



Good
Discipline
and Effective
Learning

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Student Welfare Directorate

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Introduction: Students, parents and the public school system

The public schools of New South Wales exist to provide a first-class education for all young people.

The public school system has three overriding priorities:

- raising educational standards and levels of educational achievement;
- the provision of quality education for all; and
- the care and safety of the students in its charge.

In achieving these priorities, it provides young people with their foundation for life.

The quality of this foundation is of the utmost importance to each individual. If a child does not do well at school, the prospects for a fulfilling life as an adult are significantly reduced.

When parents enrol their children at public schools they enter into a partnership with the school staff.

This partnership is based on shared responsibility and mutual respect. It should aim at achieving effective learning and good discipline so that the school environment is both productive and harmonious. The partnership must strive to create in children an understanding of appropriate public behaviour.

Such understanding should lead the student to develop a responsibility for his or her own behaviour.

The precise character of this partnership will be unique to each student. There are, however, certain expectations in common to all such partnerships.

Parents are responsible for ensuring their children attend school. They share in the responsibility of shaping their children's understandings and attitudes about acceptable behaviour. They assume greater responsibility for their children's behaviour as their children travel to and from school.

Teachers are responsible for the education and care of their students when at school. Their task is to provide the best possible program to meet the needs, capabilities and aspirations of each student. They are also responsible for appropriately communicating with parents about the educational progress and behaviour of each student.

As children grow, they become more active participants in the partnership.

When the partnership is based on mutual respect, each partner will support the decisions and responsibilities exercised by the others.



The importance of a good learning environment

A critical factor in achieving the goals of public education is the aspiration of students to do well.

Real levels of achievement are greatly increased when teachers and parents expect high standards.

Good classroom discipline improves the level of aspirations of students.

An effective classroom should be a place of excitement, exploration, scholarship and learning.

It is the mission of the public school system to create such an environment.

If the classroom is disrupted by the noisy and inattentive few, the learning of other students suffers.

Each student's right to learn depends on the capacity of teachers to carry out their professional responsibilities in the classroom free from disruption.

Schools exist in a society in which violence is often prevalent. This social problem does not stop at the school gate.

Nevertheless, every student has the right to expect that he or she will spend the school day - both in and out of the classroom - free from bullying and intimidation.

Students have a right to be safe and happy at school. They have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity.

The same applies to teachers, who on occasions are subjected to levels of harassment which would not be tolerated in any other workplace.

The expectations of good discipline in NSW public schools

NSW public schools have the following requirements of all students:

- sustained application to learning
- respect for other individuals and their property
- courtesy to other students, to teachers and to community members
- due respect for teachers

- no violence, discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation
- no weapons
- no illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- peaceful resolution of conflict
- adherence to the standards of dress determined by the school community
- compliance with all school rules and the School Discipline Policy.

While meeting these expectations, students also have the right to expect courtesy, fairness, respect and excellence in teaching.

The School Discipline Policy

A great variety of school communities exists within the public school system. Such differences reflect the socio-economic, geographic, ethnic and cultural diversity of our community.

It is therefore appropriate that each school community develop a School Discipline Policy to meet its particular needs. Such policies must be consistent with legislation, government policy and the procedures of the Department of School Education.

Since 1987 each school has had a Discipline Code as part of its student welfare policy.

The code is now to be reviewed in terms of the following framework. All public schools are asked to prepare a new School Discipline Policy in time for implementation in the 1997 school year.

This work is to be undertaken collaboratively involving the whole school community - students, staff, parent organisations and the school council.

The School Discipline Policy will be in four parts:

- school rules or discipline code;
- strategies to promote good discipline and effective learning within the school;
- practices designed to recognise and reinforce student achievement; and
- strategies for dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

All parents and students are to be given a copy of the School Discipline Code, once it has been reviewed. They will also be informed of the procedures for resolution of complaints. A copy should also be sent to the District Superintendents. Subsequently, all new enrolments and their parents or guardians are to be given a copy of the policy.

When considering the application of these strategies, principals will ensure that no student is discriminated against, based on his or her disability, sex, race, marital status, sexual preference or age.



School Rules or Discipline Code

The school rules or discipline code are part of the evidence of a partnership between the members of the school community. They should be a set of responsibilities and rights of both students and teachers.

They will include at least:

- expected standards of behaviour in the classroom, in the playground and while travelling to and from school
- safety in and around the school and at all school activities
- acceptable standards of behaviour while on excursions and participating in or attending sporting and other activities
- obedience to requests from staff and others in positions of authority
- the school's homework policy
- adherence to the standards of dress determined by the school community
- punctual adherence to the school timetable
- prohibition of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and weapons
- positive and respectful relationships between all members of the school community.

Schools may wish to develop additional rules which meet their own local needs, consistent with the *Education Reform Act*, and government and Departmental policy.



Strategies to promote good discipline and effective learning

This section will describe the things the school is doing to encourage effective discipline, for example:

- providing appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of each student
- supporting children in achieving success in learning
- developing a small number of easily understood rules which are fair, clear and consistently applied
- discussing with parents their role in promoting acceptable student behaviour
- attending appropriate training and development programs
- providing appropriate support programs, e.g. counselling, remediation
- providing programs that develop self-discipline, self-evaluation, communication and conflict resolution skills, e.g. peer mediation and peer support.

Practices designed to recognise and reinforce student achievement

This section will include, for example:

- the use of merit certificates, awards and other appropriate school based rewards
- ongoing, regular contact with parents, e.g. letter, telephone
- commendations at assemblies and special school activities
- fostering positive relationships with the local media to promote public acknowledgment of the school and individual student achievements
- modelling of consistent and caring behaviour by staff.



Strategies for dealing with unacceptable behaviour

This section of the School Discipline Code will set out a graded set of practices for dealing with unacceptable behaviour, within the following framework.

For minor breaches, consequences could include reprimand, short detention, loss of privilege, in-class isolation.

In more serious cases formal after school detention or in-school suspensions can be used.

Parents are to be formally notified, in writing, of serious breaches of the School Rules or Discipline Code, informed of the penalty that is being applied and of the consequences of any further breaches. They must be informed of the availability of counselling to students and parents. They should also be invited to negotiate an effective process to improve the situation.

Should a further breach occur, the foreshadowed consequences are to be effected.

Consideration can be given by schools to:

- establishing isolation or 'time-out' rooms
 - a 'time-out' option will be implemented only if an appropriate space is available
 - community consultation must be thorough and broad acceptance gained before establishing the rooms
 - staff training is to be provided
 - specific issues such as duration, frequency of use, development of reintegration strategies, adequate supervision, monitoring and evaluation must be addressed.
- introducing strategies that allow for restitution
 - restitution should be a collaborative problem solving process in which the student concerned faces the consequences of his or her action and focuses on 'making things right' or redressing damage.
- requiring students to carry out works or services to repair or compensate for damage they have caused
 - new legislation will give certainty to the right of schools in their discipline policies to require students who have caused property damage or have otherwise seriously misbehaved to perform safe and reasonable work for the school
 - this allows a discipline policy to contribute something positive to the school.

Corporal punishment, which has properly fallen into disuse, is now abolished.

Suspension, exclusion and expulsion from school

At the higher end of the graded scale of responses to unacceptable behaviour are the procedures specified in the document *Suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students from school and procedures for declaration of place vacant (February, 1994)*. This is to be re-issued in February 1996.

Suspension highlights for the student and the parents the unacceptability of the student's behaviour and the parents' responsibility for remediation of that behaviour.

The school, and the public school system, will work in partnership with parents in assisting the student to rejoin the school community.

This will include the provision of counselling and access to special behaviour programs.

As long as the behaviour is unacceptable, the student's continued enrolment will be in jeopardy.

Principals of public schools will suspend, consistent with the procedures, any student who commits the following offences:

Possession of a suspected illegal substance

The Government firmly believes that schools must be places which are absolutely free of illegal drugs.

Suspension is to occur immediately if the substance is being touted, held out or passed off by the student as an illegal substance, or on confirmation (in accordance with the relevant procedure for identification of illegal substances) that the substance is in fact illegal.

Under arrangements made with the NSW Police Service, the substance will be identified within 48 hours of the material being handed to the police by the school principal. The cost of the identification is to be charged to the Department of School Education; the Police Service will hold the substance pending any legal action.

Violence

Any student intentionally causing injury or threatening serious violence against another student or a teacher is to be suspended immediately.

Possession of a weapon

Any student in possession of a prohibited weapon, or using, or threatening to use, any item or instrument as a weapon, is to be suspended immediately.

Persistent disobedience

The relationship between student and teacher should be based on mutual respect.

Students who, in their relationships with staff, are persistently disobedient, insolent or engage in verbal harassment and abuse, are to be suspended.



Criminal behaviour

If behaviour is criminal or there is evidence of a suspected crime, the Police Service will be notified by the school.

Students, like the rest of the community, are subject to the criminal law.

The authority of the Principal

The character of a school can depend crucially on the educational leadership of its principal. Principals have the right to lead the establishment of effective learning environments in their schools. Provided they act in accordance with established policy, the NSW Government will support them.

The authority, responsibility and accountability of school principals are derived from relevant state legislation and the policies and priorities of the Government.

Principals are accountable to the Director-General of School Education for the educational leadership and effective management of schools. Part of that management responsibility involves ensuring the provision of a safe and harmonious work environment for students and staff and, in particular, an effective learning environment.

In this context, and consistent with policy, principals have the authority to suspend, or exclude or recommend expulsion. Expulsion can only be approved by the Minister on the recommendation of the Director-General, following a principal's submission.

Consistent with legislation and government policy, principals also have the authority to determine



the conditions for a student's continued enrolment.

They will exercise this authority having regard to their responsibilities to the entire school community and the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice.

While principals may delegate responsibilities with regard to student discipline to the staff, and co-operate with other members of the school council in determining local discipline policy, they remain ultimately accountable to the Director-General for the effectiveness of school discipline.

The responsibilities of parents

Parents and teachers share a commitment to provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for their actions and to have a greater say in the nature and content of their learning.

The school is not by itself responsible for, or equipped to develop, socially acceptable behaviour by students. That is a shared responsibility of parents and students in partnership with teachers.

Schools are encouraged to work with parents in providing mentors and role models for desirable social behaviour and in communicating and demonstrating the benefits of co-operative behaviour.

Working through their school council and duly constituted parent organisations, parents will be encouraged to contribute to the development of the School Discipline Policy. Subsequently, parents will be expected to support the school in the application of the policy.

There must be a partnership between parents, teachers and students to teach and promote socially responsible behaviour.

If parents are unable to meet their responsibilities for the basic care of children - and all too often this is because of circumstances beyond their control - the school will seek to link the children and the family to appropriate support agencies.

Special programs and education settings have been established to address the needs of those with behaviour problems.

Schools have access to resources devoted to assisting those young people whose lives are affected by the illness or unemployment of parents, by poverty or family breakdown or by other circumstances.

Those involved in public education recognise that they, together with other government agencies with particular responsibilities for families and children, must cater comprehensively for the needs of all young people, for many of whom the years of schooling are their best chance in life.



Conclusion

In order to ensure that each school's discipline policy remains relevant to the school's needs, and to ensure new parents entering the school community have the opportunity to participate in forming the policy, each policy should be revised by the school community every three to four years.

The development and revision of a School Discipline Policy in every school will support the essential components of the public education system in New South Wales - student welfare, good discipline and effective learning.