
PLAYGROUND SUPERVISION

A whole-school approach

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Playground supervision – a whole-school approach*

I was walking across the playground and noticed several year 6 lads playing downball in the infant part of the playground. Walking across I ‘eyeballed’ them, smiled – they stopped playing. “Hi fellas; how’s it going?” (A returned frowning ‘smile’ and a muttered “OK.”) “I notice you’re playing downball in the infant area.” [Describing the *obvious reality* keeps the corrective language least intrusive and ‘incidental’. It is pointless asking them ‘why’ they are playing here. I’m not interested in ‘reasons’ on an issue like this; not now. It also leads to dissembling, excuses and ‘points discussion’ or argument].

One lad quickly retorts (a whining tone to his voice) “Other teachers don’t care if we play here as long as there’s no little kids here.” [How many times have we heard ‘the other teachers ...’ line?] This, of course, may be true but it’s wasted energy to debate the veracity of what the students are saying here; I added “I can check that ...” (I don’t need to call them liars). A brief bit of ‘partial agreement (followed by a *direct* question) :- “I can check that with other teachers. Where are you supposed to be playing downball?” (or, “*What’s our rule for?*”, or “*Where are you supposed to be playing ...?*”). Interrogatives such as ‘Why?’, or ‘*Are you playing downball in the infant area?*’ or even ‘You’re not supposed to be here, *are you?*’ These sorts of questions are an ‘invitation’ to student debate discounting ‘reasons’, or seeking to ‘get round’ the known, fair, rules.

“But Mr Smith said we could play here if there’s no infants.” The lad was persistent. I think he thought this whining admission was his ‘*coup de grace*’ (!) Partial acknowledgement and a last re-focus is enough now : “I can check that with Mr Smith. *Where are you supposed to be playing?*” It is important to direct the focus to student ownership of the behaviour or rule wherever possible (hence the “Where ...” question). One of the other lads broke ranks adding – with sulky and frowning expression – “We’re supposed to play down by the dust bins ...” “Well, enjoy the rest of your playtime fellas.” I gave them some ‘take-up-time’ by walking away with a brief glance to check they had moved off. I *tactically* ignored the muttering, their sibilant sighs and their obvious sulking.

*In Australia all teachers do all ‘yard’ (or playground) supervision, including ‘wet-day’/lunch/before and after school ...

This kind of brief discipline exchange keeps one's playground supervision / management 'least intrusive' (wherever possible) and avoids unnecessary confrontation; we're 'relaxedly vigilant' (Rogers, 2011). We haven't ignored this behaviour nor have we been overly vigilant (demanding, hectoring, petty, mean-spirited, bossy ...).

If students argue or challenge we will (of course) need to make the fair consequences clear to them (including confiscating the ball if necessary ...). In such cases we would give a *directed* consciously 'choice' first ... eg : "If you continue to ... then ..."

We have all had our whinges, at times, about 'yard duty' (playground supervision) – on hot, windy or wet, cold days. A playground is a large space to supervise. There will be squabbles about play, space and friendships; the 'pecking orders' among peer groups and the inevitable silly behaviours (play-fighting, throwing things, spraying at the drinking taps, friendship exclusion ...). It is a necessary time for children to enjoy relative 'freedom', for play and recreation, but it also needs to be a place (and time) where children can feel safe (psychologically as well as physically).

It is essential that a school develop a **whole-school approach to behaviour leadership** in duty-of-care contexts outside the classroom; particularly playground supervision.

Even when a teacher is not on rostered playground supervision we all need to observe *relaxed vigilance* at break times. If we see inappropriate, silly, unsafe, behaviour we need to address it – *en route* – even if we are not on rostered duty.

A whole-school approach to any duty-of-care management in non-classroom contexts (including corridors ...) is based in thoughtful needs analysis of typical behaviour dynamics (including student feedback); a school-wide plan; a common preferred practice approach in managing the 'typical' range of behaviours we may need to address and a consequential process and follow-up processes (beyond playground incidents) for more serious behaviour incidents.

Preventative features of duty-of-care (in non-contact tiome)

Preventative aspects of school policy will need to address basics such as :- safe play areas; thoughtful signage; safe and clean toilets (crucial) / safe and clean drinking areas; adequate litter bins strategically placed (and occasional litter education particularly in the establishment phase of the year); appropriate ball-play areas; no-go areas; quiet areas (where children can

draw, play board games, jigsaws – not all children want to leap off climbing frames); use of library at lunchtimes (but monitor computer and i-Pad games ...); sun-awareness policy etc. Preventative policy is part ‘architectural’ and part organisational; it also includes education and discussion (week one, term one) on safe play, fair play, available games and equipment (no pulling to ground or ‘fighting’ when playing ‘footy’, soccer, ball games ... etc). It is important we don’t merely assume that children know whether they can ride their bike on their way out of school at 3.40 (ish) and that they need a helmet. (Clear signage at the bike rack area will help here as will duty teachers’ – ‘relaxed vigilance’). Even if a teacher is not on rostered duty they can still exercise relaxed vigilance when they see inappropriate or unsafe behaviours in non-contact time.

Corrective aspects of a school policy and practice will mean we have basic, clear, fair rules in place so we don’t get into unnecessarily defensive arguments about which teacher said ‘You *can* do ‘x’, ‘y’, ‘z’ ...’

A key feature of our corrective management (during duty) is the concept of *relaxed vigilance* by all staff at all times.

Some teachers are ‘non-vigilant’; they will walk past students breaking sticks off trees and ‘fighting’ (play fighting) ...; they will ‘ignore’ loud swearing, or silly male testosterone bonding ... (the pushing/shoving/‘friendly strangling’ ...).

I’ve heard school Principals say they can tell on which days students are more likely to be sent ‘inside’ (from playground) from which teachers are on yard duty on a given day. Even a brief, positive, word (aside, in the corridor or playground) by *any* teacher (or T.A.) will communicate *that all teachers are aware of, and care*, about considerate, responsible and safe behaviour (again, *relaxed vigilance*).

As with all discipline / behaviour leadership, staff are encouraged to embrace a least intrusive approach (wherever possible) and assertive leadership (not hostile or aggressive) where necessary; positive language (where possible); avoid unnecessary confrontation and keep the focus of correction on the main, or ‘primary behaviour’ or issues being addressed *at that point*. We avoid arguing or debating with students about *why* they are behaving inappropriately or behaving in unfair or unsafe ways; we avoid over-servicing the sulkiness, the indulgent sighing, the raised eyes ... and whingeing ... when we – fairly – remind, and expect, appropriate/safe behaviours.

Our manner, tone, and characteristic language significantly affect student goodwill and co-operation. It will be important that staff address this aspect of daily, managerial, supervision as we move around the playground (*relaxedly* vigilant).

Developing policy and practice

Once a year we will (as a whole staff team) need to review and re-address current policy and practice.

The review will address :-

1. The *frequency* and *seriousness* of playground incidents.

The most common pattern is high frequency but 'low serious' :- silly play (at taps, toilets, on climbing frames, throwing of wood chips ..., flicking sand ..., "I didn't mean to hit him in the eye!"); 'boundary running'; 'play fighting' ..., social exclusion (... "can't play with us!"), and the small group of students with 'no-one to play with ...'

Some behaviours are *low* frequency but high serious and will occasion immediate consequences such as time-out, or even restraint (in a serious fight). The school needs a clear protocol on directed and vicious swearing; taunting and threatening (including threatening of teachers) others; nasty or dangerous fighting; throwing woodchips, sand – even a ball – *at* someone ... We also need very clear rules and consequences to address bullying; any bullying (including cyber-bullying). Such consequences will be non-negotiable, carried out firmly, decisively and respectfully. All such consequences will also need to occasion follow up by the 'initiating teacher'/duty teacher (with a senior colleague) and the student/s in question. Such follow up can also need to address mediation and restitution.

The degree to which all staff are *relaxedly* vigilant will often affect whether a low-level incident moves into a more serious issue or conflict.

2. Staff discuss how we (as a staff team) *characteristically* address the typically frequent incidents.

It will also help to check if location or area (of the playground) affects behaviours adversely. Records of first aid incidents can also help. A yearly review with our students using a user-friendly map (for older children) where they are asked to note (on the map) areas where they feel safe and very comfortable to play (and recreate) =

number 1; areas they are not so comfortable to play = *number 2* and areas where they would never play = *number 3*. On the back of the map the students give reasons *why* they have numbered the map thus.

It can also help with very young children to discuss with them where they feel safe, less safe or unsafe in the school at playtimes *and why*. This will often correlate with areas in the school that are more difficult to supervise.

Another typical student review will address questions such as :-

What's working well in our playground and *why?*; what is not working well and *why?*; what can we (all) do to make our playground (and our play) safer and more enjoyable ...? *How?* What suggestions do you have?

3. Review the rules for the playground : are they clear, simple, fair, positively expressed (where possible) and helpfully displayed? Each grade teacher (at primary level) / form teacher (at secondary level) each year (in the establishment phase), will remind students about the rules and why we have them in our school. We will review these as the need arises during the year.

4. **Encouragement**

It will be important to normatively encourage children when we are on duty. Where we see considerate, thoughtful, helpful behaviours we can quietly, positively, affirm such. A lad trips over as he hurries on the grass area. Two lads rush back to help him up and check he's OK. A teacher walks over and says ..."Hello boys (use their names if you know them, or ask), that was very considerate and helpful to ..." The same with litter; safe, considerate, play; we encourage thoughtful and considerate behaviours. This helps affirm – and build - a positive behaviour culture.

Those brief 'encouragers' by duty teachers in duty-of-care time can be basic – they make a difference.

On duty, yet again, recently; a cold but sunny wintry day. Relaxed vigilance where possible.

Students have been 'cooped-up' in classes now it's their time of partial freedom ... recreation, games, quieter activities for some (we hope) ...

I noticed, on the large oval, a soccer game in progress – just a 5-a-side (encouraging to see a few female students enjoying soccer too). A small audience ...they'd made a shorter pitch, home-made goals ...

As I looped the oval (on duty) I observed the year 12 students clearly enjoying the game, I heard the banter ... I noticed a skilful goal save. Walking past the goal area "Wow ... that was skilful ..." That's all – he smiled back "Lucky ..." I added (*en passant*), "Skill ..." I kept walking.

Second round of the oval-loop-supervision ... I noticed a couple of lads over-doing a tackle ... I called over ... "Fellas (...) soccer, footy or rugby?" They grinned, back into reasonable vigorous play. I continued walking ...

I passed the group a few more times. Smiled when there was eye contact, nodded at a few 'good plays' ... kept walking; on duty. Relaxed vigilance in these *brief*, episodic, passings by ...

Nearly time for lunch playtime bell over ... The ball went wide and away ... From 30 metres I gave a not-too-bad returned kick of their ball to their play ... It was nice (even from years 12s) to receive a cheery wavy and thanks. Again, *brief*; episodic ...

There goes the clarion bell for end of lunch play and for the next period. I saw them packing up and reach for their 'third hands' (their smart phones) as they did their last texts, or calls before period five ...

Brief chats, brief encouraging asides and cues (well meant) also make a relational difference between teacher and students – even when 'on duty'.

5. A review of litter bins, shade areas, safe seats (no split wood or serious splinters!); *enough* seats ...; clean and serviceable, toilets. Children, too, need an opportunity to share concerns here and be involved in how they understand and utilise their playground place and their time together at recess ...
6. Publish a staff duty-of-care plan (reviewed each year) and enable some in-servicing (particularly of new staff).

Like all aspects of behaviour policy and leadership, we need a balance of *considered prevention (including an educational focus); positive correction and encouragement;*

appropriate consequences and follow-up and – above all – our *relaxed* vigilance to enable students to enjoy their ‘partial freedom’, fresh air and the recreation that playtime can give.

It can help if all teachers carry a notebook (even when they are not directly ‘on duty’) to note down students’ names and behaviour(s) that need follow-up and follow-through by senior staff. Even when we’re not on duty, if we see inappropriate, unacceptable behaviour and *any* dangerous behaviour we still have a duty-of-care (even if not on roster) – *relaxed vigilance*. *Duty* of care is ever present. What is noted (in the notebook) is transcribed daily in a monitoring / tracking book (or computer ‘file’) in the staff room eg : date, time, student’s name, incident, immediate action taken ... suggested follow-up noted. [This notebook carries the school logo so it looks appropriately ‘official’. Perhaps a bright yellow notebook? Like the yellow card used in football/soccer.] See over.

Many schools now have school-based software to record (from notebook) observations and incidents for monitoring and follow-up.

Where students present with at-risk behaviour(s) in out-of-class settings it will be essential to have a whole-school response for working with such students. That response will often need to include a *personal behaviour plan* for the student and (where necessary) even staggered playtimes.

See : *You Know the Fair Rule : and Much More* Rogers, 3rd Edition, 2011 Published in the UK by Pearson Education, and *Behaviour Management : A Whole-School Approach (2006)* Scholastic Australia 2nd edition. Published in the UK by Sage Publications, London.)

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STYX ROAD
SECONDARY
COLLEGE

2020

Our *RVMB Staff
Note Book

STAFF NOTE BOOK

Use *skillfully* to **encourage, remind, offer choices to / warn or take names** of students challenging rules, routines, expectations and instructions about fair, appropriate and safe behaviour in our school.

Please carry at all times

- ❖ Inside or outside classrooms
- ❖ On duty
- ❖ To assist *your* follow-through
- ❖ To inform other staff
- ❖ In conjunction with notes in student planners
- ❖ For *positive* reporting where appropriate

Our Aim : To create a *visible* and *professional* response to assist staff and students in our school.

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Nb We don't actually use the acronym (RVMB) 'relaxed vigilance monitoring book' (in-house humour). Also there is not (as far as I know) a Styx Rd. School. Styx is one of the several rivers in the mythological Greek Hades.

Date _____ Time

Name and form (check carefully)

Information / incident

Next Steps? (note in planner?)
(Key follow-up with colleague[s])

Print /
Sign

(With thanks to
my colleague
Harry Pearce for
this notebook
format.)

References

Bill Rogers *Behaviour Management : A Whole-School Approach* (Sydney : Scholastic).
2006 [In the U.K. : Sage Publications]

Bill Rogers (Ed.) *Teacher Leadership and Behaviour Management*
(London : Paul Chapman 2006).

Available in Australia from Footprint Books www.footprint.com.au

Bill Rogers (2011) *You Know the Fair Rule* 3rd Edition Australian Council for Educational
Research ACER Press : Melbourne. In the UK : - Pearson Education : London.

See also in-service notes in : *Dealing With Disruptive Behaviour Outside the Classroom*.
(a draft discussion paper, 2019. Bill Rogers. Available on request.).