

Better Behaviour - Better Learning

Summary Report of the Discipline Task Group



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Making it work together

Foreword



JACK McCONNELL, MSP

*Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs
and Chair of the Discipline Task Group*

Dear Colleagues

Ensuring good discipline in our schools is a top priority for me—and for Scotland’s pupils and their parents and carers. All children and young people should experience education of the highest quality in a secure environment, free from distraction and disturbance.

It is very important to support the needs of children and young people who often, for understandable reasons, feel alienated and whose outward behaviour can often disrupt, not only their own education, but that of many other pupils. However, in achieving this goal we must also ensure that the education of the vast majority of our pupils, who are in the main pleasant, hardworking and committed, is of the highest standard.

Balancing these needs is not easy—there are no straightforward solutions. However, there are many encouraging and promising initiatives already underway in individual schools and local authorities across Scotland.

The Discipline Task Group represented the full spectrum of interests. They are all people with busy and demanding professional lives, yet all of them gave generously of their time and expertise. I would like to record my appreciation of their work.

When I launched the report on 19 June 2001, I undertook to publish in the autumn an Action Plan for implementation of its recommendations. I also gave a commitment to taking forward quickly some of these recommendations:

- Planned funding should help provide schools with special facilities to manage challenging behaviour;
- We will move the emphasis from a negative exclusions target, towards targets for positive behaviour and participation;
- We will review the relevant strands of the Excellence Fund to give schools greater flexibility to support positive behaviour programmes;
- Next session there will be five pilot projects across Scotland to trial staged intervention using the model of Framework for Intervention.

The report also recommends the sharing of good practice across Scotland, and in implementing this recommendation, I will establish a national resource which will have a focus on research and support linked to helping schools develop best practice in the management of discipline and behaviour.

I know good school discipline is not always easy to achieve. It can be hard to foster a good school ethos and a positive climate for learning. This Report, and the immediate measures I have announced, will help us to unlock the potential of all our children and young people.

School life should be – and can be – a fun and rewarding time for all. As in other important areas, in ethos and in discipline, I want every Scottish school to be excellent, improving or both.

If we all now work together to achieve change and improvement, we can make a real difference in the months and years ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jack McConnell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JACK McCONNELL, MSP

July 2001

Background

In December 2000 the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, Jack McConnell, announced the establishment of a short-life Discipline Task Group (DTG) in response to concerns expressed over indiscipline in Scottish schools. Membership of the DTG is shown in Appendix 1. Our remit was to recommend strategies to the Scottish Executive aimed at securing purposeful and orderly conditions in schools to allow those involved in education to participate positively and appropriately in the processes of learning and teaching.

In gathering evidence for this report we were made aware of a wide range of causes of indiscipline and suggested strategies for improving it. We take the view that if there was a straightforward answer to the problem of indiscipline in schools, someone would have discovered it by this stage. Our work has highlighted the complex nature of indiscipline and has concluded that there is no single overall solution which can solve all problems.

We recognise the difficulties and challenges faced by teachers and related professionals in the field of education. We consider that progress is most likely to be made if schools, as learning communities, are supported in establishing local solutions to local circumstances. It is clear that 'solutions' to indiscipline cannot be grafted from elsewhere onto a school's own context and culture. Staff, pupils, parents/carers and others must be involved in key decision-making and have a stake in the processes and procedures adopted. As a result, our recommendations feature key issues and principles which the Scottish Executive, local authorities and schools may wish to consider when developing policy. We hope and believe this provides an effective framework for improvement.

Key principles

In forming our key principles, we looked to the Scottish Executive's National Priorities in Education (see Appendix 2), established by the improvement framework within the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, requiring Scottish Ministers and local authorities to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of education in Scotland's schools.

Key principles which support the promotion of a positive learning environment were identified by the DTG as being:

The purpose of education

Section 2(1) of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 requires that education is to be directed 'to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.' Learning abilities and life skills are both important and complementary, and children and young people should have opportunities to develop different kinds of abilities and experience success within multiple contexts.

The experiences children and young people gain throughout their education must provide them with the life skills required to equip them to participate safely, purposefully and positively in an increasingly complex world. Schools have a key role to play in nurturing young people's core skills to support them through childhood and in later life.

Effective learning and teaching

Effective learning and teaching is much easier to achieve where a positive ethos and good discipline prevail. Discipline policy cannot, and should not, be separated from policy on learning and teaching – the two are inextricably linked. Children and young people are more likely to engage positively with education when careful consideration is given to the factors which affect their learning and teaching.

Entitlement to education

All children and young people are entitled to permanent, full-time education of the highest quality which enables them to develop as individuals and gain skills, knowledge and understanding – however that may be organised. Access to education is a key element in determining life chances. They are also entitled to have the opportunity to gain qualifications – denial of this reinforces disadvantage in our society.

If pupils are educated in a well-ordered and structured environment, these entitlements are enhanced. It is important that these opportunities are not denied to the majority of children and young people as a result of the negative effects of a small minority of troublesome pupils.

Encouraging positive behaviour

Children and young people should learn in an environment which offers well-judged praise and recognition of achievement, and which looks for and focuses on their strengths, takes them seriously and shows a genuine interest in them. Research shows clearly that schools which promote the appreciation and encouragement of the positive contributions of both staff and pupils can be more effective in building motivation, confidence and a sense of responsibility.

Equality and respect

All members of the school community are of equal worth and are entitled to respect. There is no place for discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social group or any other grounds. Schools must ensure equality of opportunity and access to education for all children and young people, with particular regard being paid to those learners with disabilities and special needs.

Inclusion

Schools are important public institutions which promote society's values. Children and young people who are part of an educational community and are subject to high expectations of participation, achievement, commitment and personal conduct are more likely to have better long-term opportunities in society as they grow older. They are more likely to continue within the education process, gain purposeful employment and avoid patterns of crime. This is of benefit to them as individuals and to society as a whole.

Participation and citizenship

People are more likely to understand the reasons for policies and procedures, and therefore genuinely subscribe to them, when they have been actively involved in determining them. Participation in decision-making of all staff, children, young people, parents/carers and others is the hallmark of many schools which have been successful in promoting positive discipline.

Partnership working

There is a wide range of factors which affect a person's behaviour, and there is no one way of dealing with the complex problems which can be faced by children, young people and their families. Children's experiences and behaviour in school cannot be dissociated from all other aspects of their lives, including within their families and communities. Accordingly, what happens to children in school is of interest to their parents/carers and involved professionals, and what happens to them in families and communities is of interest to teachers and schools.

In order to develop shared values and understanding of the needs of children and young people, and to maximise the response to those needs, partnership working involving parents/carers, education, social work, health, voluntary agencies and other professions is essential.

Discipline in schools

The achievements of Scottish education are significant. The majority of young people leave school with qualifications and most are well-rounded individuals. We must ensure that all children experience learning and teaching of the highest quality throughout their time in the education system.

However, there are growing concerns regarding the level of indiscipline in our schools. These concerns range from the cumulative effect of low-level indiscipline displayed by routine inappropriate behaviour in classrooms, to the extremely disturbed behaviour exhibited by troubled young people who face major challenges in their lives. There is also concern over the increasing levels of indiscipline and anti-social behaviour witnessed outside the classroom in corridors, playgrounds, dining areas, on school buses and also in areas immediately adjacent to schools.

A small number of children and young people have specific behavioural problems which are medical or psychological in origin. However, discipline problems may have their roots in the social and economic challenges faced by families and communities, and sometimes in the way in which the management of learning and teaching is organised. Frequently discipline problems have a variety of causes.

Whatever the problems are, they are a barrier to learning and teaching and they must be addressed for the benefit of our young people and society as a whole.

Social factors affecting indiscipline

We were aware that there are many factors which play a significant part in securing a more inclusive society – factors which may mitigate the best efforts of the various professionals working with children and young people. A background of unemployment, poverty, crime, violence, abuse, alcohol, drugs, mental health and family break up all feature largely in the statistics of young people who experience serious difficulties in school and beyond. Clearly, in facing the challenges of social inclusion, a significant commitment of resources will be required in the area of children's services.

School policies

In listening to the views of teachers, pupils and parents/carers, it seems clear that there are a number of whole-school factors which may work against a positive school ethos and therefore contribute to indiscipline.

Most schools have developed policies and procedures for managing discipline and many of these policies seem to be working well. However, evidence suggests that some school policies relating to discipline and behaviour management can often be too negative and very bureaucratic – they can create an endless paper chase for staff.

Promoting better discipline

Some challenges are more difficult to overcome than others. There are steps which schools can take to promote better discipline and therefore improve the conditions for effective learning and teaching to take place. Some schools appear to be making more progress than others in achieving this.

Some measures which can be taken are strategic and can be accomplished reasonably quickly. Others depend very much on the ethos and culture of the school as a learning community. A positive ethos needs to be nurtured and developed over time to bring lasting benefits. The sensitive introduction of praise and reward systems as part of a strategy to develop a positive ethos can bring rapid improvements.

Involving pupils and parents/carers

If people are to engage with improvement strategies, they must feel a sense of ownership as a result of having had a hand in forming them. Many schools, supported by their local authorities, are experimenting with ways of genuinely involving young people and their parents/carers in decision-making about aspects of school life.

This means heightening awareness about rights as well as making a genuine commitment to responsibilities.

Supporting pupils in school

Most children and young people go through school without experiencing any major difficulties. However, some find the experience more challenging than others. It is clear that with appropriate support it is possible to engage all but a tiny minority of pupils in learning and teaching which is appropriate to their needs at that time and also prepares them for later life.

Supporting learning takes many forms. In some cases it will be possible to achieve it by finding alternative ways of working within a mainstream class. From time-to-time, it may be appropriate to establish small group work or one-to-one support. Occasionally it may be necessary to consider alternative provision for children and young people who display particularly challenging behaviour.

Certain groups of children and young people are more vulnerable than others. It is important that schools and education authorities take all steps necessary to ensure that barriers to learning are removed where possible and that social disadvantage is not reinforced by educational disadvantage.

Multidisciplinary working

It is very rare to find that children or young people who are experiencing problems in school are doing so as a result of a single issue. It is usually the case that they are having problems in a number of areas in their lives.

Accordingly, it is important that professionals with a range of different expertise are involved in assessing and supporting the needs of children, young people and their families. It is crucial however, that the approach to multidisciplinary working is well coordinated and managed.

Working with staff

Staff demonstrate on a daily basis their professionalism and commitment to working with children and young people who display social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. It is important that experienced teachers and new entrants to the profession feel confident, well-prepared and supported in carrying out this challenging work. This is equally important for non-teaching staff.

In order to achieve this staff must be fully involved in making key decisions relating to the formulation and implementation of school policies. They also require access to continuing professional development opportunities which not only enhance their professional competence, but also provide opportunities for accreditation through recognised career development pathways.

Conclusion

The report of the DTG has revealed the nature and extent of the problems of indiscipline in our schools and has highlighted some of the strategies being used successfully in various authorities and individual schools, as well as areas which the DTG feel must be addressed to secure longer-term improvement. It is clear that there is much good work going on in schools across the country and that there are things which can be done at national, authority, school and individual teacher levels to help improve the climate in which teachers teach and children and young people learn.

There are no easy solutions or quick-fixes available. Improvement requires sustained effort and commitment over a considerable period of time by the wide range of parties who have a direct interest in the education of children and young people, all of which have definite resource implications. It became apparent to us that there were a number of recurring key themes which emerged from all the evidence submitted to us. They were:

- effective vision and leadership
- the importance of high quality learning and teaching
- participation in decision-making by teachers, pupils and parents/carers
- consistency in the implementation and application of agreed policies
- the development of holistic support through multidisciplinary approaches
- the importance of teachers having and sharing high expectations with children and young people
- ensuring that staff who have responsibility for the care and welfare of children and young people are given the time and resources to do this effectively.

We were aware that schools and individual teachers are concerned about the increasing demands placed upon them as a result of policies linked to social inclusion and alternatives to exclusion. However, it was heartening to know that these concerns were related to the lack of appropriate strategies and resources to embrace social inclusion effectively, rather than a genuine opposition to the principle of giving each and every young person the best possible start in life. We consider it to be inappropriate to set targets for the reduction of exclusions from school by one-third without giving schools the means to achieve this.

The recommendations laid out in the DTG report provide a range of strategies which we consider will help local authorities and schools support the needs of children and young people and target support and resources more effectively to assist teachers in their work. We hope they provide a framework for improvement. However, the work is just beginning – our task was to highlight the issues and make recommendations – these must now be developed and implemented.

Summary of recommendations

- 1 The Scottish Executive should provide guidance to all schools on the degree of curricular flexibility available within current guidelines to enable them to take account of local circumstances and meet individual pupil needs.
- 2 Local authorities and schools should review existing policies and guidelines relating to learning and teaching, making explicit links with policies for promoting positive discipline. It is recommended that these should be integrated into a single framework of effective inclusive practice.
- 3 The additional resources already agreed and planned to support schools and education authorities through the implementation of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*, and for the continuation of the classroom assistants and class size strands of the Excellence Fund should be prioritised to increase staffing (teaching and non-teaching) in order to support social inclusion and the development of positive discipline strategies in all schools.
- 4 Schools should agree and share good practice on routine procedures for managing pupils in and around the school and within classrooms. These procedures should be applied consistently by all staff.
- 5 The Scottish Executive should endorse the principles of staged intervention. Funding should be made available to enable a number of pilot programmes on staged intervention to be established. The evaluation of such programmes should pay particular attention to the links between indiscipline, classroom management and effective learning and teaching.

	Scottish Executive	Local Authorities	Schools
1	✓		
2		✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓
4			✓
5	✓	✓	✓

- 6 Schools should agree and adopt policies for the management of pupil care, welfare and discipline, including the promotion of positive behaviour. Particular attention should be paid to expectations, rules, rewards and sanctions. These policies should be applied consistently.
- 7 Local authorities should provide support and advice for all schools in the formulation of policies relating to pupil care, welfare and discipline. School policies and their implementation should be regularly reviewed and endorsed by the local authority and these arrangements should be evaluated by HM Inspectorate of Education through their inspections of education authorities.
- 8 A national mechanism for identifying, evaluating and disseminating good practice at education authority and school levels should be established and funded. As part of this mechanism, national research focused on school discipline, behaviour management and school inclusion should be developed.
- 9 In supporting the concept of creating a 'learning community', schools should consult with pupils, teachers and parents/carers in order to agree a dress code for children and young people. Local authorities should support schools in the implementation of their agreed dress codes.
- 10 In consultation with schools, the Scottish Executive and local authorities should consider how additional and existing funding might be used to provide auxiliary support to assist with the care and welfare of children and young people. Consideration should be given to appropriate training for these staff.

	Scottish Executive	Local Authorities	Schools
6			✓
7	✓	✓	✓
8	✓		
9		✓	✓
10	✓	✓	

	Scottish Executive	Local Authorities	Schools
11 Local authorities should provide guidance and advice to all staff regarding the levels of intervention they expect from them with respect to their handling of disciplinary matters in classrooms and public areas within the school.		✓	
12 Schools should develop agreed systems for shared responsibility between staff at all levels for the conduct and behaviour of children and young people in corridors, playgrounds and public areas within the school.			✓
13 Schools should ensure that there are formal mechanisms in place to allow all pupils to regularly share their views with teachers and other pupils, and to participate in decision-making on matters which affect them directly. These mechanisms should allow for consultation and active participation on a range of issues, including the setting of priorities for the school development plan.			✓
14 Schools should ensure that opportunities are provided for senior pupils at both primary and secondary levels to take responsibility for 'buddying' and/or mentoring junior pupils.			✓
15 Schools should review the mechanisms and approaches used to communicate with and involve parents/carers in the general life of the school and with their own child's education in particular.			✓
16 A national development programme on parenting skills should be developed.	✓		
17 The Scottish Executive and local authorities should prioritise funding from within the Excellence Fund to provide for a home-school links worker in secondary schools and primary clusters.	✓	✓	

- 18 A media campaign focusing on parents’/carers’ rights and responsibilities in the school system should be established. This should include an information leaflet for parents/carers highlighting these rights and responsibilities, and advising ways to support their child’s education.
- 19 Schools should give consideration to integrating the work of learning support, behaviour support and guidance into a single overall framework of pupil support in order to achieve a more holistic approach to supporting the needs of all children and young people.
- 20 There should be a review of the criteria and formula for the allocation of learning support staffing to all schools to allow for appropriate levels of support for children and young people with special educational needs, including those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- 21 There should be a comprehensive review of the nature and purpose of guidance, both at primary and secondary school levels, and of the training of guidance staff.
- 22 Flexible support provision, including in-class support and facilities to educate children and young people outwith the normal classroom environment, should be established in secondary schools and designated primary schools. Best practice in operating such provision should be further researched and disseminated nationally.

	Scottish Executive	Local Authorities	Schools
18	✓		
19			✓
20	✓	✓	
21	✓	✓	
22	✓	✓	✓

- 23 In planning for new and refurbished school buildings, local authorities should seek to ensure that suitable and appropriate accommodation is made available for supporting the needs of children and young people who may need to be educated outwith the normal classroom environment. They should also consider how to adapt existing school buildings to allow this to happen.
- 24 The guidance contained within Circular 2/98 *Guidance on Issues Concerning Exclusion from School* should be reviewed in the light of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000. Local authorities should ensure that all schools are aware of relevant guidance and legislation relating to exclusions from school. As part of their inspections of education authorities, HM Inspectorate of Education should review the procedures used to manage the process of exclusions from school.
- 25 All schools should have a designated member of staff who is responsible for the care, welfare and tracking of progress of looked after children. There is a clear role for this member of staff in supporting colleagues in caring for the interests and welfare of looked after children.
- 26 There should be joint multidisciplinary decision-making relating to the care and welfare of children and young people experiencing social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Clear mechanisms for ensuring effective multidisciplinary working, adapted to meet local needs and circumstances, should be established for all nursery, primary and secondary school clusters to provide holistic and responsive support for children, young people and their families as required.

	✓	
✓	✓	
		✓
	✓	✓

	Scottish Executive	Local Authorities	Schools
27		✓	✓
28		✓	✓
29	✓		
30			✓
31	✓		

- 27 Schools and local authorities should consider how to further enhance their investment in early intervention strategies aimed at pre-school and primary school children and their families. This should include a specific focus on supporting pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which encompasses local family support strategies.
- 28 Local education authorities and schools should review policies and procedures to ensure all educational transitions, including those between mainstream education and alternative provision, are proactively managed in the best interests of all children, young people and families.
- 29 The success strategies identified in the New Community Schools pilot should be rolled out to secondary schools and primary schools across Scotland.
- 30 As trusted professionals, all teachers should have access to relevant background information on pupils, including personal and family details, which may affect the learning and teaching process.
- 31 The current review of initial teacher education should include the extent to which student teachers are prepared to meet the challenges of supporting social inclusion through effective behaviour management, the promotion of positive discipline and classroom management skills. It should also include the development of opportunities for students following ITE courses to link with professionals in other fields and to develop an awareness of approaches to working with parents and carers.

- 32 In partnership with teacher education institutions and faculties of education, a national continuing professional development programme relating to behaviour management, social inclusion, alternatives to exclusion and effective learning and teaching for probationers, serving teachers and senior managers should be developed.
- 33 The continuing professional development programme should include opportunities for teaching staff to take part in multidisciplinary training with professionals in other fields and to develop an awareness of approaches to working with parents and carers.
- 34 The Scottish Executive should develop a set of policy targets linked to the performance measures within the National Priorities, focused on school ethos and discipline. These should support education authorities and schools in maintaining a greater number of children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties within mainstream schools without adversely affecting the progress or welfare of other pupils or staff. Schools should receive appropriate funding to achieve such targets.
- 35 The relevant strands of the Excellence Fund should be reviewed and focused on promoting effective learning and teaching, promoting positive discipline and alternatives to exclusion.
- 36 There should be a national strategy developed to manage the implementation of the recommendations offered by the Discipline Task Group. Local authorities and schools should also consider how they can best address the recommendations which apply directly to them. HM Inspectorate of Education should review the progress being made by local authorities and schools in this respect through routine inspections.

✓	✓	
✓	✓	
✓		
✓		
✓	✓	✓

Appendix 1 Membership of Discipline Task Group

Chairman

Jack McConnell MSP, Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs.

Members

Bill Alexander, Head of Service (Children, Young People and Families), Highland Council.

Margaret Doran, Head of Schools, Stirling Council.

Joan Fraser, Head of Pupil Support and Inclusion Division, Scottish Executive Education Department.

Evelyn Grant, Reporter Manager, Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, North Region.

Louise Hayward, Assistant Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow.

Ruth Higham, Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

Gordon Mackenzie, Rector, Balwearie High School, Kirkcaldy.

Mukami McCrum, Chief Executive, Central Scotland Racial Equality Council.

Alan McKenzie, Principal Teacher of History, Greenock Academy.

Bill Maxwell, HM Inspectorate of Education, Scottish Executive.

Pamela Munn, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education and Professor of Curriculum Research, University of Edinburgh.

Alana Ross, Senior Teacher, Ruchazie Primary School, Glasgow.

Andrew Saunders, Principal, Barnardo's Blackford Brae Project, Edinburgh.

Gordon Stewart, Scottish School Board Association.

Hazel Steele, Head Teacher, Newfields Primary School, Dundee.

Nicol Stephen MSP, Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs.

Alastair Struthers, Head Teacher, Lochend Community High School, Glasgow.

Moiria Tannock, Head Teacher, Langlaw New Community Primary School, Dalkeith.

David Watt, Acting Assistant Head Teacher, Cleveden Secondary School, Glasgow.

Secretary

Neal McGowan, Head Teacher, Gracemount High School, Edinburgh.

The Discipline Task Group were assisted in their work by Alan Hughes and Helena Wright of the Scottish Executive.

Appendix 2 National Priorities

National Priorities (2000)

The National Priorities in Education for the purposes of section 4(1) of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 are –

- 1 to raise standards of educational attainment for all in schools, especially in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and to achieve better levels in national measures of achievement including examination results
- 2 to support and develop the skills of teachers, the self-discipline of pupils and to enhance school environments so that they are conducive to teaching and learning
- 3 to promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages
- 4 to work with parents/carers to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society
- 5 to equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society and to encourage creativity and ambition.

Further copies of this summary report and copies of the full report are available from

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