

## School Discipline

### Developing a Policy

#### Introduction

It is difficult to produce a policy document which will cover every eventuality which may arise, but this document contains proposals which form a framework for schools to apply to suit their own needs.

The word 'discipline' should be thought of in its purest sense as **training which promotes mental, physical and moral development.**

Two points must be remembered.

- 1. It is most important that everyone applies the same standards throughout the school so that pupils and staff have a consistent set of rules to adhere to.**
- 2. The proposals should stress the important part played by the class teacher in maintaining discipline within his/ her own classroom.**

Much of school and classroom discipline depends on common sense and the maintenance of an organized, productive and friendly atmosphere.

### Conduct Expectations

From an early age pupils are expected to behave responsibly and to show consideration towards one another. They are expected to address politely both teachers and other adults they meet in school and to act as ambassadors for their school. Support and co-operation from parents play an important part in achieving good standards of behaviour and establishing a safe, happy and productive learning environment.

### School Rules

School rules are specific statements which make clear the behaviour required to ensure the safety, well being and success of pupils and staff. They are based on courtesy and consideration for all. This means that what is stated in the school rules must set the standard of behaviour acceptable in

school. It is not enough to decide on the rules and share them with pupils, parents and staff. These standards must be reinforced on a daily basis and referred to whenever necessary. Pupils should be involved in drawing up the rules to encourage ownership and control. School staff must model in school the behaviour expected from pupils.

The rules must also be easy to understand and follow. Rather than have a long list, it is simpler perhaps to have sets of expectations to suit different areas of the school.

For example, **general school rules relating to safety and security** might include :

1. Pupils are expected to arrive in time for the start of school each day.
2. Movement around the school building should be orderly and quiet to avoid disturbing others.
3. Pupils must be given permission to leave the school grounds.
4. The playground and school building should be kept tidy and litter free.

*(Every school will have expectations specific to their situation. For example, if your school is beside a busy road a rule may be that school gates are kept closed at all times during the school day.)*

There should also be expectations relating to **personal and social behaviour** such as :

1. Appropriate language \* must be used at all times in school in the playground and in the classroom.
2. Respect \* must be shown to staff, pupils and visitors to the school. Disagreements and opinions should be stated in a calm and polite manner and without any form of aggression.
3. The school should provide a safe and happy environment. If a disagreement cannot be resolved through discussion, ask a member of staff for help.
4. Everyone is responsible for taking care of and improving the school grounds, building and resources so that we have a pleasant place in which to work.

*\*(It is assumed that words and phrases such as 'appropriate language' and 'respect' will be discussed in class so that younger pupils are aware of their exact meaning.)*

There should be a basic agreement amongst staff about certain areas including behaviour, standards of work and safety so that the whole school is in agreement and following the same code of conduct throughout to ensure continuity and security for pupils and staff. However each class will also have its own set of rules. For example, the Infant classes may have rules about sand and water play and the older classes about use of computers. Whatever the rules are, they should be clearly displayed and reviewed and updated regularly by staff and pupils to keep them meaningful and significant. They should form the basis of all school activity so that if a problem occurs they are there as a point of reference for staff, pupils and parents.

As children mature and move through the school, the code of conduct expected by the school will become increasingly meaningful and perhaps help to set lifelong standards. **For this reason each pupil's experience of how these rules or standards have been used in their school career must be as positive as possible.**

### **Supporting and managing the discipline policy**

How a teacher or adult member of staff deals with discipline issues on a day to day basis is crucial to the success of the policy. Pupils must feel that their opinions and points of view have been listened to and considered. They must feel that discussions and decisions are fair and impartial – not just those which involve them personally - but in general. This is because we learn also from experiences of others and if this experience is negative it can affect our trust and confidence in the whole system.

Once the ground rules are set and everyone is clear on the behaviour expected in school, staff must reinforce these expectations on a daily basis by demonstrating :

- respect for their pupils and other members of staff
- a willingness to listen to and consider points of view and suggestions
- how to give positive, constructive feedback
- a sense of humour and fun
- a genuine interest in the pupils
- an impartial and fair approach to all situations.

Classroom organization also plays a major part in ensuring a well disciplined school. Motivated pupils find the stimulation they need in their classroom tasks.

Problems arise when pupils lack interest in the subject, when the work is too hard or too easy or when they simply don't see the point.

These problems can be avoided if the teacher ensures that :

- the pupils share the learning outcomes set by the teacher
- the work is differentiated to suit pupils' abilities
- the tasks set are varied and as interesting as possible.

Throughout the day the teacher must be aware of what is going on around her / him to pre-empt possible problems.

It is also important to be firm and consistent. If, for example, the teacher is teaching a specific group and wishes to avoid interruption, the other pupils in the class must be clear on what they should do if they have finished their work or if they have work to be marked.

Another example of this kind of pre-emptive class management might be as simple as the classroom seating arrangements. There should be prior consideration about who works well together, does anyone have a hearing problem, is there a need for differentiated groupings and so on.

A third tactic in handling inappropriate behaviour, actual rather than potential, is to employ 'Ignoring Tactics.' Rather than commenting on the inappropriate behaviour directly, avert the child from it by pointing out their next task or directing them in some way. Once a teacher gets to know their pupils, they can become very skilled at this kind of deflective reaction. The advantage is that pupil attention is quietly returned to the task and conflict is avoided. The teacher has placed the importance on the task and not on the inappropriate behaviour. Also the pupil has been gently corrected and steered back on course. A positive and productive ethos remains!

### **Dealing with Inappropriate Behaviour**

If a child is behaving inappropriately in class, before reacting the teacher should quickly assess the reason for the misbehaviour. If the behaviour is past the avoidance, pre-emptive or ignoring tactics stages, then the teacher should ask the child and anyone else involved to talk about what has happened. This should be done calmly and with only one person talking at a

time. Everyone involved should have an opportunity to speak if they want to but only when it's their turn. The teacher should listen carefully and assess the situation before reacting. Once the teacher knows as far as possible what actually happened, she should make clear to the children how the incident could have been avoided (or if possible, encourage the children involved to point out how the situation could have been avoided – bearing in mind the school rules). She should make it clear to the children what the consequences will be. Sometimes, however, in more serious incidents, it is wise to keep some thinking time aside before making decisions about punishment. At this initial stage the emphasis is on helping the children to understand what is and is not acceptable behaviour. This also demonstrates the school discipline policy in action.

Every school is aiming to achieve the ideal, i.e. the stage where discipline of pupils means self-discipline and the need for sanctions disappears.

Pupils, staff and parents must all understand the sanctions which will be used if a pupil uses inappropriate behaviour.

Some possible sanctions may include:

1. A verbal reprimand given in private to the pupil and if necessary an apology received.
2. The pupil may be given a change of seat to remove him/her from the problem.
3. A punishment exercise may be given but this should always be a meaningful piece of work.
4. Informal contact may be made with parents to discuss the incident and keep them informed. This may prevent escalation of the problem.
5. If a child's behaviour is not showing significant improvement, then the teacher may wish to write a letter to parents outlining the problem and inviting them in for a discussion.
6. If the behaviour of a pupil is putting himself or others at risk, loss of privileges may become a necessary sanction.
7. In the case of more serious incidents or patterns of misbehaviour, parents may be asked to attend an interview with the Head Teacher to ensure parental support and jointly look for a solution.
8. The pupil may also be asked to sign a 'commitment to appropriate behaviour contract' to highlight the necessity for improvement. This should be accompanied by clear goals for the child to aim for.

9. In cases of persistent indiscipline, pupils may be excluded from school temporarily / permanently.

**There is an important responsibility on the part of the teacher to assess each situation separately. The emphasis is always on guiding pupils onto the track of appropriate behaviour. If a teacher makes a decision to punish before knowing the facts or before considering an alternative way of dealing with a problem, then this would be inappropriate behaviour and may damage pupil confidence in the system.**

Discipline is in itself an integral part of teaching and cannot be separated from the teacher's main aim of helping pupils to learn. Classroom discipline is not something that can be established in the first day of session and then ignored. It involves constant thinking ahead and making contingency plans. In any classroom which is well managed, the teacher is in control, the pupils are interested in the task in hand and the teacher is always one step ahead of the class. If this is the case the teacher can anticipate trouble before it happens and take appropriate action to avoid it.