

## **Recent discipline problems at schools**

Although there have always been problems with discipline at schools, some primary schools in the Czech Republic claim that in the last five years the problems have considerably deteriorated. Schools experience a variety of students' misbehaviour ranging from minor to very serious offenses. Those that can be regarded as minor are truanting, talking through the lessons, disrespect for the authorities, sneering, students' tardiness and absenteeism. Schools report incidents of vandalism on school property, students' alcohol and drug use, sale of drugs on school grounds, verbal or physical abuse of teachers, bullying, sexual battery, robbery, or even physical attack or fight with weapons, all of which are considered serious crimes. It is a highly complicated issue concerning the entire society. Apparently, the education system is in a need of a change.

Since the 1960s, many states have experienced an extreme act of violence at schools such as physical attacks with weapons or bomb attacks. On March 25, 2009 the problem affected the Czech Republic as well. A 17-year-old student is suspected of preparing a bomb attack on a grammar school. Another completely new phenomena, which appeared with the development of information and communication technologies, is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying means when a child is threatened, humiliated or embarrassed by using the Internet, digital technologies or mobile phones. It became very serious issue when some children have committed suicide or killed each other after having been involved in a cyberbullying incident. Forms of cyberbullying are text messaging, stealing passwords, creating pages designed to insult others, sending degrading pictures of others through e-mails or phones or offensive internet polling. Children are often motivated by anger, revenge or frustration. Sometimes they do it for entertainment or because they are bored, without realizing these acts are very serious, even though not said in real life. Obviously, the role of schools is vital. Schools should educate consequences, i.e. losing access to internet or instant messenger accounts. Schools should necessarily show pupils how to respect others and not ignore their pain. Students are determined to respect school regulations set in the school code and one of the regulations can cover not using mobile phones during the classes, which would be considerable help to the cyberbullying problem. On the other hand, when schools discipline students for cyberbullying, they are often sued for exceeding their authority and violating the students' rights, because actions very often take place outside of school. Schools though, can be very effective in working with the parents to prevent and stop cyberbullying.

In order to deal with misbehaviour, there should be an effort to prevent it by school improvement. Attacks on schools resulted in changes of some schools' policies concerning discipline and security. Schools have adopted social control practices and violence prevention programmes to provide a safe learning environment, e.g. access to the building and school grounds are controlled, random metal detector checks are implemented. These precautions restricts pupils liberty on account of their (and also teachers') safety, conversely to liberalisation of educational system, which is currently being applied. Teachers' role in the process is trying to prevent misbehaviour by observing their students. If there are

troublesome children, teachers should seek how to accommodate classes to them, giving them special attention and opportunities to express themselves. Teachers should endeavour to enhance their motivation and alter negative attitudes towards school. To maintain long-term reduction of misbehaviour, it is essential to cultivate childrens' responsibility, integrity and self-discipline. It is important to identify underlying motivation for pupils misbehaviour. The basic rule for making a class effective is "praise rather than punish". Praise approves the right behaviour and it motivates pupils to continue working. When the disruption occurs, teacher should avoid exacerbating the problem and beware of its continuing, e.g. by pausing or restraining touch. If it continues, teacher has to revert to a firm statement indicating it must stop or it has some consequences. Throughout the process, teachers should keep other pupils calm by dealing with the situation with a calm and protective demeanour to reestablish safe and positive atmosphere. Only when the pupils behaviour is not improving even after friendly or unfriendly word, teacher can apply punishment.

Punishment can be represented by a loss of privileges, public censure, reparations in case of damaged or stolen property, apologies, extra work, letter home, sending to more senior staff, public reprimanding or finally, suspension or exclusion from school. Corporal punishment is banned in many countries, in CR since the year 1870. Nowadays, its provided by law, stating that the state protects children from offending, dereliction or torturing by persons who take care of the child. Generally, teachers who use corporal punishment are less experienced, less considerate and more neurotic than teachers who have never used it. In broad terms, teacher should act professionally under any circumstances and using corporal punishment is not a professional approach. Teachers should act under the law and never cross the border of their authority when dealing with discipline problems. Essentially, teacher needs to look at the problem from distance, because using punishment may cause many negative consequences including increased negative attitudes towards school and that often leads back to behaviour problems. Therefore, it is necessary that the form of punishment is selected sufficiently, according to seriousness of the misbehaviour. The rules and responses for breaking the rules must be set clearly and perceived by students as logical. However, it may be necessary to take time to help students learn to respect others rights and accept responsibility.

When dealing with any type of misbehaviour it is crucial that teachers act professionally and show respect for the pupils and their personal liberty. Disruption should be seen only as attention-seeking behaviour provoked by boredom or lack of opportunity for expressing one's individuality and should not be considered as personal attack on teacher. Teachers must be aware of how to prevent these problems, i.e. learn to use disciplinary practices effectively. Furthermore, teachers should have possibility to receive appropriate training on how to react in similar situations. Rules and disciplinary responses must be regulated by law to protect both teachers and pupils and emphasized to the students, teachers and parents in advance. Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports proclaimed that according to a new amendment as from the next year, there would be an option to exclude pupil from school for a number of hours or days for his/her frequent misbehaviour or even pupils' mobile phone can be removed. During the exclusion, the pupil would be under intense scrutiny of a psychologist or a teacher provided with specialised training. Accepting rules and respecting them leads pupils to responsibility and democratic approach in the education process.

## References:

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