Managing Challenging Behaviour

Guidelines for Teachers

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Foreword

Childrens' behaviour often poses challenges to teachers. Sometimes such behaviour causes irritation to the teacher teaching a large class with varying abilities. At other times the behaviour of certain children disrupts the normal operation of the classroom or school for a time. However, teachers may also have to deal with behaviour which challenges their ability to provide an education for a child or their peers. In addition to this, teachers increasingly find themselves challenged by behaviour associated with a disability, or where the children's social norms are different to that of the teacher.

There is general agreement in literature related to the management of challenging behaviour that the starting point must be the promotion of positive behaviour. Traditionally, standards of behaviour in school were often defined by what was not acceptable, and disciplinary strategies focused on the sanctions available to enforce rules and punish unacceptable behaviour. In many primary schools this approach has now been complemented with an active promotion of positive behaviour, which teaches children clearly the behaviour which is acceptable in the school context and reinforces positive behaviour when it occurs.

However, there will always be a number of children in any school who challenge teachers by behaving in a way which does not fall within the norms expected for their age or level of development. This document attempts to give teachers some guidance as to how to implement effective systems of promoting positive behaviour, but also how to deal with behaviour which seriously impairs some children's ability to benefit from education. It also seeks to guide teachers' responses to various behaviours in a manner which will establish more acceptable behaviour in its place. It may be particularly helpful to newly qualified teachers, who often find the management of behaviour to be the most challenging aspect of their jobs. It may also be helpful to school staffs who wish to promote discussion and co-operation on the issue of behaviour.

These guidelines were prepared by the Central Executive Committee, in response to the increasing number of queries relating to children's behaviour. The contributions of teachers and others who have contacted INTO Head Office in response to a request in *InTouch* for views on challenging behaviour are gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are also due to Lori Kealy and Niamh Corduff who were responsible for layout and typesetting. We are grateful to Deirdre O'Connor, Official, who had overall responsibility for the preparation of these guidelines.

It is hoped that these guidelines will assist teachers in a practical manner to deal with children's behaviour, in a way which leads to more positive outcomes for all the children under the teacher's care and to a less stressful environment for the teachers concerned.

John Carr, MA(Ed.)
General Secretary   November 2004

Introduction

What is Challenging Behaviour?

There is no universally accepted definition of challenging behaviour. Behaviour is defined as acceptable or not in a social context, and is also shaped by the broader environment in which people interact with each other.

Emerson et al (1987) have developed a definition of challenging behaviour that has become widely used in the context of learning disabilities:

> *"behaviour of such intensity, frequency and duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit or delay access to, and use of ordinary facilities"*

In general terms, teachers accept that challenging behaviour in the school context encompasses behaviour that:

- interferes with the pupil's own and/or other pupils' learning;
- challenges the day to day functioning of the school;
- challenges the right of staff and pupils to a safe and orderly environment;
- has a duration, frequency, intensity or persistence that is beyond the normal range of what schools tolerate; and
- is less likely to be responsive to the usual range of interventions used by the school for pupil misbehaviour.

A perusal of the behaviour records of most primary schools will provide clear examples of different types of challenging behaviour which are displayed by children. These include:

- aggressive behaviour, which can include pushing, punching, kicking, biting, scratching and threatening behaviour;
- disruptive behaviour, which can include screaming, tantrums, verbal abuse, non co-operation, running away;
- destructive behaviour, which can include destruction of property and the environment;
- withdrawn behaviour, which can include failure to respond, or avoidance of people or activities;
- stereotypical behaviour, particularly in children with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders, which can include rocking, repetitive vocalisations, ritualistic hand movements; and
- self-injurious behaviour, including head banging, scratching and poking.

In an INTO survey carried out in 2000, teachers were asked which behaviours they rated as "gross misbehaviours". The behaviours rated as most serious by teachers were assault (on a fellow pupil or teacher), vandalism, extortion, theft and bullying. While it must be acknowledged that these behaviours were reported to occur least frequently in schools, they have the potential to cause enormous disruption in the school community.

Teachers have repeatedly demanded assistance in coping with challenging behaviour such as workable procedures in the form of comprehensive Codes of Behaviour, in-service training, smaller classes, support teachers, psychological services and special units.

In what Contexts does Challenging Behaviour occur?

There are reasons why children are behaving in a challenging manner. Therefore, identifying why they do can be the key to finding a solution to the problems caused by the behaviour. This analysis must include a consideration of the behaviour and the context in which it occurs.

Children with **communication difficulties** may engage in challenging behaviour. If a child is unable to express needs or wants, because of a lack of understanding or ability to use language, inappropriate behaviour may be used to express these needs. In cases like this, teaching a child to use acceptable ways to communicate their needs may form part of the solution. Intensive and early intervention from a speech and language therapist will be very beneficial for such children.

Environmental factors may contribute to the problem. Children may react negatively to noise, heat, cold or to invasion of their space. Some children, particularly children with autistic spectrum disorders may be over sensitive to certain stimuli such as noise, and may therefore react by displaying challenging behaviour.

Attention-seeking is often identified as a cause of challenging behaviour. This begs the question as to why the child needs to seek attention in this way. Some children may be unable to manage a particular task and may be frustrated or bored. However, attention-seeking behaviour can also be a learned behaviour, which has been effective in the past in ensuring that children get what they want. Even negative attention can be motivating for some children, especially if they feel that this is the only attention they receive.

Factors associated with **socio-economic disadvantage** also influence the prevalence of challenging behaviour. Poor social skills and language development, associated with poor parenting skills may lead to a child exhibiting challenging behaviour. This behaviour may be used as a survival technique in the child's environment.

Finally, challenging behaviour may have an underlying **medical cause or reason**, such as pain, illness or sensory difficulties. Some forms of challenging behaviour are particularly associated with certain conditions and disabilities such as repeated and involuntary body movements (tics) and uncontrollable vocal sounds (Tourette's Syndrome) or ritualistic or obsessive behaviour (Autistic Spectrum Disorders).

Strategies for Promoting Positive Behaviour

The most effective methodology that teachers develop when attempting to manage challenging behaviour is to prevent it occurring in the first place. To this end, many schools have developed strategies to promote positive behaviour. This is based on the assumption that all behaviour (negative and positive) is learned and, therefore, that acceptable behaviour can be learned. It is also predicated on the belief that behaviour is contextual, so children can be taught to behave in a certain way in the school context. Acceptable behaviour is then reinforced in a school and classroom climate which is supportive of positive behaviour.

Mainstream schools are becoming increasingly inclusive and, therefore, regularly encounter a situation where they meet children with challenging behaviour as an aspect of special education. A positive approach to the promotion of good behaviour benefits all children, including those with special educational needs. However, approaches must be modified to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate to the child with special educational needs.

Support teachers (teacher counsellors), who are available in some disadvantaged schools, can play a significant role in guiding children towards positive behaviour. Where behaviour is as a result of domestic factors, a home school community liaison teacher can often explore interventions within the home which can be of benefit.

Every school is obliged to have a Code of Behaviour. Circular 20/90 requested schools to draw up such a Code. The Education Welfare Act 2000 has made such Codes a legal requirement, but promised guidelines have yet to issue from the National Educational Welfare Board. Circular 20/90 and the Education Welfare Act stress the importance of the promotion of positive behaviour, as does INTO advice on the subject (Appendix 1).

Promoting Positive Behaviour in the Classroom

Children have an inherent need for a safe and secure environment. The classroom, in many instances can be the only stable element in the life of a child not experiencing such security in other parts of his/ her life. Teachers model positive behaviour, by treating children and adults with respect and building up a positive relationship with pupils.

In general, children react well to routines and boundaries. There is, of course, a natural tendency to initially push out boundaries that are set and to test their limits. Establishing and maintaining rules and routines in the classroom requires a good deal of effort from teachers, but it has been shown to promote positive behaviour.

The following strategies have been found to be effective in promoting positive behaviour in classrooms, when implemented appropriately.

Develop clear and simple **classroom rules** in discussion with the children. These can

be displayed in the classroom, perhaps with pictorial clues for non-readers. About five to seven rules, stated in terms of observable behaviours is sufficient for most classes. Positive statements such as "Keep your hands and feet to yourself" are preferable to negative statements such as "No kicking or pushing". Rules can be taught and practised as role plays, and reinforced by praise or reward. It is important that there should be positive consequences for children who keep the rules. There must also be consequences for those who do not.

All children respond to attention and, therefore, a focus on positive behaviour will reinforce positive behaviour. Many teacher make a point of trying to **catch children being good** and praise or reward them for this, placing the focus of attention in the classroom on the majority of children who behave appropriately. In many classrooms, teachers have adopted a formalised approach to rewards and praise, where children earn tokens, points or stickers for positive behaviour.

Gordon (1996) gives the following advice for the **use of rewards**:

- reward appropriate behaviour as soon as possible;
- make the pay-offs small, and attainable;
- make the rewards cumulative;
- make the pay-offs cooperative (ie. encouraging the class to work together for a reward);
- never take back a reward; and
- use the element of surprise (eg, by giving a double reward unexpectedly).

Many disruptive behaviours occur at transition times, for example when children are moving from one activity to another. It is, therefore, essential to **plan for routines and transitions**. Transitions can be flagged by the teacher eg, "In five minutes, we will finish this activity and eat our lunch." A child with a specific learning difficulty may, for example, find organising books and equipment a particular challenge. A verbal or visual clue about what will happen next can, therefore, help with management of classroom life.

Giving clear instructions to children about what is required of them is part of everyday life in the classroom. Teachers give an enormous number of commands during the school day with some research indicating an average number in a half-hour of thirty-five. This has been shown to rise to sixty where children have more behaviour problems (Webster-Stratton, 1999). Webster-Stratton describes children as being caught in a "command storm". In order to make teachers' instructions more effective she suggests that commands should be:

- delivered after the teacher has sought and gained attention;
- short, clear and specific;
- expressed in positive terms;
- followed by time for children to comply;

- followed up by positive reinforcement of children who have followed the commands; and

- reinforced by giving further signals to non-compliant children such as by standing close, using eye-contact and calling their name.

The introduction of the social personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum has afforded teachers discrete time and a structure within which to address **the teaching of social skills**. Many teachers use approaches such as talk and discussion (including circle time), drama and co-operative games to achieve the objectives of the SPHE curriculum. The Primary Curriculum (1999) states that SPHE

"fosters the personal development, health and well being of the child, and helps him/ her to create and maintain supportive relationships and to become an active and responsible citizen in society".

Many of the skills fostered by the SPHE programme, such as decision-making, conflict resolution, communication and self-awareness are central to the promotion of positive behaviour in the classroom.

Children must be aware that misbehaviour has **clear, consistent consequences**, and that failure to keep rules or to behave well will incur consequences. These can be presented to a child as a choice, where a teacher might say, "I have asked you twice to work quietly. If you continue to talk, you will have to work at a separate table." This is a way of holding children accountable for their behaviour. Consequences should be consistent, promptly applied, reasonable and related to the behaviour concerned.

A Whole-School Approach

Many of the strategies above have been adopted by schools as part of a whole-school approach to the promotion of positive behaviour. Schools in general report that such an approach to the promotion of positive behaviour has been more effective. Several areas have been highlighted as benefiting from a whole school approach.

A shared ethos for the school which emphasises care, respect and responsibility can be both a starting point and a result of an emphasis on positive behaviour. Practical manifestations of such an ethos include school assemblies where success is celebrated, a welcoming attitude to parents, buddying of younger children or children with special education needs, a sharing of responsibility with students and the use of children's first names. The cornerstone of such an approach is that it is shared by the whole school community, including staff, children, parents and the board of management. The approach taken by the school must also be appropriate to the context in which the school operates, including factors related to the broader community.

The **role of parents** in an approach to positive behaviour is extremely important. The Education Welfare Act (2000) requires schools to provide parents with a copy of the Code of Behaviour and states that schools may require parents to confirm that it is acceptable to them. Teachers have also found that parental involvement in acknowledging positive behaviour, through the use of a note in the homework journal, or in making reports to

parents is very useful. Research has shown that children regard a positive note home as the best reward, while a negative note home was seen as the worst sanction.

A whole school approach to the promotion of positive behaviour also enables **staff to support each other**. Collaboration involves staff in discussions about behaviour without the danger that individuals may feel that their classroom management skills are being questioned. Staff support has also been identified as one of the major factors in coping effectively with incidents relating to challenging behaviour. In schools where there are particular problems, staff may have a system of calling another member of staff to assist by removing a pupil, or the class group, where necessary, to calm a difficult situation.

Finally, a sense of common purpose in the promotion of positive behaviour is very effective in **dealing with behaviour in public areas**, such as corridors, assembly areas and the yard. A shared understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in these spaces, a willingness by all staff to deal with all children, and facilitating other members of staff to become involved in situations leads to a cohesive approach to behaviour which is more easily accepted by children. Children will test the limits of every system, and so it is particularly important that a school's induction policy should ensure that new or substitute teachers are given a clear understanding of procedures related to behaviour.

Some schools have adopted or adapted particular systems of positive behaviour such as 'Discipline for Learning'. A description of one school's experience of implementing 'Discipline for Learning' is included in the INTO publication *Discipline in the Primary School* (2002)

The key to success of any system is that the procedures are fully discussed, understood and agreed by all staff.

Managing Challenging Behaviour

Steps taken to promote positive behaviour impact positively on the general climate in the school and the classroom, and minimise the occurrence of negative behaviour. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of schools to develop shared approaches that promote positive behaviour, it is likely that all teachers and schools will encounter situations of challenging behaviour.

Analysis of the behaviour is essential. A common strategy is to look at **A**ntecedent, **B**ehaviour and **C**onsequence.

The **antecedent** is what went on before the onset of the problematic behaviour. The student may have been faced with a task they were unable to complete, reacted to something said by another pupil, or be distressed by something that has happened outside of school. It may be possible to identify a pattern of behaviour such as a child beginning to fidget after a certain period of time.

An analysis of the **behaviour** of the student can help in attempting to prevent a reoccurrence of the behaviour. Analysis can also help to break down the behaviour so that it can be tackled in small steps. For example, tackling outbursts which include among other things, bad language, might focus on dealing with the bad language, before tackling other elements.

An analysis of the **consequences** of behaviour may give clues as to how a situation occurs or develops. An extreme example might be that following a particularly bad outburst a child is sent home, which may have been the child's desired outcome. Attention seeking behaviour may be considered successful by a child in that it attracts negative attention from the teacher, or other pupils. Sometimes, the initial response to misbehaviour can serve to escalate a situation. A common example of this is where an aggressive response to a behaviour may provoke further aggression from a child.

Responding to Behaviour

An appropriate response to challenging behaviour depends on the type of behaviour being exhibited by the child. Any response to challenging behaviour should be consistent, fair, and be the least disruptive response necessary to manage the behaviour. A considered, proactive response is likely to be more effective than one which is merely reactive, and which may be influenced by an emotional response to the incident.

One response to particular forms of challenging behaviour is to **ignore** them. This strategy can be effective in dealing with annoying behaviours such as whining, pouting, screaming and tantrums. These behaviours are generally aimed at getting something, such as an object or attention. Initially, the behaviour may worsen, as the child tries harder to get attention. By ignoring the behaviour consistently, the child will come to realise that the behaviour is not effective. However, this approach must be combined with positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviour. Ignoring is not appropriate for

behaviours which are abusive, or destructive, or behaviours such as lying, stealing or non-compliance.

It is important that teachers do not ignore children who are off-task, or who are withdrawn. Teachers need a range of strategies for **redirecting** such children, without drawing attention to the student's behaviour, or disrupting the work of the class. Teachers use strategies such as moving closer to a child, making eye contact, or using visual clues such as pictures or hand movements to remind children of appropriate behaviour. They also use firm, direct and specific statements to remind children of rules or the consequences of breaking them. If children comply with the direction, their behaviour can then be acknowledged positively.

More serious outbursts of misbehaviour, where the child chooses to act inappropriately must be met with **consequences**, which are clear and logical. For example, if children fight in the yard, it is a logical consequence that they will have to leave the yard. If children distract others in class they will have to work away from others. It is important that the consequences are fairly immediate, implementable, and appropriate. Consequences might include being moved in the classroom, a loss of privileges, or staying in during a break to finish work or tidy up a mess. Consequences should never be physically or psychologically harmful or humiliating. A school's Code of Behaviour should outline the sanctions which are used in the school. (See Appendix 1, page 22)

Another strategy which may be useful in the case of a serious incident of misbehaviour, or to prevent the escalation of an incident is providing for **time out**. In such circumstances a child goes to a particular place in the classroom, designated as the time out or cool down area. Time outs should be for designated misbehaviours only, and be part of a planned hierarchy of response. The time out area should be away from the other students, but in the view of the teacher. This approach should be for a limited, specified period, and it should be borne in mind that research has shown that five minutes is an optimal time frame. Children will test the limits of such an intervention but, if it is followed through consistently, it has proven to be an effective way to manage misbehaviour.

Exiting a child from the classroom may be necessary where the classroom is significantly disrupted. It is the most intrusive action that the teacher can take and should, therefore, be a planned intervention. This should include the steps to be tried prior to exiting, where the child will go and how they will be supervised. How the child will return to the class should also be considered in advance. Exiting needs to be planned on a whole school basis, taking account of the particular needs of the school. Teachers may agree, for example, to allow a child from another class to have a time out in their room, in return for a reciprocal arrangement. However, repeated exiting of a child can place an unfair burden on a particular member of staff and may give the children the message that the teacher is unable to manage the child.

It is also important that when the child returns from a time-out, or having been exited that they are assisted in re-establishing a working relationship with the teacher and the class.

Children with particularly challenging behaviour may benefit from the drawing up of a **behaviour plan**. Such a plan might set out the attainment of a particular behaviour

target over a short period of time such as a day or a week. Plans should focus on one behaviour at a time and the achievement of the targets should be reinforced positively. Children should be involved in the setting of targets. If a child is entitled to resource teaching or has access to a support teacher on the basis of their behavioural needs, the resource / support teacher may be in a position to discuss the plans, or set targets in consultation with the child and the class teacher. However, continually placing the child on a behaviour plan will reduce its effectiveness.

Managing Aggressive or Violent Misbehaviour

Aggressive and violent misbehaviour is not a regular occurrence in most primary schools. However, when such incidents occur, they are serious and cause a great deal of stress for those involved. When faced with a potentially violent situation the following steps may prove useful in de-escalating the situation. Schools should develop a system where a teacher can call for assistance if faced with a potentially dangerous situation.

- Where possible the child should be isolated. This may involve the child being exited from the classroom, perhaps with a special needs assistant, or with the assistance of another teacher. An alternative is that the rest of the class is removed from a potentially violent situation.
- The child should be spoken to calmly, assertively and respectfully.
- The teacher should stay at a safe distance.
- It should be made clear that you are listening to the child. In this way it may be possible to find out how the situation has developed, or how it may be resolved.
- The child should be asked to consider possible positive outcomes and behaviours.
- The child should be given space and time to cool off and to respond to requests.

It is important that any violent incident is recorded. It may also be analysed using the Antecedent - Behaviour – Consequences approach (see page 9)

The most serious form of misbehaviour is an assault. Circular 40/97 sets out the procedures which should be followed in the case of an assault by a pupil (Appendix 2).

Physical Containment/ Restraint

A small number of children with special education needs may be unable to respond to the normal sanctions applicable or there may be emergency situations where sanctions are not appropriate or adequate. In these circumstances, in some special schools, the use of physical restraint may be part of the school's policy on challenging behaviour. In such cases, it should be clear that any policy in the use of restraint must be expressly approved by the board of management, and incorporated in the school's Code of Discipline as part of a system of behaviour management. Teachers must be expressly authorised to utilise restraint where necessary by the board in accordance with the school's policy. In addition, staff

should be specifically trained in the use of physical restraint as part of an overall behaviour intervention strategy such as the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI). Teachers should not undertake the use of restraint except in the aforementioned circumstances.

The question of the use of restraint or physical containment of a child who poses a danger to themselves or others in the mainstream school is currently being considered by an INTO Sub-Committee on Discipline. It is hoped that agreed guidelines on Codes of Behaviour will be drawn up, and that these guidelines will address how the needs of such children and their teachers might be met.

Conclusion

All children are entitled to an education free from frequent disruptions in a safe secure environment. Boards of management have a duty to ensure that schools are safe and healthy workplaces for teachers and others. The promotion of positive behaviour in the school and in the classroom is necessary if these outcomes are to be achieved. Schools also need to have a clear policy on how incidences of misbehaviour are handled. Experience has shown that the effort required in setting up a systematic approach to the promotion of positive behaviour pays dividends for all staff and students.

This publication sets out to give guidance to teachers on how they can best manage the challenging behaviour, which they encounter in schools and classrooms. It is based on the assumption that behaviour is learned and that, therefore, appropriate behaviour can be taught in the school context. It proposes that the starting point for a school in managing challenging behaviour is to prevent it occurring, by promoting positive behaviour in the school and classroom. Finally, it recognizes that not all challenging behaviour can be prevented and proposes some ways in which teachers can manage inappropriate behaviour, with an emphasis on ensuring that it does not reoccur.

Meeting the needs of children who display challenging behaviour is a task which cannot be faced by teachers in isolation. The support of the wider school community in promoting positive behaviour and dealing with incidents of misbehaviour is essential. Boards of management must ensure that the provisions of the school's Code of Behaviour are adhered to. Parents should be aware of the Code and be encouraged to actively engage with it. Services such as speech and language therapy, counselling and psychiatric assessment must be available to schools to allow them to adequately meet the needs of a school population which has increasingly diverse needs. Finally, smaller classes would allow teachers to better build relationships with vulnerable pupils, use different teaching techniques and engage pupils more effectively in the learning experience.

Preventing and managing challenging behaviour is a vital component in ensuring that teachers' and children's experience of school is a happy one. These guidelines seek to assist schools in the implementation of an effective behaviour policy which promotes positive behaviour and also enables teachers to deal effectively with challenging behaviour.

Appendix 1

Guidelines Towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline

Under the terms of Circular 20/'90 boards of management and principal teachers are requested to draw up a 'Code of Behaviour and Discipline' for schools in accordance with guidelines which were enclosed with the Circular.

Children are entitled to an education free from frequent disruptions in a safe, secure environment. In order to protect the rights of children, teachers and others who work in schools, the principal teacher and the teaching staff should draw up a Code of Discipline in consultation with parents which should be submitted for approval to the Board. Once agreed by the Board the Code of Behaviour and Discipline should be circulated to parents.

It should be reviewed by the school staff at regular intervals.

It is not possible to compile a definitive Code of Discipline that will apply to all schools. Approaches to school discipline must take account of the particular needs and circumstances of individual schools.

Behaviour and Discipline

Discipline in schools is an essential element in the socialization of children, in the formation of their characters and in the process of education. This requires the use of certain controls which, while not threatening children's independence, self-esteem and self-confidence, will enable them to appraise their behaviour rationally in terms of what is right and wrong or appropriate and inappropriate.

Rule 130 – Rules for National Schools

The following is the text of Rule 130 as included in Circular 20/'90. (This rule was amended by Circular 7/'88).

(1) The board of management has ultimate responsibility for discipline in the school under its management and a duty to ensure that a fair code of discipline applies therein. This code should be formulated by the principal and the teaching staff in consultation with parents and be approved by the board.

(2) Teachers should have a lively regard for the improvement and general welfare of their pupils, treat them with kindness combined with firmness and should aim at governing them through their affections and reason and not by harshness and

severity. Ridicule, sarcasm or remarks likely to undermine a pupil's self-confidence should not be used in any circumstances.

(3) The use of corporal punishment is forbidden.

(4) Any teacher who contravenes sections (2) and (3) of this Rule will be regarded as guilty of conduct unbefitting a teacher and will be subject to severe disciplinary action.

(5) Where the board of management deems it necessary to make provision in the code of discipline to deal with continuously disruptive pupils or with a serious breach of discipline, by authorising the chairperson or principal to exclude a pupil or pupils from school the maximum initial period of such exclusion shall be three school days.

A special decision of the board of management is necessary to authorise a further period of exclusion up to a maximum of 10 school days to allow for consultation with the pupil's or pupils' parents or guardians. In exceptional circumstances, the board of management may authorise a further period of exclusion in order to enable the matter to be reviewed.

(6) No pupil shall be struck off the rolls for breaches of discipline without the prior consent of the patron and unless alternative arrangements are made for the enrolment of the pupil at another suitable school.

INTO Advice regarding Suspension

The procedure followed prior to and during a period of suspension should be seen to be reasonable and scrupulously fair. In this regard the following guidelines may be helpful:

- a record should be kept in the school of all instances of serious misbehaviour by pupils;

- parents should be invited to meet the class teacher, the principal and/or the chairper-son to discuss serious incidents of misbehaviour;

- communications to parents regarding the suspension of a pupil or the possibility of suspension should be in writing. (Copies of all correspondence should be retained);

- a written statement of the terms and date of the termination of a suspension should be given to parents;

- when a period of suspension ends, the pupil should be re-admitted formally to the class by the principal; and

- where a satisfactory resolution of a problem is achieved, a pupil may be re-admitted to school within a suspension period at the discretion of the chairperson of the board and the principal.

Impact of Education Welfare Act

Under the Education Welfare Act 2000, the National Education Welfare Board will be obliged to produce guidelines for schools to assist in the drafting of codes of behaviour. The INTO is in negotiations with the DES, Management, and the National Education Welfare Board in relation to the implementation of the provisions of the Act for schools. Section 23 of the Act deals with the proposed code of behaviour.

SECTION 23 – CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

The following is the full text of Section 23.

(1) The board of management of a recognised school shall, after consultation with the principal of, the teachers teaching at, the parents of students registered at, and the educational welfare officer assigned functions in relation to, that school, prepare, in accordance with subsection (2), a Code of Behaviour in respect of the students registered at the school (hereafter in this section referred to as a 'Code of Behaviour').

(2) A Code of Behaviour shall specify:

    a) the standards of behaviour that shall be observed by each student attending the school;

    b) the measures that may be taken when a student fails or refuses to observe those standards;

    c) the procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school concerned;

    d) the grounds for removing a suspension imposed in relation to a student; and

    e) the procedures to be followed relating to notification of a child's absence from school.

(3) A Code of Behaviour shall be prepared in accordance with such guidelines as may, following consultation by the board with national associations of parents, recognised school management organizations and trade unions and staff associations representing teachers, be issued by the board.

(4) The principal of a recognised school shall, before registering a child as a student at that school in accordance with section 20, provide the parents of such child with a copy of the code of behaviour in respect of the school and may, as a condition of so registering such child, require his or her parents to confirm in writing that the code of behaviour so provided is acceptable to them and that they shall make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance with such code by the child.

(5) The principal of a recognised school shall, on a request being made by a student registered at the school or a parent of such a student, provide the student or parent, as the case may be, with a copy of the code of behaviour in respect of the school concerned.

DES Circular 20/90

Each board of management is requested to draw up a 'Code of Behaviour and Discipline' for its school. A board may adopt and adapt provisions in the Suggested Code as necessary to meet the particular needs and circumstances of its school.

This circular and appendices will replace Circular 7/88 and its appendices:

1. 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 cooperation among staff and between staff, pupils and parents. The school staff need to be aware of the fact 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 cooperation 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 teachers treat each other. This positive ethos permeates the activities of the school and helps in forming a strong sense of social cohesion within the school.

2. The board of management has a role to play in the maintenance of desirable standards of behaviour in a school. It should be supportive of the principal in the application of a fair code of behaviour and discipline within the school. Chairpersons of boards of management should visit their schools and satisfy themselves that the *Rules for National Schools* are being complied with.

    Boards of management and principals have positive roles to play in fostering understanding and cooperation between teachers, parents and pupils and in helping to adapt to the needs of the pupils.

    The board of management should encourage the body representing parents of pupils attending the school to become involved (a) in the process of drawing up a code of behaviour and discipline and (b) in supporting the teaching staff with regard to its implementation. If considered desirable, it can obtain reports from the principal on standards of behaviour in the school. It should ensure that a high standard of cleanliness and maintenance prevails within the school.

    Boards of management and selection boards should ensure that they have regard to the need to select as principal a candidate with the qualities necessary to deal effectively with behaviour and discipline in the school.

3. The 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. He/she can create the right climate within which individuals

in the school community can fulfil their responsibilities. He/she 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.

4. A whole school behaviour policy should be developed by schools following meaningful consultation with parents. The body representing parents should be invited by the board of management to make a submission indicating what it would like to see in the policy. Careful consideration should be given by the board of management to the parents' submission in formulating the policy document if parents are fully involved in drawing up a whole school behaviour policy, they will have greater understanding of what it entails and are more likely to support the school in implementing it.

5. The policy should aim to create a positive school ethos where learning and development can take place and to promote the highest possible degree of consensus about standards of behaviour among staff, pupils and parents. A whole school policy should become part of the ethos of the school and should be clearly understood by pupils, parents and the wider school community. It is important that the policy be accepted by all the staff.

The policy should indicate ways in which parents can have easy access to teachers and set down procedures for meaningful communications between both parties.

Pupils are likely to respond positively to such a policy if it is clearly understood and applied in a consistent manner. In this context, principals should consider consulting older pupils about the relevance of individual rules and regulations.

6. The attitude of staff will have a critical bearing on how successful the policy is likely to be. 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. Poor behaviour can stem from a range of causes, some school-based, some external. The problem, then, is complex and a variety of measures is required to deal with it.

7. 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 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 greater likelihood they will obtain them. An attractive environment for learning can also be a motivating factor in maintaining good behaviour.

8. Schools need the support of parents in order to meet legitimate expectations with regard to good behaviour and discipline.It is important that parents be made aware of

the aims, values and disciplinary requirements of the school.

The great majority of parents take their responsibility with regard to standards of behaviour in their children seriously. Some parents, however, do not fully appreciate the need to provide their children with firm guidance and positive models of behaviour.

Schools can more easily implement a policy on behaviour and discipline if they receive the active support of the parents.

Parents can cooperate with schools by encouraging their children to abide by the school rules, by visiting the school when requested to do so by the principal or other member of the staff and by ensuring that homework is allocated due time and effort by the child. Parents should be made aware of the school homework policy and how they can assist.

Parents play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes which produce good behaviour in school. They should take full advantage of all formal and informal channels of communication made available by schools. Parent-teacher associations or parents' associations should ensure that their activities are accessible and rewarding to as many parents as possible.

9. It is accepted that there is a need for sanctions 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.

10. A teacher should report repeated instances of serious misbehaviour to the principal while at the same timekeeping a written record of all such instances. This record should indicate the warnings and/or advice given to the child 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. It is better to involve parents at an early stage than as a last resort.

    They should be informed of their right to come to the school and be invited to do so in order to discuss the misbehaviour with the principal and/or the class teacher. This should always be done when suspension of a pupil is contemplated.

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

12 . Close cooperation with parents is important. Individual invitations to discuss their child can help in the acceptance of a combined responsibility. Parents should be informed by the school authorities about problems with their children's behaviour before a serious situation develops.

A range of activities involving parental participation will help to establish positive links with parents.

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

Evidence seems to indicate that schools which succeed in achieving and maintaining high standards of behaviour and discipline tend to be those with the best relationships with parents. Principals and staffs should ensure that their schools provide a welcoming atmosphere which encourages parents to become involved and that parents are not only told when their children are in trouble but also when they have behaved particularly well. Schools' policies on behaviour should be communicated fully and clearly to parents.

A Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for National Schools (from Circular 20/90)

1. In devising the Code, consideration has been given to the particular needs and circumstances of this school. The aim is to ensure that the individuality of each child is accommodated while acknowledging the right of each child to education in a relatively disruption-free environment.

2. 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 the teachers.

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

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

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

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

7. 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.

8. The overall responsibility for discipline within the school rests with the principal. Each teacher has responsibility for the maintenance of discipline within his/her classroom, 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.

9. 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).

   Teachers will keep a written record of all instances of serious misbehaviour as well as a record of improvements in the behaviour of disruptive pupils. Before resorting to serious sanctions, eg, suspension, the normal channels of communication between school and parents will be utilised. Parents will be involved at an early stage, rather than as a last resort.

10. Communication with parents will be verbal or by letter, depending on 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, depending on circumstances.
    Where there are repeated instances of serious misbehaviour, the chairperson of the board of management will be informed and the parents will be requested in writing to attend at the school to meet the chairperson and the 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. Suspension will be in accordance with the terms of Rule 130(5) of the *Rules for National Schools*.
    In the case of gross misbehaviour, the board shall authorise the chairperson or principal to sanction an immediate suspension, pending a discussion of the matter with the parents.
    Expulsion maybe considered in an extreme case, in accordance with Rule 130(6).

11. 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, eg, Community Care services provided by Health Boards.

12. In formulating this code, the Board of Management considered a submission relating to the possible content of a code received from, and discussed with, 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.

13. In the belief that the most effective schools tend to be those with the best relationship 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.

14. The code will be reviewed at agreed intervals.

Appendix 2

Assaults on Teachers

Assaults against teachers do not happen very often. However, when they occur the impact on the individual teacher or teachers can be quite profound. Circular 40/97 emphasises the necessity to create and maintain a culture where acts of violence are not tolerated and where incidents when they do occur are effectively and speedily dealt with.

Creating such a climate requires the cooperation of the whole community. However, where in a minority of cases parents do not abide by the agreed procedures the Circular offers little practical assistance in how to proceed.

Circular 40/97 focuses on:

- The board's duty to provide a safe place of work for employees.
- Measures to be taken to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults to teachers or other staff employed in schools.
- Measures to be taken in support of staff who have been assaulted or threatened with assault and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

DES Circular 40/97

The Minister for Education and Science wishes to bring to the attention of the school authorities his concern at the increase in the incidents of assaults on staff in primary schools. Violence in the workplace is an issue of grave concern for employees and employers alike. As in other workplaces, school employees are also the victims of violence in the workplace. During the course of their work, school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

The Minister is anxious that every effort would be made to create and maintain a culture in schools where acts of violence are not tolerated and when they do occur, are effectively and speedily dealt with.

In this context, the Department of Education and Science wishes to draw the attention of boards of management to the following issues:

- the board's duty to provide a safe place to work for employees;

- measures to be taken to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults to teachers or other staff employed in schools;
- measures to be taken in support of staff who have been assaulted or threatened with
- assault; and
- ensuring that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

1. Board's Duty to provide a Safe System of Work

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for boards of management and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 requires employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees. It requires employers to draw up a Safety Statement:

- identifying the hazards;
- assessing the risks to health and safety;
- putting in place appropriate safeguards.

In the education sector violence should be considered as a potential hazard and assessed accordingly and where there is a risk to health and safety from violence, appropriate safeguards must be put in place. Account should be taken of the specific circumstances that pertain in each school.

There should be consultation with those at risk concerning the measures to be taken and monitoring their effectiveness. Information should be given to staff on protection and preventative measures which are essential.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 1993, provides that the Health and Safety Authority must be notified when an accident/ incident occurs in the workplace which requires treatment from a registered medical practitioner or treatment in hospital. An accident or incident which results in an employee being absent from work for three days or more must also be reported to the Authority.

2. Preventative Measures

Boards are urged to consider and implement measures which would prevent or minimise the risk of assault to the employees of the board. The effectiveness of agreed procedures should be reviewed where necessary.

(A) EXTERNAL LIAISON

Bearing in mind that communication between home and school should be frequent, open and positive, boards in consultation with the principal and staff of the school should promote good practice for the conduct of communication between home and school.

(i) Admitting parents/visitors to the school

Parents who wish to have a consultation with a class teacher should be encouraged to make a prior appointment with the relevant teacher. In urgent cases where a pre-arranged appointment is not appropriate, parents should be encouraged to report in the first instance to the school secretary/principal. The practice of parents approaching classrooms directly during teaching time should be discouraged. Specifically, access to teachers should be on an 'appointment only' basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke confrontation.

(ii) Parent/teacher meetings

Arrangements for the conduct of formal parent teacher meetings should be addressed in the School Plan. Parents should be given adequate notice regarding the timing of such meetings and encouraged to raise issues of concern. Where sensitive issues are the subject of discussion, arrangements should be made for conducting such interviews in privacy. Conducting interviews at the classroom door, while simultaneously supervising a class of children, is not conducive to open communication. Particular care should be taken to ensure that parent/teacher consultations do not take place within the hearing of other pupils and or/parents.

(iii) Code of Discipline

Under the terms of Circular 20/90 schools are requested to develop a Code of Behaviour and Discipline for pupils. This code should be developed by the principal and staff in consultation with parents and approved by the board of management. Once finalised, this Code should be notified to parents. Any sanction imposed on a pupil should be in accordance with the Code of Discipline. Procedures for suspending pupils should be clearly set out in the school's Code of Discipline and should be adhered to.

(iv) Complaints Procedure

Boards of management should have in place a clear procedure for the processing of potential complaints. Some managerial associations have already negotiated such a procedure with the INTO. The terms of the complaints procedure should be notified to parents, and parents should be encouraged to utilise stages of the procedure where necessary.

(B) Internal Procedures

The issues of internal school procedures should also be discussed from time to time at staff meetings. Staff should be familiar with all relevant procedures.

In circumstances of increased risk (eg, schools for young offenders) training should be provided for staff:

- in identifying potentially violent situations; and
- in calming down potentially violent situations.

Specific examination should be given to circumstances where staff are:

- working alone on school premises;
- working in an isolated part of the school premises;
- engaged in out of class activities;
- working with pupils with behavioural difficulties;
- engaged in home visiting.

3. Steps to be followed in the event of an assault

Boards should develop a clearly defined procedure to be implemented in the event of an assault on an employee. This policy should include a clear commitment on the board's part to be fully supportive of staff who have been subject to violence.

It is accepted that judgement will have to be exercised in each case. However, the following elements should be included in each procedure:

a) The incident should be immediately reported to the principal teacher/other colleague.
   The details of the incident should be recorded in an Incident Book kept for this purpose in the workplace. Situations in which members have been intimidated or threatened with physical violence should also be recorded.

b) Where necessary, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

c) The matter should be reported to the Gardaí, where appropriate. This report would normally be made by the teacher who was assaulted.

d) The board of management should be notified of the incident and, where necessary, an emergency meeting of the board should take place. The board should notify its legal advisors of the assault. The board's insurance company should also be notified.

e) Where the assault is by a pupil the matter should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Discipline and as provided for in Rule 130 (5) of the *Rules for National Schools.*

f)   Repeatedly aggressive pupils should be referred, with the consent of parents, for psychological assessment in order to assess the pupil's social and emotional needs and to determine how these can be best met.

g)   Where the assault is committed by a parent/guardian, the parent/ guardian should be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the teacher/ school pending full consideration of the matter by the board. Subsequently the board should correspond with the parent/ guardian stating:

  - that the board considers the assault unacceptable;
  - what action the board intends to take;
  - outlining what pre-conditions should be met before access to the school is restored.

h)   Applications for leave of absence in relation to a member who has been assaulted should be forwarded to Primary Payments Section, Department of Education and Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co Westmeath. Each application will be assessed on its merits.

i)   Where an employee's personal property is damaged in the course of an assault, compensation for its replacement value may be paid by the board of management under the extended School Protection Policy.

Resources

Additional Needs Net [Website] www.additionalneeds.net/Challenging_Behaviour/ primary/mainpage.htm

Behaviour Management in Education Foundation [Website] www.bmef.com

British Institute of Learning Disabilities [website] www.bild.org.uk/

Department of Education of Northern Ireland, Parents and Professionals Autism (PAPA), Department of Education and Science, The Irish Society for Autism. *Autism, An Introduction.* (Video and Booklet)

Department of Education of Northern Ireland, Parents and Professionals Autism (PAPA), Department of Education and Science, The Irish Society for Autism. *Autism Spectrum Disorder, A Teacher's Toolkit* (CD Rom).

Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2001) *Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour.* Belfast: Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Department of Education and Science [Website] www.education.ie

Dwyer, Patricia. (2003) *Achieving Positive Behaviour, A Practical Guide.* Dublin: Centre for Education Services, Marino Institute of Education.

Gordon, Gerard (1996) *Managing Challenging Children. Ireland*: Prim-Ed Publishing.

Humphreys, Tony. (1993) *A Different Kind of Teacher.* Cork: Dr Tony Humphreys.

INTO (1995) *Meeting the Needs of Children with Social and Emotional Problems.* Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organization.

INTO (2002) *Discipline in the Primary School.* Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organization.

INTO (2004) *Tackle Disadvantage Now!* Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organization.

Irish National Teachers' Organization [Website] www.into.ie

O'Mahoney, Paul J. (2003) *Challenging Behaviour, Information and Guidelines for Boards of Management.* Dublin: National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education.

REACH, Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland. Vol 12 No.1 June 1998. *Challenging Behaviour, Coping in Special Education.*

SCOPE – Disability Organisation whose focus is Cerebral Palsy [Website] www.scope.org.uk/

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation [Website] www.thecbf.org.uk

The Incredible Years [Website] www.incredibleyears.com

Webster-Stratton, C. (1999) *How to Promote Children's Social and Emotional Competence.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.