



Circular Letter 20/90

Department Of Education and Science Primary Branch

To the Management Authorities and Principals of National Schools

The Minister for Education wishes to refer to the matter of behaviour and discipline in national schools. [Circular 7/88](#), which was issued in March, 1988, indicated that a review would be carried out of the operation of the procedures contained therein.

This review has now been completed and the Department has drawn up two documents, which are enclosed, viz,

[Guidelines towards a positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline](#), and [Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for National Schools](#).

Copy of revised [Rule 130](#) is also enclosed.

Each Board of Management is, requested to draw up a Code of Behaviour and Discipline for its school in accordance with the enclosed documents. 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.

Where a Board of Management employs detention as part of its code of behaviour and discipline, arrangements should be made to have the pupil(s) concerned properly supervised during the period of detention. Advice received by the Minister indicates that, if it is proposed to detain a pupil after school hours, the parents or guardians should be notified of this in advance.

N O Loingseachdín
Secretary
August 1990



Guidelines Towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline

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 co-operation 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 co-operation 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 co-operation 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 co-operate 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 members 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 time keeping 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 co-operation 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 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

- 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 co-operation 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, e.g., 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, e.g., 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.

Rule 130 of the Rules for National Schools

(as amended by Circular 7/88)

School Discipline

- 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 or 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.