# Introduction

QUESTIONS

The bell has just gone. Dianne has struggled with one of her Grade 5 students this morning. Craig, a student who seems to have his nose permanently out of joint, has made the morning hard work—to put it mildly. She recalls one of the exchanges when she directed Craig to sit up from his heavy chair leaning and distracting behaviour. 'Gees, you're always picking on me!' he'd grumbled. She had been drawn into an argument with him again: 'Well I wouldn't pick on you—as you call it—if you would just sit up properly, Craig, and not rock on your chair and turn around and annoy others. That's one of the reasons you never get your work finished.' She reflects, as she heads for morning tea, that she probably argues with him too much—gives him the least helpful attention. But what else can she do?

The bell has gone, Dianne heads off to playground duty. She walks past a colleague's Grade 6 class. She hears him shouting at a student in the corridor. 'How many times have I told you, Lee? Why can't you just do as I ask, eh? Is it so hard to pack up like the others?' 'Oh, no wonder! It's Lee,' Dianne thinks as she walks past, surreptitiously. She winces as she hears the tone in her colleague's voice and quickly takes in his angry body language. Yet she too, surely—on occasion—has disciplined students in a similar way.

She sees a couple of boys running full pelt down the corridor. Should she say anything? She's tired. She's on playground duty in a minute. Anyway, she doesn't know their names. She had observed the deputy principal yelling at a few boys yesterday, 'Oi! This isn't a racetrack! How many times have I told you not to run in the corridor? Right, come here!' She doesn't like his yelling, especially when he corrects talkative, inattentive students during school assembly. Should she act like him to be 'effective as a teacher-leader?' What does it mean to be 'effective'
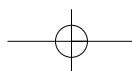
anyway? She sighs. 'At least I've got time for a quick cuppa.'

Dianne quickly grabs a coffee from the staffroom and she's off to playground duty. She overhears several teachers discussing behaviour problems and the upcoming review of behaviour management policy:

■ 'Do you know what that little ******, Peter, said to me in class?'
■ 'They're getting noisier I'm sure, or maybe it's me getting tired at the end of term.'
■ 'I'm fed up with Lisa's sulking in class.'
■ 'You'd think I'd asked Sonia to fly to the moon when I asked her to pay attention! You should hear her—she's got the last-word syndrome down to a tee!' (With oblique eye contact, Dianne sees her colleague mimic Sonia, complete with whine.)
■ 'I'm sure Paul has stolen money in class. I can't catch him out though. I tell you—he's an accomplished liar. Looks you straight in the eye and . . .'
■ 'I just can't seem to get him to work.'
■ 'What are we going to do about the teasing by the older kids?'
■ 'What are we going to do about the litter problem?'
■ 'What's the best punishment for . . .?'

Tune into any staff discussion, or staff meeting, stop and chat with a teacher or parent about behaviour management issues and these sorts of questions and comments are common.

With the hot coffee in hand, Dianne heads for Duty Area 3 down by the sandpit. She sees a couple of boys karate kicking—with an audience—down in that clump of trees. What should she do? She'd heard David say the other day at the staff meeting that it's just 'boys will be boys stuff ' and we shouldn't get too worked up about it. Several of her female colleagues had disagreed; a few quite strongly. Is it aggressive play? If so, what should she say? How can she best approach them? She recalls an infant teacher sharing how some Grade 6 boys had challenged her in the playground with, 'You're just an infant teacher.'

She sees several older girls sitting, eating, with litter at their feet.
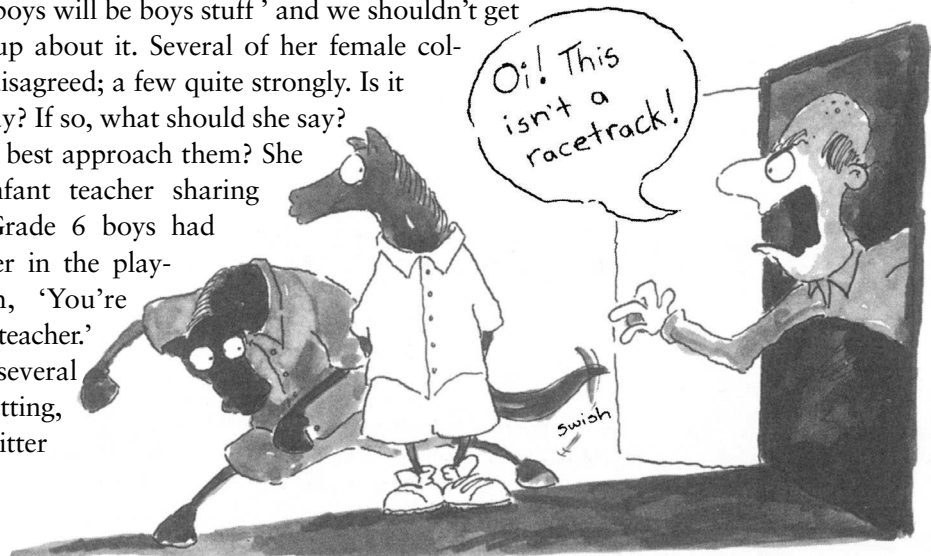
'Shall I remind them to put it in the bin?' She recalls an argument she had with some senior girls last week over whose litter it was. 'Is it worth the effort?' She has watched other colleagues discipline students in the playground, but she hasn't always agreed with their approach. She's never had a serious discussion about how best to do playground duty.

The bell goes. Dianne moves towards her class, cup in hand. She sees the keen students beginning to line up outside Building 3 in the senior school. She passes a couple of boys; 'Were they swearing?' She is sure she heard a racist put-down. Should she stop and say something? Should she report it? She's in a hurry. What would she say? Is it worth the effort?

Asking questions, seeking answers

The principal is on his way back to the office. He's mulling over the upcoming behaviour management review. He has to raise the issues of classroom and playground discipline. How will he do it? He's partly driven by Education Department guidelines, but is also aware of staff disquiet on a number of matters such as rudeness, swearing, aggression, teasing, even bullying. There are many great things going on in 'his' school, but these behaviour problems have to be addressed. He sees one of the younger, male teachers yelling at a student in the playground. As he passes and gazes at this social vignette and sees the wagging finger, he muses, 'Doesn't look too good, does it? The student probably deserves it though. Wonder what he was doing?'

He is aware that students are more challenging today and more vocal about their rights but how can he, and his staff, challenge students to be more responsible and respectful of others' rights? And (as important) to be aware of their responsibilities? 'Of course, times have changed, but the way some of these students speak! They still need discipline, guidance and instruction. In my day, I used the "strap", the cane. Was it better then? It was easier, but then we taught differently with larger groups; it was more teacher-directed.' He knows the authoritarian approach to discipline and behaviour management is ineffective and largely resisted by students today. But? And the bullying issue: 'In my day, we just lived with it. All the media attention today seems to make out it's a huge issue. We don't have many fights here, it's mostly "play-fighting".' Some of his staff have raised verbal and racial put-downs and teasing as equivalent to bullying. 'Are they right?'

Seated in his office, he takes a piece of paper and reflects on the questions raised by behaviour management. There are so many entry points into this issue of behaviour management and discipline . . .
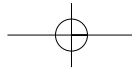
- 'Where do I start?' (Where do *we* start?)
- 'Is there such a thing as a *right* way to discipline? What do we mean, anyway, by discipline? Some of the parents would actually be happy if I brought back corporal punishment!'
- 'What do we mean by good management practice? Who decides what is good practice?'
- 'How can I encourage my staff to reflect on their management and discipline? Some of my staff need to work on their behaviour management skills. Some of my teachers need *more* behaviour management skills—but which skills? How? Is it all down to personality in the end?'
- 'How can I support my classroom teachers when they send Craig, Dean, Lee or Lisa to me? What am I supposed to do? I'm sure some of them expect me to bawl them out. What good does that do in the long run?'
- 'Do we really need a time-out policy?'
- 'I want children, here, to "own" their behaviour; to learn to be responsible *and* accountable. How can we better do that?'

He stops writing to consider how he will address the upcoming interview with Chad's mother. The school psychologist has described Chad as 'behaviourally disordered'. 'He's that all right! What am I going to say to her—especially after the last interview? More importantly, how am I going to support his grade teacher, Wendy? She already has that difficult Grade 2 girl.' His musings are interrupted by a knock at the door. Adam, one of his senior teachers has come to discuss the planning meeting for this staff review on behaviour management. Adam is a good listener and a supportive colleague. 'Adam, can I run these questions past you?'

Finding helpful, useful answers to these kinds of questions is not always easy. They call forth our fundamental values and beliefs, they often challenge our characteristic behaviour management and discipline practices. They require reflection, individually as well as with colleagues as a supportive team.

More difficult is the fact that teachers are incredibly busy people, with little 'free', or 'spare', time. The challenge of these questions occurs in the midst of their day-to-day concerns, but they have to be asked. I've sought to answer these questions in the course of my on-going work with schools. This book sets out a range of practical answers developed by schools to address behaviour management and discipline issues in schools today. No answer is definitive— especially when addressing the vagaries of human behaviour when one group of people (teachers) is trying to lead, guide, direct, teach and encourage another group (students) to behave in responsible, rights-enhancing ways.

Some quite robust, human ideals are outlined in this text, especially the need for positive behaviour management practice. There is a section on how to deal with
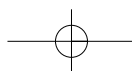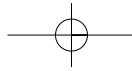
argumentative students, and the more objectionable members of the human race, in our schools. A range of practical strategies is outlined for dealing with such matters as noise levels in class, calling out, teasing and telling tales. While the strategies and plans outlined here are effective, they are not easy. They require thoughtful effort and consistency in application. Clearly there are times when even the best plans, the most thoroughly considered practices and the highest ideals are frustrated by the inadequacies of others as well as our own tiredness and depleted energy reserves. We are heavily fallible—all too human. The way people behave can be frustrating and annoying enough to make us angry at times. Even our own behaviour and the slow pace of change sometimes create stress. A whole-school approach takes time and we need to accept and allow for fallibility in ourselves and others. If we focus on the school as a whole, the journey and outcomes will be more effective.

I have written this book from the conviction that schools can (and clearly do) find workable, useful and practical answers to questions of behaviour management using a whole-school approach. Things can always improve, significantly improve, when teachers:

■ move from sectional self-interest to concern for the welfare of colleagues as a group, as a team within their local school.
■ ask: 'What do we believe as well as what do *I* believe?'
■ ask: 'What are our aims regarding behaviour management and what practices will better fit those aims?'
■ work for common plans to realise those aims. Plans that address classroom behaviour as well as behaviour in non-classroom settings (this is addressed at length, later.)
■ work for common approaches to teasing, harassment and bullying issues (Chapter 7).
■ Develop thoughtful, and effective, approaches to behaviour consequences.
■ Above all develop a safe school—where mutual respect, tolerance, encouragement and mutual support are more than stated aims.

Effective behaviour management is essential to the smooth running of a school and in the creation of an environment where everyone's rights and responsibilities are addressed. A balance between fundamental rights and responsibilities is at the heart of behaviour management and discipline issues in schools.

This book addresses the many aspects of student and teacher behaviour which affect that balance and explores how teachers can work in practical ways towards consistent, positive and purposeful school-wide practice.