

Chapter 6 : A Whole School Approach to Discipline

Introduction

6.1 Discipline is not only about some control measures to resort to in time of misbehaviour. More important, it should be an on-going process to reinforce students' positive, self-motivating and rule-abiding behaviour and help them internalize positive values and develop self-discipline in the long run. The most efficient and effective means to bring about this is to adopt a Whole School Approach to Discipline.

Integrating the individuals and the systems

6.2 The teaching staff of school are usually organised by various subjects or work areas within a hierarchical structure. The middle layers are the leaders of functional teams. In the conventional hierarchical models, teachers of one subject have little to do with teachers of another subject and the functional team leaders receive strategic directions exclusively from the school heads and their deputies. It is not uncommon to find teachers having different expectations on students' behaviour because they see themselves playing an independent role and not as an integral part of the school. In this way, teachers' effort is often duplicated or offset due to inconsistent student management strategies and a lack of communication among teachers. On the other hand, in a Whole School Approach to Discipline, the school will employ a positive approach to achieve a high degree of coordination and concerted effort among all school personnel to develop strategies and solutions to student issues. In adopting such an approach, the student management and school discipline are integrated in the various school systems and incorporated into the major school policies. To be effective, this process should be carried out at all times, by all school personnel and at all levels of the school.

Implementing a Whole School Approach to Discipline

6.3 In implementing the Approach, all school personnel, students and their parents should be involved in arriving at a consensus view on the student discipline issues to be dealt with. Examples of such issues could be smoking, hair colouring, bullying and so forth. You may wonder at this stage how and why the Whole School Approach is considered proactive when the issues mentioned focus on

misbehaviour.

- 6.4 Misbehaviour may be common among students. In order to prevent the problem from spreading, school may use a Whole School Approach to launch proactive measures. In adopting a Whole School Approach, schools identify and agree on the common concerns of student discipline issues with all parties involved, including the students, their parents and teachers. With the joint effort of all these people, the approach guides the formation of school policies and the implementation of intervention strategies and preventive measures. In view of the intensive involvement in the above processes, teachers and students will support the school policies and be committed in the implementation. As can be seen in Scenarios for Classroom Management at Appendix VIII, the approach is best operated at three levels i.e. the student, the classroom and the school level.

At the student level

- 6.5 The needs of individual students and the reasons for misbehaviour should first be identified and clarified. The teachers should involve other teachers and parents concerned in further understanding the underlying causes and the warning signs of student misbehaviour. In handling students with disciplinary problems, behavioural contracts can be set up with individual students with a view to building up a socially acceptable code of behaviour as agreed between the teachers and the individual students and sometimes, their parents as well. Target behaviour for improvement can be discussed and agreed upon between the teachers and the students. Through continuous monitoring and support from the teachers, and the positive experience of attaining progress, the students can develop a sense of responsibility and motivation for self-improvement.
- 6.6 Proactive activities at the student level may include observations of behaviour inside and outside the classroom, informal contacts between students and teachers to facilitate understanding about the students' needs, beliefs, interests, strengths and family backgrounds etc.

At the classroom level

- 6.7 Specific themes of discipline-related matters, such as staying away from smoking, can be integrated into the content of various subject matters. For example in a Biology lesson, the teacher can emphasize the adverse effect of smoking on the

respiratory system. In an EPA lesson, students can conduct a simple survey on smoking among students in school. In so doing, the everyday learning and teaching activities in the classroom help to enhance the internalization of the values and beliefs behind the rules and regulations hence leading to the development of self-discipline in the long run.

- 6.8 Classroom rules are in line with the school rules. Students are helped to understand the acceptable standard of behaviour and the meaning of school rules through classroom discussions, reflections and relevant promotional activities.
- 6.9 Other proactive activities at the classroom level may include programmes to promote class spirit and students' sense of belonging to the class during form teacher periods. The mobilization of peer support in the classroom can also serve to enhance rule-abiding behaviour in class. Teachers should arrange projects like award schemes for classes with good classroom discipline, or inter and intra-class competitions on the understanding of school rules.

At the school level

- 6.10 On the basis of the views and concerns of the teachers, students and parents, the principal should take the lead to set up a school policy on school discipline using a Whole School Approach. In line with this policy, the responsible team of teachers, in consultation with other teachers, should design an action plan for all other teachers to follow. All teachers should be made aware of the policy in both its rationale and implementation through regular meetings or staff development programmes. The more involved the people are, the more committed they will be; and this applies to the students, their teachers and parents. In designing and implementing the school policy, the importance of coordination, shared responsibility and joint-effort should be emphasized.
- 6.11 Proactive activities at school level may include school assemblies to develop school ethos; extra curricular activities such as Boy Scout, Girl Guide, Red Cross etc., to promote self discipline; staff development programmes to update teachers' professionalism and training activities for parents to involve them as partners in the education of their children.

Developing a policy of Whole School Approach to Discipline

6.12 The following outlines the suggested stages of development if a Whole School Approach is adopted.

Stages	Action
I Assessing the current situation	Decide whether to start or not: (1) Identify the areas of concern; (2) Conduct needs assessment; and (3) Decide whether to adopt the Whole School Approach or not.
II Initiating changes	Identify and solicit support: Solicit support from all school members including the school head, discipline teachers, guidance teachers, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and students.
III Formulating plans, long term and short term	Define the framework for the development of the Approach: (1) Determine who will organize the work; (2) How decisions are to be made; (3) How to proceed; (4) Let everyone know and involve them; (5) Assign duties and define roles of different parties; and (6) Develop a time line.
IV Drafting policy	Prepare and construct a discipline policy: (1) Agree on the framework for the new policy; (2) Decide on the aims of the policy; (3) Explore a variety of ways to achieve the aims; (4) Select acceptable options and develop simple and principle-based rules to be accompanied by common consensus of all parties concerned as required; and (5) Produce a draft policy.

Stages	Action
V Implementing policy	<p>Design programmes and activities in line with the Approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Activities at all the three levels are designed, making use of the resources from the parents, the school and the community; (2) The plan is distributed for approval and to all involved; and (3) New procedures and programmes are tried out.
VI Evaluating the programmes/ activities of the Approach	<p>Evaluate and modify the programmes/activities in the Approach throughout and after the implementation stage:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Involve all parties concerned to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes; (2) Collect informal feedback from teachers, students and parents through daily conversation; (3) Collect formal feedback from teachers, parents and students using evaluation questionnaires (Refer to the sample questionnaire at Appendix X); and (4) Observe students' behaviour inside and outside school.
VII Reviewing the programmes/ activities of the Approach	<p>Identify room for improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Revise the programmes/activities of the Approach on the basis of the evaluation results; and (2) Review the overall plan and make adaptations.
VIII Completing the loop	<p>Return to stage I and start with another discipline issue which may require policy changes.</p>

6.13 An illustrated example: A Whole School Approach to dealing with smoking among student.

Stages	Action
I Assessing the current situation	<p>There were isolated reports from students and parents that some students were found to be smoking outside school in school uniform. Although smoking was not serious among students in this school, the school was concerned that the problem may spread. The concern of the school was brought up by a S2 Form teacher who conducted a small group discussion with the class during a Form period regarding their views about smoking. Appendix XI is the written response of one of such groups. The teacher was worried because the students seemed very tolerant towards smoking. There appeared a need to assess the seriousness of the problem and the perception of other students in the school before deciding on any follow-up actions.</p>
II Initiating changes	<p>The teacher discussed with the principal who then solicited support from the discipline master, the guidance teacher, and other form teachers. This core group of teachers decided to use a Whole School Approach model to deal with the problem. The sample questionnaire at Appendix XII, a more structured means to collect information, was adopted to assess the students' perception and the seriousness of the situation. On the basis of the feedback from the questionnaire, preventive programmes could be designed.</p>

Stages	Action
III Formulating policies	<p>To ensure a higher success rate, the core group and the school administration decided to look at the problem realistically so that the students would also be involved in coming up with some workable details during programme implementation. The core group was required to decide on the anti-smoking policy and conduct the campaign against smoking. With appropriate guidance, the regular student smokers could be led to feel that the school respected them as students needing help and not as criminals so that these students would be more ready to respect the school policy by cooperating with the school.</p>
IV Drafting rules	<p>Some simple and principle-based rules were drafted in dealing with the possession of cigarettes among students. The core group then met with the student and parent representatives to solicit their views for the refinement of such rules.</p>
V Implementing programmes	<p>(1) The decision was announced at a school assembly so that everyone would be aware of the school policy, the rules, the detailed implementation plan as well as the teachers responsible for promoting the awareness of the system and its monitoring.</p> <p>(2) The counselling team and the extra-curricular activity team would promote healthy activities for students after school hours so that they learn better pastime than having to resort to smoking.</p>

	<p>(3) The mathematics and/or geography teachers might consider enlisting students to design questionnaires to conduct a survey on the situation of smoking among students and its effects. The findings could be analyzed and discussed.</p> <p>(4) The science or biology teacher might organize a trip to the local hospitals to visit patients with respiratory problems so that the students would have first-hand information about the negative effects of smoking on the respiratory system.</p> <p>(5) The art teacher might lead students in designing slogans and posters on the subject.</p> <p>(6) The language teachers would be responsible for arranging drama and essay competitions.</p> <p>(7) The school social worker could provide parent education programmes on the related issues for the parents; and</p> <p>(8) Students who have more severe smoking problem might need individual guidance and follow-up support by the discipline team and/or guidance team.</p>
VI Evaluating the Approach	The effectiveness of the Approach could be evaluated with the help of the form in Appendix X.
VII Reviewing the Approach	On the basis of the evaluation results, the programmes could be reviewed and adjusted.

Summary

- * A Whole School Approach to Discipline is an integrative approach involving the whole school, namely all the school personnel, students and parents, to work collaboratively to formulate policies and develop preventive strategies to address the discipline issues in school and work towards the common goal of promoting self-discipline and a sense of responsibility among the students.
- * A Whole School Approach to Discipline can be operated at three levels, i.e. the student, the classroom and the school level.
- * The suggested stages of developing a policy of Whole School Approach to Discipline with an illustrated example are outlined for reference.