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# NAPCE's Evidence to "Enquiry into Discipline in Schools" June 1988

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A committee chaired by Lord Elton has been asked to examine the issue of discipline in schools. NAPCE, with its membership of tutors, pastoral leaders and others interested in all aspects of pastoral care in schools is in a unique position to comment on this issue. This paper is a copy of the submission which the Association made to Lord Elton's enquiry. The National Executive Committee asks that readers send their comments on it to Chris Watkins who is the National Executive member responsible for this topic.

## a) Information on the National Association for Pastoral Care in Education

NAPCE was founded in 1982, and now has a membership of over 2,500, most of which are school members (mainly secondary schools). It has been a flourishing association at national, regional, and local levels, even in difficult times for such associations. Its aims are to support the pastoral aspects of the teacher's role, including those aspects recently stated in the new conditions of service as the professional duties of teachers.

## NAPCE is uniquely well placed to submit evidence on school discipline:

- Many of the association's members are those with positions of responsibility for pastoral care in secondary schools. As tutors, Heads of Year/House, Deputy Heads, they observe and are engaged in responding to many (perhaps the majority) of disruptive incidents in our schools. It has been common to see their roles described as "responsible for the welfare and discipline of pupils".
- The Association's national study conference last year was on the theme of "Care and Control": it addressed the developments and difficulties in serving those two functions in an integrated way.
- The Association's view of the purposes of pastoral systems in our schools includes that one of the goals is "to encourage everyone in the school or college to foster a caring and orderly environment within which all students can exercise initiative and responsibility, and grow socially, emotionally, intellectually and morally"<sup>1</sup>

## b) NAPCE's view on the setting up of an Enquiry into Discipline in Schools

- we hope that EIDIS can make a positive contribution to understanding and debate about school discipline, and that it can disseminate some of the effective practice which some schools have developed.
- we welcome the committee's emphasis on collecting evidence, and on asking contributors to specify the evidence which leads to their views. School discipline is a topic which engages people's emotions. As a result they may see only a small part of the overall picture, and suggest action based on a limited view. As in other areas of disturbing behaviour, it is all too easy to give excessive weight to those who shout loudest "something must be done", and who thereby promote the existence of a problem without clear evidence of its scale or seriousness.
- we welcome the inclusion in the committee's terms of reference of a wide range of stakeholders in the education system: central government, local authorities, voluntary bodies, governors, headteachers, teachers and parents<sup>2</sup>. We are of the view that when these different groups act in effective partnership, our schools are characterised by less discipline problems, and conversely when there is conflict between these parties the pupil behaviour may mirror it.

## Responses to the Committee's four main questions

### 1. How would you define good behaviour and discipline (and their opposites) in the school context?

It is **not** meaningful to give a list of "good behaviours". The meaning of behaviour varies according to many features, including the context: for example a pupil's singing has different meaning in a maths classroom, in a music lesson, in the headteacher's room.

It is meaningful to say that indisciplined behaviour is generally that which disrupts the teacher's goals and the teaching process. This definition can incorporate the fact that behaviour which is seen as indisciplined can vary across time, across place, across person, across 'victim', and so on.

Evidence<sup>3</sup> suggests that there is a trend in the

general sorts of behaviours which teachers are likely to define as disruptive:

'refusal' (ie refusing to be taught, refusing to obey, refusing to work, refusing authority)  
talking and 'rowdy behaviour'

[the above two categories cover half the disruptive incidents]

'bad language', 'insolence'

'slow settling', 'lateness'

'throwing things'

[the above cover 90% of incidents reported]

We conclude that the behaviours which are defined as indisciplined in the school context are particular to that context, and any attempt at understanding them should start with an understanding of that context.

## 2. Is there currently a 'discipline problem' in schools, and if so how serious and widespread is it?

We know of no systematic or convincing evidence which could lead to the conclusion that there is more indisciplined behaviour in schools currently than there has been at any other time. We are aware that there are occasional attempts to make this argument, but we do not believe that the systematic data which would be needed (of this time and a previous one) is available from any source. There have been a number of examples of 'surveys' of discipline 'problems' in recent years: these have typically suffered from a loaded approach and loaded questions.

Evidence from NAPCE membership is not direct, but it is clear that the association's conferences on this specific theme do not regularly attract greater numbers than our conferences on other themes, such as personal-social education, school guidance etc. This despite the fact that the membership is closely associated with the phenomenon on a daily basis. Our impression is that this concern stands evenly alongside a number of other concerns.

Evidence from HMI<sup>4</sup> is summed up by "The behaviour of pupils, both in classrooms and around the school, is rarely less than satisfactory: usually it is good"

With regard to the historical, we are also aware of the evidence<sup>5</sup> that phenomena such as hooliganism were a feature of the Victorian era.

## 3. What in your view are the principal causes of disruptive incidents and misbehaviour by pupils? What evidence is there to substantiate any causal connections that you may be suggesting?

The multiple causes of disruptive behaviour in schools can be encompassed under three main headings:

- social issues
- school issues
- personal issues

It would be wrong to ignore the social context of the school, and the possible contribution to school indiscipline of features such as youth unemployment, and the more widespread polarisation in society. However we do not have full evidence on these factors as yet, so for this question we shall limit our comments to the school issues.

As teachers we are aware of the evidence<sup>6</sup> which documents our tendency to view the causes of disruptive behaviour as "in" the pupil, or "in" their home background. But we are also aware that evidence does not support this tendency in our thinking:

- Pupils who are associated with behaviour problems in primary schools are **not** the pupils who are associated with problems in secondary schools<sup>7</sup>
- when disruptive incidents do occur they engage (over time) more than a 'tiny minority' of pupils<sup>8</sup>
- teachers and parents describe **different** behaviours and **different** young people as problematic<sup>9</sup>
- pupils from the **full range** of social backgrounds express similar disaffection with the later years of schooling<sup>10</sup>

With this evidence in mind we need to consider a range of aspects:

### 1. Aspects of schools

- schools in the same area with comparable intakes are associated with different delinquency rates<sup>11</sup>
- Schools in similar areas show large and consistent differences in the number of pupils excluded or suspended on disciplinary grounds<sup>12</sup>
- A number of aspects of pupil behaviour vary across schools and may be related to school climate or ethos<sup>13</sup>

### 2. Aspects within schools: organisation and curriculum

- Schools which group pupils according to 'ability' are associated with higher disruption in the lower 'bands'<sup>14</sup>
- Most schools find more disruptive incidents in the final years of compulsory schooling, where our attention is drawn to the curriculum

### 3. Aspects of classroom interaction and teaching methods.

- evidence from studies of classrooms<sup>15</sup> leads to the conclusion:  
the action teachers take **in response** to a discipline problem has no consistent relationship with their managerial success. However, what teachers do **before** misbehaviour occurs is crucial in achieving success
- some initial data<sup>16</sup> suggests that whole class teaching methods are associated with a greater incidence of disruption than are groupwork methods
- evidence<sup>17</sup> suggests that 'hard' strategies on

the part of teachers are less likely to lead to the diminution of disruptive incidents than are 'soft' or discursive strategies

#### **4. What action could be taken by relevant organisations and individuals (eg teachers parents, local education authorities, the Government etc) to promote an orderly atmosphere in schools? What evidence is there to suggest such action would be effective?**

Action on indiscipline needs to be long-term and developmental rather than short-term and reactive. We have said that school discipline is a theme which engages people's emotions – this then typically leads to calls for quick action, in which simple blame is attributed and the wider causes are ignored.

##### **1. Action by central government**

###### **• The Context of schools**

It is important that the status and standing of our education system is maintained at a high level, in the eyes of all who have a stake in it. Continued challenges to the professional standing of teachers will not help<sup>18</sup>. Continued lack of opportunity for young school leavers will not help<sup>19</sup>.

###### **• The Climate of schools**

Our schools are presently being subjected to a large number of changes initiated from outside. This can lead to extra stress for teachers<sup>20</sup>, and if it is not accompanied by the supports needed for development there is a risk of increased underachievement and polarisation within and across schools. Poorer standards of behaviour could result. Central Government should consider this possibility.

###### **• The Curriculum of schools**

A learning offer which meets the needs of young people, is flexible and engaging, and which is associated with the appropriate teaching methods and valuing of achievements will reduce disaffected behaviour by pupils. Central Government should be aware of the danger that an excessive emphasis on a fixed curriculum with imposed achievement targets will increase disaffection and disruption.

###### **• In-Service Training**

Central Government now has considerable control over the content of in-service training for teachers. It should set a continuing national priority to address the aspects of schools which relate to positive discipline (see below)

###### **• Research**

The Committee of Enquiry will find that there has been little supported research into patterns of school behaviour and their multiple causes. If Central Government is concerned to promote an informed view of school discipline it will fund appropriate research.

##### **2. Action by local education authorities**

###### **• Support to schools**

LEAs should ensure that INSET / Staff Development is available to promote positive discipline as outlined below. This should be reflected in their local priorities for GRIST and should include training in the relation between pastoral care and discipline.

LEAs should promote a process of positive self-review in the schools, on areas associated with discipline (see below).

LEAs should maintain the spirit of the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act, and support provision in the ordinary schools as general priority.

###### **• Suspensions/exclusions**

LEAs should investigate and experiment with new practices regarding exclusion, so that it is really a last resort, and so that some schools do not over-use it. Local research is needed on school differences.

###### **• Staffing**

LEAs should ensure that their staffing priorities for schools include consideration of the teams and team leaders which are involved in promoting positive discipline.

##### **3. Action by Schools and Teachers**

###### **• Schools should**

- review and update their long-term staff support provision<sup>21</sup> and take seriously the pastoral care of staff
- continue the process of curriculum review with an emphasis on the affiliation of pupils
- prioritise some time for staff to review and develop teaching methods, through staff workshops etc
- develop effective mechanisms for gathering and discussing clear information<sup>22</sup> on patterns of indiscipline
- clarify the positive long-term role of pastoral care<sup>23</sup> in relation to patterns of discipline and in relation to achievement, and discourage over-emphasis on short-term crisis-management
- clarify the role and importance of the form tutor as a first point of regular contact and information regarding individual pupils, and discourage extensive "referral" of pupils
- review formal rules and prune counterproductive examples
- promote structured occasions for pupils to reflect on and give their perspective on patterns of behaviour and discipline in the school
- enlist and value all parents' advice and cooperation through frequent informal contact

##### **Responses to the Committee's Other Enquiries**

Extra questions which were asked of local education authorities deserve comment:

1. LEA statistics on suspensions and exclusions are **not** a good indicator of pupil behaviour. Rather, they reflect the operation of divergent local and school policies and practices, and (like all official statistics on deviance) reflect variations over time which are not linked to variations in pupil behaviour (e.g. trends in teachers' tolerance across terms, a school having a "drive" on disruptive behaviour, etc) **Statistics on the exclusion of black pupils**<sup>24</sup> demonstrate that teachers' and schools' perceptions are at work in such figures.

2. LEA and School Policies on Discipline can have some positive effect through the process by which they were drawn up. If this is consultative and discursive, it can aid towards the school's coherence in general terms.

It is disturbing to note the committee's focus on policies for exclusion of pupils and not on policies for achieving positive discipline.

3. The committee's enquiry concerning In-service Training which is specifically related to classroom control could be counter-productive if such training were narrowly conceived. Much In-Service training on management, curriculum and teaching methods, pastoral care, and on individual pupils has clear payoff for positive discipline in schools.

4. The committee's enquiry concerning Alternative Provision for pupils is founded on the view that particular pupils are responsible for indiscipline, that they can be identified, and that they should not be taught in the ordinary school. This is a partial and questionable view. Evidence<sup>25</sup> shows that alternative provision is ineffective in the long term, since it tends to fill up in the short term and stimulates further demand for such provision. Other evidence<sup>26</sup> suggests that alternative provision is ineffective in the short term, since problem behaviour reappears in connection with over 60% of pupils who return from such provision.

National Executive  
June 1988

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2 Many of our members would give evidence of the benefits of including pupils on this list, and of the extra illumination which their perspective offers. However we understand the pressures against a government committee of enquiry doing so at the present time.

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