

## Classroom discipline - how had it changed? - Collette Reynolds

School discipline had changed in many ways over the years and probably the main change is the abolition of corporal punishment in the early 1980's.

Before then much of the inappropriate behaviour within school would be dealt with this way, and it could be argued that this was sometimes used too often and not as a last resort which is what would have been expected. Many of those children, who are adults today, will have vivid memories of corporal punishment and this will sometimes be the most memorable aspect of their school life, rather than the things that they learned.

This of course will not apply to everyone, but the old fashioned discipline methods involved a lot of fear and intimidation, children were treated strictly and grouped together as a whole. No allowances were made for possible reasons for inappropriate behaviour, anything inappropriate would be dealt with seriously. There were strict rules to be followed, and the children would learn never to question teachers' methods, this would even reach parents too and teachers were held up with the same kind of respect that doctors would have. Children were not generally treated individually, but as a class who should be 'kept in line' with rules and regulations that had to be accepted and followed.

The problem with this is that some teachers could take the 'power' they had too far and use their position to assert themselves, and children had to suffer any consequences that particular teacher saw fit.

The approach to discipline is very different now, there is no physical punishment allowed at all, in fact the children are taught that physical harm is completely unacceptable. Children are treated individually and the school works hard to discover anything in the child's life/background that might affect their learning or behaviour. There are strong parent/school links and any problems are quickly addressed.

Most schools have clear behaviour policies set out and many individual classrooms also have classroom sanctions that the children are made aware of early in the school year.

There are many issues that have arisen since the abolition of corporal punishment, the general discipline in school today can sometimes be very poor. Children often have little respect for the teachers and are aware of the fact that they cannot be punished physically, peer pressure means that bad behaviour can be reinforced and patterns can emerge that are difficult to break.

A valid reason that there are often strong parent/school links is that it can help with discipline problems. If the school can work together with the parents to deal with problem behaviour then a solution can be found to sort it out. Unfortunately there are parents who do not want their child to be disciplined, have no respect for the school staff, and their views are passed down and are evidenced with the behaviour of their child.

Children with severe problems can now be assessed as Special Needs, this means that the school can acquire special funding for a Learning Assistant to work closely with the child in question. This can be a good way of overcoming barriers to learning and hopefully give the child time and attention to improve their attitude.

Discipline is much more child-orientated, the reasons for problem behaviour are looked for and assessed so that learning can take place. It is a complete contrast to the strict fear and regimented way that many schools were run years ago. Making sure that the child has the best opportunity to get a good education is something that schools take very seriously and a lot of time and effort is put into this.

Another thing that seems to have changed is that discipline generally takes place within the classroom, years ago the Head teacher was feared and children sent to see them for punishment. The modern approach tends to use that method as a last resort, teachers try to deal with discipline problems themselves as they happen and only involve the Head teacher if the situation becomes more serious. This had made the relationship between the Head teacher and the children a more positive one.

Some would say that the pendulum has swung too far the other way and that there is little respect in schools today, but it is a very difficult thing to balance. One of the things that many people would say is that there are always new things that can be learned and new attitudes that treat the children individually must be seen as a step in the right direction.