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## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**CIRCULAR M33/91**

**To the Management Authorities  
of each Post-primary School**

### **GUIDELINES TOWARDS A POSITIVE POLICY FOR SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE**

### **A SUGGESTED CODE OF BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

# **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

## **Circular M 33/91**

### **GUIDELINES TOWARDS A POSITIVE POLICY FOR SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE**

Codes of Behaviour in schools should be considered in the context of the school being a community of which mutual respect, co-operation and natural justice are integral features. A code should have regard to the rights and responsibilities of all the parties concerned within the school – management, teachers, pupils and their parents. Circumstances will vary from school to school and it is only those intimately involved with a particular school who can draw up a code appropriate for the school.

#### **School Ethos:**

The ethos or climate of a school is a major factor in establishing and maintaining high standards of behaviour and discipline. This will involve a strong sense of community within the school and a high level of co-operation among staff and between staff, pupils and parents. The school staff need to be sensitive to the possibility that the values of the home and of the wider community which it serves may differ from the values which the school tries to promote.

Ideally, teachers should be familiar with the relevant factors influencing the families of their pupils. A high level of co-operation both within the school and between the school and the wider community is best achieved through good relationships.

A positive school ethos is based on the quality of relationships, both the professional relationships between teachers and the ways in which pupils and teacher treat each other. This positive ethos permeates all the activities of the school and helps in forming a strong sense of social cohesion within the school.

Management and teachers should recognise that a school has an obligation to all its pupils, whether they be difficult or amenable, to promote their educational welfare as far as it possibly can, and to take account of the effects that home environment can have on the performance and behaviour of pupils.

#### **The Management:**

The managerial authority of each school is responsible for ensuring that a fair and efficient code of behaviour, encompassing rules, sanctions and procedures, is drawn up and applied in the school. Any such code has as its aim the maintenance of desirable standards of behaviour, particularly in fostering understanding and co-operation between teachers, pupils and parents and in helping schools to adapt to the needs of its pupils while establishing the basis for responsible actions by the pupils. Management authorities should be supportive of the principal in the application of the code of behaviour and discipline in a fair and reasonable manner. In the selection of teachers, particularly of principals, management should take account of the qualities necessary to deal effectively with behaviour and discipline in the school.

#### **The Principal:**

A Principal's management style is a crucial factor in encouraging a sense of collective responsibility among staff and a sense of commitment to the school among pupils and their parents. S/he can create the right climate within which individuals in the school community can fulfil their responsibilities. S/he can provide guidance and support in the implementation of the school policy on behaviour.

It is the Principal's responsibility to ensure that the school's code of behaviour and discipline is administered in a manner which is consistent and fair to all pupils.

**The Staff:**

The support and attitude of staff are similarly critical in implementing the agreed code in a fair but effective manner. Staff should consider themselves responsible at all times for the behaviour of children within sight or sound of them and should respond promptly and firmly to any instances of unacceptable behaviour.

It is generally accepted that the quality of teaching has a direct influence on pupil behaviour. Lively and stimulating methods, with work well-matched to pupils' abilities, are most likely to receive a positive response from the children. Positive expectations by teachers can make pupils more responsible in their work and conduct. Where teachers insist, firmly but fairly, on honest effort and commitment from pupils and on high standards of behaviour, there is a great likelihood they will obtain them. An attractive environment for learning can also be a motivating factor in maintaining good behaviour.

Poor behaviour can stem, however, from a range of causes, some of them external associated with the home or environment, some of them arising from emotional or physical problems. It is important that such problems be identified at the earliest possible time and action undertaken in association with the parents. The need for good parent-teacher, home-school links are particularly necessary in this context.

In general the Principal and teacher should encourage the parents to visit the school, to familiarise them with the school and its activities, to welcome their active involvement, to inform them of the progress of their children and to discuss with them aspect of behaviour of their children, where called for, in a spirit of mutual co-operation.

**Parents:**

Parents and a supportive home environment play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes which produce good behaviour in schools. Schools need the support of parents and can more easily implement a policy on behaviour and discipline if they have the active support and involvement of parents.

It is important, therefore, that parents not only be made aware of the aims, values and behavioural requirements of the school but that they be actively encouraged to become involved in:

- (a) the process of drawing up a code of behaviour and discipline;
- (b) co-operating with the schools by encouraging their children to abide by the school code;
- (c) actively supporting the teaching staff in the application of the code.

A range of school activities, outside of the area of school behaviour and discipline, involving parental participation will help a school establish positive links with parents.

**Sanctions:**

It is accepted that there is a need for sanction to register disapproval of unacceptable behaviour. Each school will devise a graded system of sanctions suitable to its particular needs and circumstances. They should, however, contain a degree of flexibility to take account of individual circumstances. Misbehaviour should be checked immediately after it occurs.

Sanctions should make the distinction between minor and more serious misbehaviour clear to pupils.

A teacher, or year-head as appropriate, should report repeated instances of serious misbehaviour to the Principal while at the same time keeping a written record of all such instances. This record should indicate the warning and/or advice given to the pupil on the misbehaviour and the consequences of its repetition. Pupils should be informed when instances of serious misbehaviour on their part are being recorded. Parents should be kept fully informed from the outset of instances of serious misbehaviour on the part of their children and their co-operation in addressing the problem requested. The problem should be discussed orally with them in the first instance. It is better to involve parents at an early stage than as a last resort.

In the context of imposing sanctions, schools should ensure that the rules of natural justice apply. This requires that before sanctions are applied, the pupil and depending on the nature of the action which it is proposed to take, his/her parents, should be advised of the nature of the complaint and be given every opportunity to respond. Parents should also be informed of their right of appeal to the next level of authority.

Pupils who are removed from class should not be left in an unsupervised situation.

In schools where detention is used as a sanction parents should be advised in advance of such detention and given precise details of when the sanction is to be imposed and for what period.

The balance between rewards and sanctions, in both policy and practice, is a useful indicator of a school's approach to maintaining good standards of behaviour. Where schools lay the emphasis on rewards, the best results are found.

A school should give consideration to designating responsibility for home-school links to a suitable member of staff.

Management should encourage good communication with other schools in the area, primary and post-primary, in the interests of pupils generally and in order to facilitate a change of school by a pupil where considered desirable.

Expulsion should be resorted to only in the most extreme cases of indiscipline and only after every effort at rehabilitation has failed and every other sanction has been exhausted. Schools should be aware of the legal consequences that might arise if a pupil under 15 years of age were expelled and alternative placement in another school not secured for that pupil.

### **Corporal Punishment:**

The use of corporal punishment is forbidden.

## **A SUGGESTED CODE OF BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

In devising the code, consideration has been given to the particular needs and circumstances of this school. The aim is to provide a framework for reasonable and responsible behaviour by all concerned, staff, parents and children alike, and to ensure that every reasonable effort is made to accommodate the individuality of each pupil while acknowledging the right of each pupil to education in a relatively disruption-free environment.

Every effort will be made by all members of staff to adopt a positive approach to the question of behaviour in the school. The code offers a framework within which positive techniques of motivation and encouragement are utilised by teachers.

The school places greater emphasis on rewards than on sanctions in the belief that this will, in the long run, give the best results.

The school recognises the variety of differences that exist between pupils and the need to seek to accommodate these differences.

It is agreed that a high standard of behaviour requires a strong sense of community within the school and a high level of co-operation among staff and between staff, pupils and parents.

The rules are being kept to a minimum and are positively stated in terms of what pupils should do.

All efforts will be made to match the curriculum to the abilities, aptitudes and interests of each pupil. This should help to reduce boredom, lack of interest or lack of progress.

The overall responsibility for discipline within the school rests with the Principal subject to the authority of the school management. Each teacher has responsibility for the maintenance of discipline within his/her class while sharing a common responsibility for good order within the school premises. A pupil will be referred to the Principal for serious breaches of discipline and for repeated incidents of minor misbehaviour.

Teachers shall keep a written record of all instances of serious misbehaviour as well as a record of improvements in behaviour of disruptive pupils. Before resorting to serious sanctions, e.g., suspension, the normal channels of communication between school and parents will be utilised. Parents will be involved and their active co-operation sought at an early stage, rather than as a last resort. They can be assured of a fair hearing and will be informed of their right of appeal.

The following strategies may be used to show disapproval of unacceptable behaviour:

- (a) reasoning with the pupil;
- (b) reprimand (including advice on how to improve);
- (c) temporary separation from peers, friends or others;
- (d) loss of privileges;
- (e) detention during a break or after school hours;
- (f) prescribing additional work;
- (g) referral to Principal;
- (h) communication with parents;
- (i) suspension (temporary).

Communication with parents will be verbal or by letter, depending on the circumstances. The parents concerned will be invited to come to the school to discuss their child's case. For gross misbehaviour, or repeated instances of serious misbehaviour, suspension will be considered. Aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour towards a teacher will be regarded as serious or gross misbehaviour.

Where there are repeated instances of serious misbehaviour, the parents will be requested in writing to attend at the school to meet the Manager or Principal. If the parents do not give an undertaking that the pupil will behave in an acceptable manner in the future, the pupil may have to be suspended for a temporary period.

In the case of gross misbehaviour, the Management Authority shall empower the Principal to sanction an immediate suspension, pending a discussion of the matter with the parents.

Expulsion will be considered only after every effort at rehabilitation has failed and every other sanction exhausted.

Every effort will be made to have an emotionally disturbed child referred for psychological assessment without delay. Help will be sought also from support services within the wider community, e.g., Community Care Services provided by the Health Boards.

In formulating this code, account has been taken of the observations of the body representing the parents of the pupils attending the school.

All members of the teaching staff have been involved in planning the code.

A copy of this code has been made available to all parents.

In the belief that the most effective schools tend to be these with the best relationships with parents, every effort will be made by the Principal and staff to ensure that parents are kept well-informed, that the school provides a welcoming atmosphere towards parents and that parents are not only told when their children are in trouble but when they have behaved particularly well.

The code will be reviewed at agreed intervals.

C.N. LINDSAY,  
SECRETARY.  
1 OCTOBER, 1991.