

Policy on Plagiarism and Other Incidents of Cheating

Some First Principles

An accusation of cheating or dishonesty is a very serious matter and requires a sensitive response. On the one hand we may be dealing with a student who does not appreciate that what has been done is a serious matter or has an imperfect understanding of the seriousness of the offence. [It is possible, too, to overstate the seriousness of the offence.] On the other hand, there are students who have a very finely developed sense of honesty and pride for whom an unjust accusation of cheating will tell more deeply than almost any other charge. The general principles which apply to any matter of behaviour management will apply most obviously here. For example, the need for respect, for procedures which preserve the dignity of the student and a transparent sense of fairness will be paramount.

This policy will apply to the Year 8 - 12 section of the school.

This policy is developed as a guide for teachers, Heads of Department, parents and members of the school administration. No policy, however comprehensive, can predict all the incidents which might occur in this area of concern. The senior member of staff charged with managing this issue is the Director of Studies; in any incident, he or she will need to bring common sense and the spirit of the document to the management of each particular matter.

The policy must embody simple principles such as fairness, natural justice, transparency and utility. It must have a high degree of face validity; that is, parents, teachers and students must feel comfortable with the document.

Because our students are ultimately competing with students from other schools for tertiary places, the policy should not be essentially inconsistent with policies in place in other schools.

The policy is intended to cover the following typical incidents of cheating:

Students who bring prepared or prohibited materials into an examination room.

Students who seek the assistance of another student during an examination.
--

Students who present the work of other students as their own. For example, students who use an essay written in a previous year as an answer to an assignment question.

Students who copy material unacknowledged from another source and present it as their own.
--

Students who download material from the Internet and then present it as their own.
--

Anecdotal information indicates that examination room cheating is not a serious problem. Much more serious [because it is more difficult to detect] is the presentation of work copied from others or downloaded from the Internet.

It is clear that there will be degrees of seriousness in all of the situations described above. Teachers will need to make professional judgments about matters such as unacknowledged quotation in an assignment. How much is too much? To what extent is the student aware that what he or she is doing is inappropriate? An undefined area of concern is assistance given by parents to students in the presentation of assignments. Again, anecdotal information indicates that this is certainly a problem with some few students. Parents must

be aware that the reworking, rewriting or development of their children's work can jeopardize a fair assessment of the piece. Parents should be sensitive to what is "a fair thing" in these circumstances. Parents should also remember that when Year 11 and Year 12 work is submitted for monitoring and review by Queensland Study Authority panels, work completed in examination conditions is often considered to be a more reliable indication of student ability than work done in assignment.

Some Features of Prevention through Best Practice

This is an area of school life where prevention is obviously better than cure. The table below sets out best practice management of each of the problems indicated. It is obvious that students need to be aware of policies on cheating and plagiarism before an assignment or test is given.

PROBLEM	BEST PRACTICE PREVENTION
Students who bring prepared or prohibited materials into an examination room. Check all materials before the examination begins.	Teacher remains vigilant during the examination.
Students who seek the assistance of another student during an examination.	Clear direction before the exam begins on inappropriate communication. Isolate problem students before the examination begins. Teacher remains vigilant during the examination.
Students who present the work of other students as their own.	Teacher sights work at draft stage. Vary test items from one year to the next.
Students who copy material unacknowledged from another source and present it as their own.	Teacher sights work at draft stage. Careful comparison of work presented in any one cohort. A single teacher marks all the work from one cohort.
Students who download material from the Internet and then present it as their own.	Teacher sights work at draft stage. Questions with a high degree of specificity.

Some simple rules for students in an examination room

'Examination Conditions' obtain from the moment the teacher begins the distribution of the papers until the last papers are collected.

Spread students out throughout the examination room with desks as far apart as possible.

Students are instructed to raise a hand to indicate a problem. Otherwise, no other talking is allowed.

Students are not permitted to borrow equipment from other students for the life of the test although the teacher may be able to assist with materials in some circumstances.

During the life of the test, students are not permitted to communicate with one another in any way.

Students must put all equipment not needed in the examination (books, etc) at the front of the exam room before the beginning of the test.

Teachers cannot mark papers or read novels etc while they are invigilating an examination. It is important to be alert and vigilant during examination sessions.

Responding to Incidents

If a teacher suspects a student of cheating, the student should be isolated, the nature of the suspicion should be noted on the paper and the student should be allowed to finish the test. The incident should be managed in a way that causes a minimum of fuss so that other students are not distracted from completing the test. At the end of the test, the teacher should check as carefully as possible to confirm a suspicion. Where the suspicion continues, the teacher should take the student to the appropriate Head of Department.

Where a student is found to be cheating in an examination room [and there is immediate proof of this], the student should be isolated, allowed to continue the test and the paper marked at the point where the cheating occurred. The incident should be managed in a way that causes a minimum of fuss so that other students are not distracted from completing the test. At the end of the test, the teacher should take the student to the appropriate Head of Department.

Where a teacher suspects that assignment material has been copied, the matter should be raised with the Head of Department. The Head of Department should discuss the matter with the student and the teacher together. Where the matter cannot be proven, the Head of Department should counsel the student on the consequences of any proven cheating and the situation can be monitored thereafter.

Where a teacher can prove that work is copied, the matter should be reported immediately to the Head of Department concerned.

As a general principle, the Head of Department should manage incidents of cheating within the guidelines established by this policy. In cases involving students in Years 8, 9 and 10, the Head of Department should [where possible] manage the incident with the appropriate teacher. In incidents involving students in Years 11 and 12, Head of Department will involve the Director of Studies as a matter of policy.

Consequences for Cheating Incidents

In every case of proven cheating or plagiarism, the Head of Department will inform the parents of the student.

In incidents of cheating in examinations or copying of assignments, marks allocated to the test item will be cancelled and the student will not be permitted to sit the test again. A 'Level of Achievement' will be determined by treating the test item as if it scored zero marks. Where assignment work is shown to have been copied or downloaded from the Internet, the remainder of the assignment work will need to be checked carefully for similar plagiarism.

There is both an academic consequence of cheating and a behavioural consequence. It may be appropriate for the school to impose a behavioural consequence (Wednesday or Saturday detention or a period of suspension) for cheating as well as the academic consequence of loss of marks.

Where a student disrupts an examination by talking or communicating with another student and there is no question of cheating, it would seem appropriate to apply the behavioural consequence rather than the academic consequence. In many cases, the Head of Department will be able to make this determination. Where a Saturday detention or a period of suspension is appropriate, the Director of Studies will make that decision in consultation with the Head of Department.

Where two students are involved in an incident of cheating and both are complicit, both students would suffer the same academic and behavioural consequence. For example, if one student gives an assignment to another to copy, then both students would be punished equally provided that both students are aware that borrowed material will be copied.

The Internet produces some exceptional circumstances and challenges. For example, a senior student may provide material for another student to copy without benefiting directly. A student may download material from the Internet for another student to use but not do anything improper in their own assignment. In such a case, the student who receives the copied material would suffer both the academic and the behavioural penalty; the student who supplies the material will suffer the behavioural penalty which may, in fact, be more serious than the receiving student.

Students and parents must be aware that teachers have used internet search engines to establish plagiarism in the past. In cases where plagiarism is detected in this way, the penalties outlined above will be invoked.