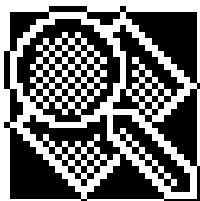


## Action on Ethos

*A revised behaviour policy  
in an independent girls' school*

*This case study describes  
the process of involving  
all students and staff  
(both teaching and support)  
in the formulation of  
a revised behaviour policy.*



## St George's School for Girls

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**Headmistress: Dr. Judith McClure**  
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### 1 Background

St. George's School is situated on the western side of Edinburgh. It is an independent girls' school, founded in 1888 by a group of far-sighted, single-minded women who wanted to offer a full education to girls and women who until then had been denied real educational equality. They had to overcome tradition, prejudice, conservatism and complacency in order to establish the school. The community has evolved, fully committed to girls' education and very conscious of the changing context of the society in which they will take their place.

At present, the School has a roll of 870 pupils from 5 to 18 years, just under 10% of whom are boarders, with a teaching staff of 79 FTE, 21 full-time and 33 part-time support staff.

### 2 General Aims

During session 1994-5, both staff and students had raised various guidance issues. These had mainly emerged from the implementation of the discipline and referral policy but they included matters connected with the anti-bullying policy and the child protection guidelines. It was decided that one of the 1995-6 targets should be a full review of the behaviour policy. The key concept to underpin the review was to be 'working together, so that all students can prosper and all staff can enjoy their work'.

The aims of the review were:

- to clarify the aims of the behaviour policy;
- to identify and incorporate agreed changes into a revised behaviour policy document;
- to ensure that the behaviour policy was communicated, understood and applied consistently within the whole School;
- to set up procedures for annual review of the revised behaviour policy so that it could remain dynamic and responsive to change from both within and outwith the School.

### 3 Methods/Strategies

- a) The review was to go right back to basics rather than tinkering with policy and procedures.
- b) All members of the community were to be involved so that everyone would be able to understand and feel able to implement the revised behaviour policy.

Note: The School has both primary and secondary ages, two sites with a variety of separate buildings and two boarding houses. Established and new communication procedures had to be used to encourage and facilitate involvement at all levels.



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clear, unambiguous essential rules (for health, safety & security purposes) and basic ground rules to foster good working conditions.

c) The students had identified concern over what to do if other peoples' behaviour caused them concern. The identification of support for the recipient of misbehaviour was required, with policies on anti-bullying and confidentiality to underpin them.

d) 'Punishments' had been criticised for sometimes lacking consistency and fairness, so a clear sanctions and referral system was sought. Keeping within the school ethos whilst being sufficiently flexible to permit appropriate application of sanctions was identified as being one of the most contentious issues of the whole review.

## **7 Action**

A step-by-step approach was considered essential. The majority views were taken into account and reasoned explanations were given for each action. The steps were :

a) first, the rationale for a behaviour code was published in the form of a non-negotiable statement of rights and responsibilities ; there are 5 statements which are fundamental to the way we approach our work and each other :

The five 'Rights and Responsibilities' Statements are :

**1. RESPECT & CARE FOR OTHERS.**

We are all entitled to respect, tolerance and understanding from others.

We are all obliged to be courteous and tolerant of others.

**2. WORKING TOGETHER.**

We are all entitled to be heard.

We are all obliged to listen to others.

**3. DOING ONE'S BEST.**

We are all entitled to the conditions which enable us to work to the best of our ability.

We should all do our best to support others.

**4. SAFETY OF SELF & OTHERS.**

We are all entitled to work in a safe, clean and tidy environment.

We are all obliged to follow the ground rules, to respect property and to safeguard our own belongings and those of others.

**5. THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.**

We are all entitled to be proud of our School.

We are all responsible for the School's reputation, on and off the premises.

Then came the essential ground rules based on health and safety guidelines followed by the basic ground rules to foster good working conditions.

The policies on confidentiality and anti-bullying were then added.

The sanctions procedures were the last to be formulated and were probably the most contentious.

The end product was a document entitled "Working Together", which was issued to all secondary students and all staff in August 1996.

It incorporates the following sections :

Non-negotiable rights & responsibilities statements



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Essential (health, safety & security) rules for the whole School  
Basic rules (to foster good working relationships) customised for  
each part of the School, including a section for the boarders  
Special rules for laboratories, PE, and events outwith normal  
school hours

The School policy on confidentiality

The anti-bullying policy

Sanctions and their application

A full Primary School version of the document is currently in  
preparation, but there is a revised, simple set of rules in operation  
at present.

## 8 Evaluation

The involvement of ALL members of the community heightened  
awareness of behaviour. There is a clear rationale for good  
behaviour; rules are clearer and better understood and a more  
consistent policy of sanctions application is evident. The document  
“Working Together” is used by guidance and senior staff when  
dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Support staff are better  
respected and able to understand and influence behaviour  
patterns.

In May-June 1997 (and at that time in subsequent years) there will  
be an evaluation of the booklet, the rules & sanctions but not the  
underlying principles which are now firmly embedded in the ethos.

## 9 Practical Suggestions

- a) Involving all members of the community gives everyone the  
chance to identify with the final policy document and give it  
credibility.
- b) It is good to involve staff in groups which cut across subject and  
age barriers.
- c) It is mutually beneficial for older and younger students to work  
together on something with which they can all identify.
- d) The agreement of the governing body in the definition of the  
rights and responsibility statements is fundamental and most  
supportive .
- e) Information can be gathered and disseminated through commu-  
nity structures like the Student Council and this in turn gives them  
‘teeth’.
- f) The umbrella of “Working Together” gives common ground for  
the resolution of problems inside and outwith the classroom. It is a  
context for both the anti-bullying and confidentiality policies and it  
is a good basis from which to start discussions about behaviour  
and the community in personal and social education classes.
- g) Using the rights and responsibility statements to underpin the  
discipline system has proved most practical for guidance staff  
negotiating about unacceptable behaviour.
- h) The School motto and the 5 rights and responsibilities state-  
ments are used as focal points for the personal and social  
education at the start of a session.
- i) The policy must evolve if it is to remain at the heart of and  
underpin community relations.