	29.3%
15–30 minutes	54	29.3%
30–60 minutes	44	23.9%
1–2 hours	21	11.4%
2–5 hours	7	3.8%
5–10 hours	3	1.6%
10+ hours	1	0.5%

The contrast is stark: 44% of respondents spend 2+ hours a week on negative admin, against just 6% who spend that much on positive admin. Conversely, 59% spend under 30 minutes a week on positive admin, against only 12% who spend that little on negative admin.

Negative admin time, by school type

School type	% spending 2+ hrs/week on negative admin	n
Secondary	54.5%	66
Primary	42.9%	98
Combined	16.7%	18

Secondary teachers in this sample report notably higher negative-admin time than primary teachers, and combined schools notably lower than both, though the combined-school sample is small (n=18) and should be treated as indicative only.

Duplicated work

Response	n	%
A moderate amount	67	36.4%
A little	56	30.4%
A lot	44	23.9%
I'm not sure	1	0.5%
Not answered	16	8.7%

60% of respondents who answered this question report a moderate amount or a lot of duplicated work, meaning the same information recorded more than once.

Finding 2: Digital vs Paper — It's Not That Simple

How behaviour is currently tracked

Tracking method	n	%
Entirely digital (single system)	70	38.0%
Mostly digital, some paper	55	29.9%
Entirely digital (multiple disconnected systems/spreadsheets)	33	17.9%
Mix of paper and digital	25	13.6%
Entirely paper-based	1	0.5%

Only one respondent in the entire sample described their school as entirely paper-based. Digital tracking is near-universal; the more common problem is fragmentation across multiple systems rather than absence of a system altogether.

Does digital tracking reduce admin time?

Response	n	%
Makes no difference	74	40.2%
Somewhat reduces it	50	27.2%
Somewhat increases it	38	20.7%
Significantly reduces it	20	10.9%
Significantly increases it	2	1.1%

62% say digital tracking makes no difference or actively increases their workload, against 38% who say it meaningfully reduces it.

Time saved, by tracking method

Tracking method	% reporting reduced time	n
Mostly digital, some paper	43.6%	55
Entirely digital (single system)	41.4%	70
Entirely digital (multiple disconnected systems)	33.3%	33
Mix of paper and digital	20.0%	25

Respondents on a single digital system report time savings at roughly the same rate as those still using some paper. Respondents on multiple disconnected digital systems, and those still mixing paper and digital, report the lowest rates of time savings. This supports the interpretation that consolidation, not digitisation itself, is what drives efficiency.

Finding 3: Recognition Is Frequent, but Confidence in Reach Is Mixed

How often positive behaviour is recognised

Frequency	n	%
Multiple times per day	138	75.0%
A few times a week	22	12.0%
Once a day	17	9.2%
Rarely	7	3.8%

Confidence that recognition reaches the students who need it most

Response	n	%
Somewhat confident	74	40.2%
Somewhat doubtful	48	26.1%
Neutral / unsure	25	13.6%
Very confident	21	11.4%
Not confident at all	16	8.7%

52% feel confident (somewhat or very) that recognition reaches the students who need it most, while 35% feel doubtful or not confident at all, and a further 14% are neutral or unsure. Recognition is clearly frequent in practice; whether it is reaching the right students equitably is a more open question, and one that AERO's guidance on consistency and equity of recognition suggests is worth further school-level review.

Finding 4: Perceived Effectiveness Is Split

Overall perceived effectiveness

Response	n	%
Somewhat effective	58	31.5%
Somewhat ineffective	56	30.4%
Neutral	25	13.6%
Very ineffective	35	19.0%
Very effective	10	5.4%

50% of respondents rate their school's current approach as somewhat or very ineffective, against 37% who rate it somewhat or very effective.

Perceived effectiveness (ineffective), by role

Role	% rating approach ineffective	n
Head of Department	70.0%	20
Year Level Coordinator / Dean	66.7%	6
Classroom teacher	48.3%	151
Deputy Principal / Principal	0.0%	7

This is one of the more striking patterns in the data. Every Deputy Principal or Principal respondent in this sample rated their school's approach as effective or neutral, none rated it ineffective, while Heads of Department, the role most often responsible for coordinating behaviour systems day to day, rated it ineffective at the highest rate of any group. The Deputy Principal / Principal sample is small (n=7) and this finding should be treated as a pattern worth investigating further rather than a settled result, but the direction is consistent with a broader concern raised throughout the qualitative responses: a possible gap between how leadership perceives a system's effectiveness and how it is experienced by staff enacting it day to day.

Perceived effectiveness (ineffective), by school type

School type	% rating approach ineffective	n
Combined	55.6%	18
Secondary	50.0%	66
Primary	48.0%	98

What respondents said: qualitative themes

184 respondents answered an open-text question on their biggest frustration with how behaviour is currently managed. Responses were reviewed for recurring themes. Because respondents often raised more than one issue, the categories below are not mutually exclusive and do not sum to 100%.

Theme	Approx. % of responses raising this theme
Lack of consequences or follow-through on incidents	20.1%
Lack of support or back-up from leadership	15.8%
Inconsistency across staff or across the school	13.6%
Parent accountability	9.8%
Time taken away from teaching	2.2%
System or platform usability	1.6%

The dominant theme, by a clear margin, is consistency and follow-through, not the tracking system or platform itself. Very few respondents cited software usability as their biggest frustration. This suggests that while the workload findings above point to a genuine administrative burden, the effectiveness concerns raised by respondents are, in their own words, largely about leadership consistency and consequence follow-through rather than tooling. This distinction matters for how schools might prioritise fixes: reducing admin time and improving perceived effectiveness may require different interventions.

What Schools Can Do With This

- Audit where behaviour admin time actually goes. If the pattern in this report holds locally, negative/incident administration is likely consuming disproportionately more staff time than positive recognition, even in schools that see recognition as a priority.
- Consolidate before digitising further. Schools already on a single digital system report similar or better time savings than schools adding more digital tools on top of existing ones. Fragmentation, not format, appears to be the bigger driver of wasted time.
- Review consistency of follow-through, not just the system. The qualitative data suggests staff frustration is concentrated on whether consequences and support are followed through consistently, not on which platform or paperwork process is used.
- Check for a perception gap between leadership and staff. If Heads of Department and classroom teachers in a school rate the current approach very differently from senior leadership, that gap itself may be worth surfacing and discussing directly.

Looking Ahead to 2027

This is the first edition of what is intended to be an annual benchmark. The core questions in this survey covering admin time, tracking method, and recognition/effectiveness are designed to remain unchanged year to year so that genuine trends, rather than changes in question wording, can be tracked over time.

Priorities for the 2027 edition include continuing to broaden geographic and sector representation beyond this year's Queensland-heavy sample, growing the school leadership and non-government sector response rate, and exploring the leadership-versus-staff perception gap identified in Finding 4 in more depth.

Appendix: Survey Questions

The following core questions were asked of all respondents (demographic questions omitted here for brevity; see Methodology for the full demographic breakdown):

- In a typical school week, what is your overall estimate of time spent on behaviour-related administration?
- Of your weekly behaviour admin time, how much is spent specifically on negative/incident administration?
- Of your weekly behaviour admin time, how much is spent specifically on positive/recognition administration?
- How much of your behaviour admin time would you estimate is duplicated work?
- What best describes how behaviour is currently tracked at your school?
- If your school uses a digital system, how well does it reduce your admin time compared to paper-based methods?
- On average, how often do you actively recognise or reward positive student behaviour?
- How confident are you that positive recognition at your school reaches the students who need it most?
- Overall, how effective do you feel your school's current behaviour management approach is at improving student behaviour over time?
- Has your school trialled or adopted any AI-assisted tools for behaviour tracking, reporting, or analysis in the past 12 months? (2026 rotating question)
- What's the single biggest frustration with how behaviour is currently managed at your school? (open text)

Contact

For questions about this report or its methodology, contact research@achievoedu.com.au