



St. Nicholas Primary School,

Suspension Policy

This document is drafted in accordance with the National Educational Welfare Board's guidelines for developing a Code of Behaviour. Should you wish to see those guidelines in detail, they are available at www.newb.ie

Authority to Suspend

The Board of Management of St. Nicholas Primary School has the right to suspend a student. Where this authority is delegated to the Principal, the delegation should be done formally and in writing and a copy of this authority is retained by the Principal.

The Grounds for Suspension

Suspension should be a proportionate response to the behaviour that is causing concern. Normally, other interventions will have been tried before suspension, and school staff will have reviewed the reasons why these have not worked. The decision to suspend a student requires serious grounds such as that:

- The student's behaviour has had a seriously detrimental effect on the education of other students.
- The student's continued presence in the school at this time constitutes a threat to safety.
- The student is responsible for serious damage to property.

A single incident of serious misconduct may be grounds for suspension .

Determining the appropriateness of suspending a student.

Where the purpose of a proposed suspension is clearly identified, and that purpose cannot be achieved in any other way, suspension can have value.

Suspension can provide a respite for staff and the student, give the student time to reflect on the link between their action and its consequences and give staff time to plan ways of helping the student to change unacceptable behaviour.

However, suspension can be counter productive if used without a clear rationale or without measuring its impact and value. We must consider the risk of any unwanted outcomes from suspension, such as an increased sense of alienation from school that could lead to a cycle of behavioural and academic problems.

Where a preliminary assessment of the facts confirms serious misbehaviour that could warrant suspension, the school will observe the following procedures:

Inform the student and parents

In the case of a serious incident of misbehaviour, let the student and their parents know about the complaint, how the incident was investigated, and that it could result in suspension.

In the case of continuous and persistent interruption to class teaching due to the pupils need for continuous correction, the teacher will document the misbehaviours. A copy of this list will be given to the child's parents.

Parents may be informed by phone or in writing, depending on the seriousness of the matter. Informing parents in writing has the added benefit of ensuring that there is a formal and permanent communication record for future reference, should it be deemed to be required. It also ensures that parents are clear regarding the reason for the suspension, and serves the important function of underlining to parents the seriousness with which the school views the misbehaviour.

Opportunity to respond

Parents and the student will be given an opportunity to respond before a decision is made, and before any sanction is imposed.

A meeting with the student and his or her parents provides an opportunity for them to give their side of the story and to ask questions about the evidence of serious misbehaviour, especially where there is a dispute about the facts. It may also be an opportunity for parents to make the case for lessening the sanction, and for the school to explore with parents how best to address the student's behaviour. If a student and his/her parents fail to attend a meeting, the Principal will write to the parents, advising of the gravity of the situation, and the importance of attending a re-scheduled meeting. Failing that, it is the duty of the school authorities to make a decision to respond to the negative behaviour. The school will record the invitations made to parents and their response.

Procedure in relation to Immediate Suspension

Where an immediate suspension is considered by the Principal to be warranted for reasons of the safety of the student, other students, staff or others, a preliminary investigation will be conducted to establish the case for the imposition of the suspension. The formal investigation will immediately follow the imposition of the suspension. All of the conditions for suspension apply to immediate suspension. No suspension, including an immediate suspension, should be open-ended.

In the case of immediate suspension, parents must be notified, and arrangements made with them for the student to be collected. The school will have regard to its duty of care for the student. In no circumstances will a student be sent home from school without first notifying parents.

The period of suspension

A student will normally be suspended for one, two or three days, except in exceptional circumstances where the Principal considers that a period of suspension longer than three days is needed in order to achieve a particular objective. (The Board of Management should provide guidance to the Principal concerning three kinds of circumstances under such suspensions of longer than three days might be approved.)

If a suspension longer than three days is being proposed by the Principal, the matter will be referred to the Board of Management for consideration and approval, giving the circumstances and the expected outcomes.

However, the Board of Management may wish to authorise the Principal, with the approval of the Chairperson of the Board, to impose a suspension of up to five days in circumstances where a meeting of the Board cannot be convened in a timely fashion, subject to the guidance concerning such suspensions.

The Board of Management should normally place a ceiling of ten days on any one period of suspension imposed by it.

The Board will formally review any proposal to suspend a student, where the suspension would bring the number of days for which the student has been suspended in the current school year to twenty days or more. Any such suspension is subject to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

These provisions enable the school authorities to give the student a reasonable time to reflect on their behaviour while avoiding undue loss of teaching time and loss of contact with the positive influences of school. They recognise the serious nature of the sanction of suspension, and ensure that this seriousness is reflected in school procedures. The provision ensures that the Board of Management takes ultimate responsibility for sanctions of significant length, especially where such suspensions might reach twenty days in one school year and therefore might lead to an appeal.

Appeals

The Board of Management must offer an opportunity to appeal the Principal's decision to suspend a student.

Section 29 Appeal

Where the total number of days for which the student has been suspended in the current school year reaches twenty days, the parents, or a student aged over eighteen years, may appeal the suspension under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, as amended by the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007.

At the time when parents are being formally notified of such a suspension, they and the student will be told about their right to appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, and will be given information about how to appeal.

Implementing a Suspension

Written notification

The Principal will notify the parents and the student in writing of the decision to suspend. The letter will confirm:

- The period of the suspension and the dates on which the suspension will begin and end.
- The reasons for the suspension
- Any study programme/homework to be followed
- The arrangements for returning to school, including any commitment to be entered into by the students and the parents, (for example, parents might be asked to reaffirm their commitment to the Code of Behaviour).

- The provision for an appeal to the Board of Management
- The right to appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science (Education Act 1998, Section 29)

The letter should be clear and easy to understand. Particular care should be taken in communicating with parents who may have reading difficulties, or whose first language is not English.

Records and reports

Formal written records should be kept of:

- The investigation (including notes of all interviews)
- The decision-making process
- The decision and the rationale for the decision
- The duration of the suspension and any condition attached to the suspension.

Report to the Board of Management

The Principal is required to report suspensions in accordance with the NEWB reporting guidelines (Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, Section 21 (4) (a)).

Review of use of Suspension

The Board of Management should review the use of suspension at regular intervals in order to ensure that its use is consistent with school policies, that patterns of suspension are examined to identify factors that may be influencing behaviour in the school, and finally to ensure that the use of suspension is appropriate and effective.

This policy was reviewed on 5/5/2013 and reviewed again on 1/3/2016.

Ratified by the Board of Management on 01/03/2016

Signed: *Fr. Michael Kilmartin*
Chairperson, Board of Management

John Smyth
Principal