

Chapter 2: Principles and Policy on Student Discipline

The basic concept of discipline

- 2.1 Student discipline is a complicated process, which involves a lot of people – all school staff, the students and their parents. It may mean something very different to people from different backgrounds, with different experience. To many teachers, discipline means obeying rules. Most schools have rules and a reward/punishment scheme to monitor students' behaviour. Thus when the issue of discipline turns up in discussion, the argument would centre on how many rules there should be, whether there is too much or too little punishment, and what kind of punishment works best.
- 2.2 It is important for us to remember that we should view discipline in the context of the school as well as in the wider context of education. Discipline in the context of quality education should mean more than rules and control. We do not want our students to behave only when they are closely monitored and threatened by the punishment imposed. We want to educate them so that our students are able to think critically, to analyze the situations, to solve problems and make appropriate decisions on the action to take. Students learn more from how teachers behave and what teachers believe in than what they teach. When teaching is meaningful and personalized, students develop a high sense of achievement and belonging to the class and the school. Thus when they leave school, they will behave responsibly even in the absence of the watchful eyes of teachers. We want our students to develop self-control and self-discipline. We want them to develop into responsible and well-adjusted adults. It is for these reasons that we advocate an Educative Approach to Discipline.

An Educative Approach to Discipline

- 2.3 Schools are places where learning and teaching take place. For an environment to be conducive to learning, students need to understand the boundaries and the norms so as to function harmoniously. Teachers need to capture their students' interest by teaching according to their ability level. Therefore in order to be in control of the classroom situation, teachers have to disseminate information to the class and to make the lesson interesting. When learning takes place, the aims and objectives of the school and ultimately, of education could be achieved. To achieve the aims and objectives of schooling, we have to control the learning

process. Nonetheless, in actual practice, learning may be studded by students' misconduct in the classroom and teachers are frustrated and demoralized. As adults, we frequently operate from the misconception that students should know how to behave and that problem behaviour is the result of their willful decision to do wrong so as to attract attention or to challenge teachers' authority. However, our observations in schools revealed that when students acted out in defiance, most of them actually had not yet acquired the inner resources in cognition and emotion necessary for making more appropriate responses in these situations.

How does the Educative Approach to Discipline work?

- 2.4 Looking at discipline as an educative process, students should be given ample opportunities to interact with teachers in class. Teachers should create a sufficiently safe and democratic environment for students to participate actively in the learning process. Learning appropriate behaviour should be an integral part of every lesson. All teachers should discuss with students the need for setting standards for their behaviour in school and let them express their feelings and opinions regarding school rules. This is not the sole responsibility of the discipline masters/mistresses. All teachers should have a share in this educative process. If students understand the meaning behind rule and limit setting, they would be more prepared to observe school rules.
- 2.5 Even when the boundaries of acceptable behaviours are established, inevitably there may be students who, because of one reason or another, test the limits. When this happens it is necessary for teachers to reiterate the existence of the boundaries and the agreed norms firmly, unequivocally and immediately.
- 2.6 Similarly standards of behaviour at school should be developed by using a Whole School Approach involving the principal, teachers, parent representatives and student representatives. This will ensure that the school rules and regulations developed are agreed by and meet the needs of all concerned.
- 2.7 As students have gradually internalized external discipline demand, they will start to develop self-discipline and regulate their own learning. Teachers can maintain the momentum for self-discipline by balancing the use of control and autonomy on their students and leading them to think carefully and critically when searching for coping strategies. These will form the basis for quality education.

The setting up of a discipline policy at school

2.8 The Education department considers that school discipline should be an educative process. In fact, in the course of delivering support services to schools in the past two years, the Student Discipline Section observed that schools, which were enjoying effective student discipline systems, formulated their policy and devised their discipline measures using an approach very similar to the one mentioned above. This process should be carried out as soon as the students enter Secondary 1. The building of a good teacher-pupil relationship is conducive to the development of students' sense of belonging to their school. Once it is developed, students' misbehaviour will diminish because they treasure their school, her tradition and ethos. On the basis of our observations during school visits and when working in collaboration with schools, we have prepared at Appendix II, some essential elements for consideration when setting a discipline policy at school. Many schools may have their own emphasis when formulating their school policy and objectives regarding school discipline. There is a need for school to periodically review and update the objectives and policy according to the changes in the school's education policy and the need of the community.

Summary

- * In quality education, discipline is the opportunity for students to learn and practise critical thinking so as to solve problems and to decide on the appropriate action to take.
- * The basic belief of an Educative Approach to Discipline is that most students misbehave not out of willful decision. They need guidance from teachers to steer them towards the appropriate response in class and when relating with others.
- * In adopting a Whole School Approach to Discipline, teachers, students and their parents will be actively involved. When the school rules are established with inputs from all the parties concerned, everyone would understand them better and be more prepared to observe the agreed norm.
- * If students internalize the external discipline demand, they will find intrinsic interests in self-discipline and self-learning. When all these aspects mentioned are put into places, they form the basis of quality education.