



Suspensions and Expulsions Policy

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Mission Statement

Glenstal Abbey School is a school for boys within a monastic community characterised by moderation and mutual respect. It seeks to provide a balanced and disciplined environment which emphasises values such as integrity, kindness and respect and it seeks to maintain an inclusive climate of learning where each child can fulfil his own unique potential.

Introduction

The ethos of Glenstal Abbey School is based on three essential principles which should characterise a Benedictine school: reverence, respect and responsibility. The school's rules and standards of behaviour are derived from these principles, and good behaviour is expected of all students at all times. This policy should be read in conjunction with the school *Code of Conduct* and all students and parents must indicate their acceptance of both, in writing, before a boy enters the school.

The school seeks to implement a fair and consistent, though suitably flexible, system of sanctions. Perpetrators of aggressive, intimidating or bullying behaviour may face strong sanctions. As Saint Benedict makes clear, the purpose of punishment is to bring about reform, and we take as our starting point his advice to the Abbot that he must deal with those who are guilty of misdeeds 'so that they may be healed' (RB:30:3).

The *Code of Conduct* and the *Anti-Bullying Policy* outline the various sanctions and supports which may be employed by school staff to address behaviour which contravenes the rules and standards of the school. This policy document sets out the procedures to be applied when the suspension or expulsion of a student is being considered. For the purposes of this policy, *suspension* is understood as the withdrawal of permission from a student to board or attend classes for a specified period of time; and *expulsion* is considered to be the permanent exclusion of a student from the school.

I. Suspension

In certain cases of unacceptable behaviour it may be in the best interests of the school community and/or the student involved to remove the student from the school or from class for a period of time. Suspension is a serious sanction and the Board of Management will be informed of all suspensions.

The Headmaster/Deputy Principal and the Board of Management are bound to exercise the authority to suspend in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, having regard to their responsibility to the whole school community and to the principles of natural justice. In the investigation and adjudication process leading up to a possible suspension, the school will respect the fact that the student in question has the right to be heard and the right to be treated impartially.

The student's right to be heard means that he has a right:

- To know that the alleged behaviour is being investigated.
- To details of the allegation and any other information being considered.
- To know how the issue will be decided.
- To an adequate opportunity for either the student or his parents/guardians to respond.
- To be heard by the decision-making body, whether that be the Headmaster or the Board.
- To ask questions of the other party or witness where the facts are disputed.

Impartiality and the 'Rule Against Bias'

The school will seek at all times to be transparent in its handling of potential cases of suspension. The principle that no-one should act as judge and jury in his/her own cause will be applied as far as is possible – ie neither the complainant nor someone else who may have been directly affected by the behaviour under investigation should be involved in making a *decision* about suspension.

This principle also applies when the school's Disciplinary Committee is convened. Though the committee is advisory and the right to suspend is the Headmaster's, the members should not have been directly affected by the behaviour under investigation. Similarly, a staff member who is also a member of the Board of Management may not be a member of the Disciplinary Committee, since the Board may ultimately be required to adjudicate on an appeal.

Though the functions of investigation and decision making should normally be carried out by different people, this may not always be possible and there may be times when there is no alternative to the Headmaster exercising both roles.

Suspension imposed by the Headmaster should not usually exceed three days but, in exceptional circumstances, it may be extended to a maximum of five days. In the absence of the Headmaster, the Deputy Principal may act in his place in all the procedures below. The power to suspend for longer periods rests with the Board of Management alone.

Procedure

In exceptional cases, the Headmaster may consider an immediate suspension to be necessary. Such circumstances include cases where the continued presence of the student in the school could represent a threat to the safety of either the student himself or of others in the school community. Fair procedures must still be applied and a full investigation of the behaviour in question will take place.

In all other cases, the steps outlined below will be followed, even if this entails a significant elapse of time between the incident and a subsequent decision to suspend. No undertakings, threats or promises as to the potential outcome of the disciplinary process may be made by any staff member and no inference about the potential outcome should be drawn from the length of time which the process takes.

- The Headmaster will initially delegate a staff member (or members) to investigate the matter thoroughly and to make a detailed written record of the facts. Written statements from parties to the incident and/or witnesses will be taken where appropriate.
- The facts of the incident(s) will then be put to the student involved and he will be asked to give a response. This may take place in the context of a formal meeting of the school Disciplinary Committee. The right of the student to be heard, as outlined above, will be respected. His response will be carefully noted and clarification sought/provided where needed.
- If the Headmaster/Disciplinary Committee judge that suspension should be considered, the boy's parents will be informed of the details of the case and given the opportunity to respond. In so far as distance allows, they will be invited to a meeting in the school, where both the boy and his parents will have an opportunity to engage with the Headmaster/Disciplinary Committee.
- When the Headmaster has stated the case and has heard the parents and the pupil, he will decide (with the counsel of the Disciplinary Committee where applicable) as to the sanction to be imposed, if any.

- Should the Headmaster decide to impose a suspension, the parents will be informed of the length of the suspension and of their right to appeal the basis of the suspension to the Board of Management at its next meeting. The suspension stands, pending such an appeal.
- Where the total number of days for which the student has been suspended in the current school year reaches twenty days, the parents may appeal the sanction under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, as amended by the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007.
- If the boy is over 18 years of age he may exercise the right of appeal himself.
- The Headmaster will confirm the suspension and the right of appeal in writing to the parents. The student may be set school work or other reasonable tasks to complete during the period of his suspension in order to help him reflect on his behaviour.

2. Expulsion

Expulsion is the ultimate sanction in the school and will not be considered lightly. The authority to expel a pupil rests with the Board of Management alone. Expulsion will be considered for very serious incidents, such as continuous serious disruption, violence or the possession or supply of illegal substances. However, the grounds for expulsion may, in fact, be similar to the grounds for suspension. In addition to factors such as the degree of seriousness and the persistence of the behaviour, a key difference is that expulsion is considered when the school authorities have tried a series of other interventions and believe they have exhausted all possibilities for changing the student's behaviour.

Procedure

In so far as they apply, the principles for suspension will also apply in the case of expulsion.

- The Headmaster (and the Disciplinary Committee) will interview the student about his behaviour, and give him the opportunity to respond.
- The Headmaster will write to the boy's parents/guardians, informing them that expulsion is being considered and the nature of the evidence on which this is based. He will offer them the opportunity to consider this evidence, and to make a submission by way of rebuttal within fourteen days.
- After fourteen days, and having considered the parents/guardians' response (if any), if the Headmaster still intends to recommend that the Board of Management expel the student, he will:
 - Inform the student's parents/guardians by registered post of his intention to ask the Board to expel the student, stating the reason(s) for the recommendation.
 - Give at least five days' notice of the Board meeting at which the recommendation will be considered.
 - Inform the student's parents/guardians of their right to be present and heard at the Board meeting *or* to make a written submission to the Board. (In the case of a lone parent opting to attend the Board meeting, he/she may be accompanied by a friend or relative.)
 - Prepare a report for the Board containing all the relevant material relating to the case.
 - Send out a copy of the report by post to the parents/guardians of the student on time for the meeting.
- The Headmaster may suspend the boy from school pending the decision of the Board regarding expulsion.
- Parents are required to give two days' notice to the Secretary of the Board of Management of their intention to be present and speak at the Board meeting, after which they will be invited to attend the meeting at a designated time.

- The Board will examine the report and may seek clarification from the Headmaster. The Chairperson will give the parents sufficient time to respond to the report and make representations on behalf of the student. The Headmaster will take no further part in the discussion other than to clarify matters raised in the parents/guardians appeal.
- After the presentations and any clarifications, the Headmaster and parents will leave the meeting. The Board makes its decision and communicates it to the parents/guardians by registered letter.
- If the Board decides to expel the student:
 - The National Education Welfare Board is informed.
 - The expulsion does not take effect until at least twenty school days have elapsed after receipt of notification by the NEWB, though the Headmaster may suspend the student from school during that period.
 - The parents will be informed of their right to appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills, under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, within forty-two calendar days of receipt of written notification of the Board's decision.
- If the Board decides not to expel the student, it will decide on an alternative sanction, in consultation with the Headmaster.

This policy adopted by the Board

Signed:

Chairperson Board of Management

Date: 26th January 2012.