

## **Chapter 4: Organizing a School Discipline Team: its function and systems**

### **The discipline team**

4.1 Most schools set up a discipline team to take charge of matters relating to student discipline. The functions of the team tie in closely with the duties of its members and could be broadly grouped into three main areas, namely administration, operation and support. This chapter describes the functions of the discipline team and the elements for its effective operation.

### **Functions of the discipline team**

.2 The functions of the discipline team are as follows :

#### **Administration**

- to assist the school administration in developing and reviewing the school discipline policy; and
- to advise on, plan, and review discipline measures.

#### **Operation**

- to implement school discipline policy and measures;
- to handle discipline-related matters; and
- to develop and manage the discipline team and related groups such as student prefects.

#### **Support**

- to support other teaching staff in the management of students' behaviour problems and planning of preventive work;
- to co-ordinate the support services of school social workers, the police and other agencies; and
- to offer consultation on parent training activities.

### **What constitutes an effective team?**

4.3 An effective discipline team comprises the following elements:

### **Gaining the support of the school administration**

- define the direction and goal of the school discipline work;
- provide effective administrative support on discipline work;
- appoint a senior teacher with leadership potential to head the team; and
- promote the image of the team.

### **Adopting a democratic consultative approach**

This involves a thorough consideration of views collected from teachers, students and parents on new initiatives before implementation.

### **Adopting a Whole School Approach to Discipline**

All teachers should be able to help students understand the cause of their misbehaviour, to encourage students to be responsible for their wrongdoings and accept the consequence of their misbehaviour as well as to motivate students to develop self-discipline.

### **Arranging staff development for teachers**

- organize orientation / induction programmes and set up a mentor system to support new discipline teachers;
- encourage discipline teachers to attend courses, seminars and workshops relating to student discipline;
- set up and maintain a resource bank of reports, books, journals, video programmes and internet materials etc. on student discipline; and
- arrange regular sharing of experience and knowledge among discipline teachers through seminars, workshops and journal presentation.

### **Soliciting collaboration and support**

A successful and effective discipline team does not work alone. It must collaborate with the other functional teams and teachers, and win their support so that the discipline policy and strategies could be effectively implemented. The important guiding principle is that every teacher is responsible for managing students with behaviour problems and enforcing the school discipline policy while the discipline teachers serve as resource persons to support, monitor and co-ordinate the service system. Every teacher plays an important role in the system.

- **The school administration**

The support and communication of the school administration with the discipline team, especially the discipline masters/mistresses, are very important. Some schools even appoint a vice-principal as the leader of the discipline team. If the principal and his/her deputies recognize and understand clearly the objectives and operation of the discipline team, they can give good advice and make appropriate decisions regarding school discipline. The discipline team also needs the strong support of the school administration in the recruitment of team members and the setting up of a student prefect team, besides acquiring the necessary facilities and accommodation to interview students and conduct programmes. To facilitate communication with the school administration, the discipline team should regularly report and review the work progress of the team. In this way, the discipline team can gain the recognition and support of the school administration.

- **The subject teachers**

The subject teachers are the front-line workers in the delivery of good quality discipline service. They maintain a close and frequent contact with their students and hence should have a good knowledge of their students' character, strengths and weaknesses. In schools which adopt a Whole School Approach to Discipline, the subject teachers handle most of the students' behaviour problems in the classroom and will only refer the students with very severe problems to the form teachers, the discipline team or other senior staff. The teachers continue to maintain a very close working relationship with the discipline team about the development of the cases to help the students adjust to school life.

Usually, schools will develop a set of clear guidelines for the subject teachers, highlighting their main responsibility in student discipline work and specifying the conditions which warrant additional and specialized support. To empower the subject teachers, the discipline team has to support them with training in classroom management, handling misbehaved students and other relating skills. It is also very important for the discipline teachers to build up a close working relationship and a shared vision among all staff. For example, in some schools discipline teachers are arranged to sit in different staff rooms so as to maintain a network of communication.

- **The form teachers**

The form teachers are in the best position to enhance the students' whole

-person development. They maintain a close and frequent contact with their students and their parents. They look after not only the academic needs of the students but also their personal growth such as social skills, self-discipline, personality development and so forth. It is common for the form teachers to build up students' good behaviour and personality during form periods. In meetings with parents, the form teachers will normally discuss the students' conduct, gather information about the family background and the after-school activities of the students and advise the parents on positive management techniques. The form teachers and the discipline team should maintain good communication to attain a consensus view and ensure cooperation in handling students' discipline problems. In many schools, the discipline teachers participate actively and regularly in meetings of the form teachers at various grades. Adopting a team-work approach, the form teachers and the discipline team will be involved in discussing the management of some hard-core cases and responsible for handling these cases at different stages. The discipline team should support the form teachers by sharing information and experience. Before launching new discipline policies, the discipline team should also consult the form teachers on the nature and scope of the students' problems and the possible impact of the new initiatives on school discipline.

#### ● **The guidance team**

Guidance and discipline are the two very important pastoral services of the school. While the two teams have their own specialized expertise and responsibilities, they share a common objective of cultivating a harmonious and orderly learning culture in school. In terms of collaboration, the guidance teachers should help the students, through guidance activities, to maximize their potential to improve and accept the consequence of their behaviour. At the same time, the discipline teachers should adopt an Educative Approach to Discipline in dealing with the misbehaved students and take the intervention as an educative process whereby students are helped to learn a new or better skill or attitude through logical reasoning and problem solving. The fundamental requirement is that the guidance team and the discipline team should have a high degree of mutual understanding and communication and see their efforts as complementary instead of conflicting with each other. That is why some schools would combine the two teams into one or rotate the memberships to achieve strong and effective collaboration. For this purpose, regular attendance in the team meetings and organizing school activities jointly are essential components. The experience of many schools has shown that the traditional approach having the guidance team

use a soft approach and the discipline team a high-handed approach does not necessarily work well. More important is the collaboration of the two teams to maximize the human resources available in school.

- **The school social workers**

With an increase in the complexity and diversity of students' problems, schools need more support from outside agencies. As for students with severe behaviour problems arising from outside school factors such as inadequate family care and bad peer influence, school social workers can offer a great help. The school social workers are professionally trained to support the family with social and financial problems. They are more prepared to conduct home visits and work with other social services agencies. They also collaborate with the police in managing students involved in juvenile delinquency. When teachers encounter difficulties in persuading students and their parents to accept alternative school placement, support from the school social workers could also be solicited. Therefore, discipline teams should maintain a close working relationship with the school social workers with clear and well-defined realms of responsibilities. School social workers can also support in internal staff development and participate actively in conducting training programmes for student prefects.

- **The parents**

In the educative process, parents are the indispensable partners of the school in helping students learn and develop appropriate values and behaviour. At the school level, discipline teachers should solicit the parents' support for the school discipline policy through consultation and communication. School rules, such as the dress code, can be more effectively enforced if parents are consulted and clearly briefed at the beginning of the school year, usually at the new students' orientation or parents' day. On these occasions, the discipline team should promote the school discipline policy, and clarify any misconceptions about the school rules. For students with special problems and difficult parents, the discipline teachers have to win their trust and co-operation. For example, teachers can make "sunshine calls" where parents are told about the good work or improvements of their children. In this way, parents are less resistant to contacting the discipline teachers, and parental support can be easily enlisted. Moreover, during parents' day or parents' night, discipline teachers can discuss with a selection of parents after their meeting with the form teachers, and empower them to help their children develop better self-discipline and self-management at home.

## **Setting up clear disciplinary procedures**

The discipline team should develop a set of comprehensive and clear procedures for enforcing discipline. These procedures specify how and what follow-up actions should be taken so that all teachers would handle discipline matters in a consistent manner. A number of schools have compiled such procedures into Discipline Handbooks for teachers.

Some student problems are so serious that they can no longer be handled by the discipline team. Under such circumstances referral to other professionals such as social workers or educational psychologists for additional support may be required. Therefore a clear referral system would facilitate the understanding of all parties concerned such as when and where the students should be referred. A referral flowchart for students with behavioural difficulties is in Appendix V.

## **Making good use of reward systems**

Students need to have their successes recognized and awarded. When teachers rely less on punitive action and more on the use of appropriate reinforcers, poor attitudes and low self-esteem are remedied and positive behaviour reinforced. Discipline team should develop a system to recognize and encourage positive and self-disciplined behaviour among students. This is usually done through activities like the merit point system and a model student award. Incentives may be given to students with improvement in their behaviour. What is more encouraging is that at times, frequent rule breakers who are determined to turn over a new leaf would be given the opportunity to enter into a contract with their form teachers or discipline masters. In this way, they will be able to compensate their wrongdoings with good performance in other areas, such as voluntary work.

## **Summary**

- \* School discipline teams are formed to look after the administration, operation and support of school discipline.
- \* An effective team has the support of the school administration. It makes use of a democratic approach and works in close collaboration with other functional teams. Its members are knowledgeable in helping students to be self-disciplined. It would arrange staff development for teachers.

- \* The discipline team should work in close collaboration with the subject teachers, the form teachers, the guidance team, the school social workers and the parents.
- \* The discipline team should set up clear discipline procedures so that teachers could manage students using a consistent method. There should also be reward and referral systems.