

STAGE 4: Principal's report to the Board of Management

REVISED PROCEDURES FOR THE SUSPENSION AND DISMISSAL OF TEACHERS

Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998

Report to Board of Management by Patricia Kelly, Principal, in respect of Susan Jennings (teacher) pursuant to Stage 4 of the above Procedure.

Background

For the past six years the pupils in class 7 have organised a major fundraising event for a local charity. The charity changes from year to year. This year, the charity was the local Homeless Agency. This initiative was originally started by a former teacher, Barry O'Brien, but when he left the school three years ago, the management of the fundraising initiative was taken over by another teacher, Susan Jennings.

The initiative has been very successful and has become a part of the school's life. Parents and other staff members get involved and pupils in other classes support the initiative as well. It has raised over €12,000 in the past six years.

Over the past few years there have been questions asked about the reduced financial benefits for the charity. In the early years, the sum given each year averaged €2,500, but despite greater support in the local community and greater involvement by pupils and parents, the sum handed over each year has been approximately €1,500.

This year's fundraising event

This year's fundraising event appeared to be a big success. There was wide-scale publicity in the town around the event, with huge enthusiastic participation by pupils in class 7, parents and staff. However, the sum handed over to the charity amounted only to €1,370. Questions were raised by two parents, who would have been very involved in the event (this year it was a sponsored walk), so I carried out an investigation.

My investigation

The arrangement as regards the collection of the sponsorship monies is that each pupil gets a sponsorship card, has it completed by the pupil's sponsors, completes the sponsored walk and then collects the sponsorship money. The pupils were then asked to give their sponsorship cards to the organising teacher, Susan Jennings, together with the sponsorship monies. When initial queries were raised, I asked the teacher about the money handed over to the charity. She told me that she collected the money handed in by the pupils and whatever she received she handed over. I asked her to give me all the sponsorship cards which she received. She said that many of the pupils had simply given her money and had not given her sponsorship cards, but she did give me some cards. The total monies on the 15 sponsorship cards which she gave me amounted to €860. Mrs English, one of the parents involved, has confirmed that there were 27 students in all who did the sponsored walk and collected sponsorship money.

I interviewed 22 of the 27 pupils. All 22 confirmed that they had given the money to Susan Jennings, 18 confirmed that they had given Ms Jennings their sponsorship cards. In total, the amount of money that they said they gave to Ms Jennings was a total of €2,640.

Ms Jennings said that, while she did not keep a note of what each individual pupil gave to her, she gave "over €2,000" to the school secretary, Brenda Quinn, for lodgement to the bank account, and she could give no explanation as to why the amount lodged to the bank and subsequently given to the charity amounted only to €1,370.

Brenda Quinn, school secretary said she was quite clear in her recollection, she said that Susan Jennings came to her before school on 3 April (the day the monies were lodged in the bank account) and gave her an envelope full of cash. She said that she was concerned about it, so at lunchtime she asked another teacher, Bill McGrath, to count the money jointly with her, before she brought it to the bank. During that morning she had kept the envelope in her office. She had actually hidden the envelope behind the press in the secretary's office.

Bill McGrath and she counted the monies at lunchtime, agreed the sum of €1,370 and she went, after lunch, down to the bank and lodged the money. She showed me the lodgement slip. She said that she was surprised that the money was largely in 50-Euros, with about €120 in smaller notes, which she thought was strange as in previous years the monies had come in from the pupils mainly in smaller notes.

Findings

I am very concerned about what I believe has occurred in this case – the facts show that Susan Jennings received far more money than she gave to the school principal, Brenda Quinn, and I think that she has misconducted herself in a serious way. Accordingly, I think that she should be sanctioned as provided for in stage 4 of the disciplinary procedures.