

Suspension and Exclusion Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear guidelines for senior school staff on the management of the suspension and exclusion of students from school.

Background to the Policy:

Exclusion from the school is the ultimate sanction the school can impose on a student. Suspension from school is the penultimate sanction. As such, it is imperative that this step be taken very carefully and deliberately. The inappropriate or maladroit use of this action could leave the school open to legal action so it is important that staff are aware of how the policy operates.

Principals in independent schools derive their capacity to suspend and exclude from the contractual arrangements entered into between parents and the school. These contractual arrangements are binding on students whose parents sign on their behalf. The school's Behaviour Management Policy, however, must incorporate provision for both natural justice and fairness and for the operation of the policy in emergency situations.

- Natural justice and fairness require the school principal or his nominee to properly investigate all relevant issues and to give the student concerned a fair hearing and to deal with the matter without bias or prejudice. This would normally mean informing the student of the reason for the suspension or exclusion and asking the child to respond to the accusations before action is taken. The student and parent should have the opportunity to explain any mitigating circumstances before final action is taken.
- In emergency situations, the principal or his nominee may need to make a decision to suspend a student pending a full and complete investigation, reserving a final decision until a later time. Possession of a suspected illegal drug, violent or threatening behaviour and possession of a prohibited weapon fall into this category.

Operation of the Policy:

1] The following staff are empowered to make decisions on the suspension of students:

- The Principal.
- The Deputy Principal
- The Head of Junior School.

In each case, the person acting in the capacity of the designated officer would have the authority to suspend a student.

2] Suspensions may take one of two forms:

- A student may be suspended "internally": that is, the student is informed of the suspension but continues at school working under supervision in an appropriately isolated spot and having no contact during the school day with other students.

- A student may also be suspended "externally": that is, the child does not attend school or come on to the school grounds during the suspension.

3] Suspensions may be imposed under a variety of circumstances, most typically for one of the following:

- Actions which endanger the health or safety of staff, students or others.
- Acts of significant violence, destruction of property or theft.
- Failure to comply with reasonable instructions.
- Interference with the educational opportunities of others.
- Actions which threaten the good order of the school's programs or facility.
- Actions which consist of unacceptable discriminatory behaviour.

4] Please note that there are a range of circumstances which are not listed here because they are covered not by school rules but by state laws. Included in these would be vandalism, assault, threatening behaviour and the raft of laws relating to vilification of others for religious, racial or any other reason. Many instances of bullying, for example, are more properly described as assault or threatening behaviour. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to refer matters to the police for their response.

5] Suspension may also follow a number of relatively minor problems in which the accumulation of issues and the lack of response to normal monitoring indicate a crisis in the management of a particular student.

6] At the time of suspension, best practice is characterised by:

- Inclusion of parents in the process, keeping them informed and part of the management process. Although it will not be necessary [or even appropriate] to question students only in the presence of parents, it is obviously important to keep parents informed and involved.
- Careful documentation of incidents and responses. A suspension should always be followed by written advice informing the parent of the date and the duration of the suspension and brief reasons for the action taken. This letter should also stress any particular circumstances operating during the period of the suspension: for example, a child's access to the school at this time.
- A suspension is not a withdrawal of education from the child and for that reason teachers should supply direction to cover work missed in class and if necessary, assist the child to catch up on work missed.
- A student is typically excluded from all school activities during the period of suspension. This would include sporting and cultural activities, excursions and comparable activities. A student should be able to sit examinations in isolation at the school or under the direction of a parent at home.
- In consultation with the student's parents, a student may be directed to seek professional counselling advice before return to school in order to remedy or correct the inappropriate behaviour. In this instance, the school's provider under the Employee Assistance Scheme may be recommended.

- When the student returns from a period of suspension, it must be made clear that there must be an immediate improvement in the child's behaviour. The school should contribute to facilitating the return by seeking the cooperation of other staff and students in managing this transition.
- Circumstances in the management of suspension and exclusion will vary with the age and situation of the child involved. As much as possible, however, there must be equity in the way students are dealt with and consistency in the management of student welfare issues. General principles such as respect for everyone concerned and the importance of maintaining the dignity of the child, the parent and the staff are obviously very important.

Exclusion:

1] Exclusion is the ultimate sanction on student misbehaviour and as such, it should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

2] While the Principal would be wise to consult with other senior staff, he or she is the only person authorised to make this decision in the school. The integrity of the principal's decision should be respected by all the school staff. It is highly unlikely that any other member of staff is privy to all the information which forms the principal's judgement and staff are asked to support the decision loyally. This authority to exclude a student is delegated to the Acting Principal during the Principal's absence.

3] When an exclusion is made, the Principal should follow similar procedures to those outlined above in the case of suspension. These would include:

- Investigations.
- The operation of Natural Justice and Fairness.
- Careful documentation of the incident.
- Correspondence with parents regarding the incident.
- Operation, where possible, from published policy statements.

4] As a matter of course, the Principal should inform the Chair of Council of what has happened as it is likely that any appeal beyond the jurisdiction of the Principal will be to the Chair of Council.

Appeal:

1] A parent who wishes to appeal the decision of the Deputy Principal or the Head of Junior School to suspend a student should make an appointment to see the Principal. In considering such an appeal, the Principal would seek to be assured that the student was accorded natural justice and that the response of the school was congruent with the behaviour management situation being dealt with. Parents who wish to appeal the decision of the Principal to suspend a student should ask for an appointment with the principal to do this. There is simply no other "authority" to whom they can appeal.

2] The principal's decision is final. In cases where a parent wishes to complain that the principal has acted in an arbitrary or partial way, complaint can be made to the Chair of Council. The Chair of Council may choose to refer such a complaint to an independent mediator nominated by the Chair.

The Principal