

WHEN TEACHERS LOSE THEIR GRIP: WHO PROTECTS US?

by:

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The Department of Education's Child Protection Policy was born out of good intentions. It promises a safe and nurturing environment where children can learn free from abuse, violence, or discrimination. Who would argue against such a vision? Every teacher I know dreams of classrooms where children feel secure, respected, and supported. But here lies the paradox we dare not ignore: in protecting children, have we rendered teachers defenseless?

In crowded classrooms of fifty or more students, discipline is not just about enforcing rules. It is about survival. An entire class's learning can be derailed by a single disruption, but teachers are frequently constrained by the Child Protection Policy's restrictions. Even raising one's voice, a simple scolding meant to redirect behavior, can be construed as child abuse. When a teacher fears that every attempt to correct misconduct may be weaponized as a complaint, how can discipline thrive?

Teachers do not reject the principles of positive discipline. We are trained to practice it, and many of us already do. Yet, we live with the daily reality that theory does not always match practice. How do we maintain order in overcrowded classrooms when the policy gives students the upper hand? How do we balance nurturing children while ensuring accountability for misbehavior? When a child mocks authority knowing the teacher's power to discipline is limited, is the policy truly protecting, or is it inadvertently cultivating defiance?

A study by Mag Atas and Carmona (2023) showed that teachers often struggle to reconcile policy with classroom realities. Fear of consequences makes teachers second

guess themselves, reducing their authority and sometimes their dignity. Although teachers are aware of the policy, its application is uneven and unsupported, according to another study by Bayucca (2020). This divide makes us vulnerable in addition to being perplexed. This gap leaves us not only confused but also vulnerable.

Even teachers' groups have raised alarms. The Teachers' Dignity Coalition once warned that the policy, in its strictest interpretation, might lead to a generation of ill disciplined youth. Is this the future we want? A future where teachers are silenced, students are emboldened to test limits without consequences, and learning takes the backseat?

With good reason, the Child Protection Policy was created to safeguard children. However, where is the teacher protected under the policy? Where is the recognition that discipline, when done fairly and humanely, is part of protection too? Policies that lean too far in one direction risk alienating the very people tasked with upholding them.

This is where policymakers must act. Teachers need clear, enforceable protection clauses that affirm their authority without negating the rights of children. We need training programs that do not simply preach positive discipline in theory, but equip us with practical strategies for crowded and under resourced classrooms. The Department of Education must open its doors to consultation, listening to the voices of teachers on the ground who carry the weight of this policy every single day. Discipline is not abuse, and to conflate the two is to weaken both.

If we are to create truly child friendly schools, we must also create teacher friendly policies. It shouldn't be one-way when it comes to protection. It must be a shared responsibility where the dignity of teachers is preserved alongside the rights of students. Otherwise, we may win the battle against child abuse, but lose the war for discipline, respect, and meaningful education.

The question now is not whether we should protect children, that is non-negotiable. The real question is: when will teachers be equally protected? And if we delay the answer any longer, how many classrooms will continue to suffer in silence?

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