

Teachers should be allowed to give children detentions after school

It is clear that giving children detention – that is, making them stay behind after school has finished – is an excellent way of punishing bad behaviour and rewarding good behaviour.

Children who are naughty, who misbehave or who make other children sad or uncomfortable need to be punished. If they are not made to realise that what they are doing, or how they are behaving, is unacceptable then they will continue in their bad ways. It is only by making sure that there is an unpleasant consequence to bad behaviour that children will be deterred from continuing.

Teachers have very few ways of punishing children nowadays. They are not allowed to use corporal punishment (caning or beatings) and are very limited in the things they can ask children to do by way of punishing them. It would, for example, no longer be acceptable to force a child to scrub the floor or clean the school windows as in Victorian times. Nor could teachers stand children in a corner, or put a 'dunce' cap on their heads or mock them in front of the class. So there are not many options when it comes to devising acceptable punishments.

Detentions – keeping children in from play, or making them stay behind after school – are ideal punishments. Firstly, they are unpleasant, so no child wants to be put in detention. This is important since a good punishment needs to act as a deterrent. It must stop children from behaving in a way that would bring the punishment down on them.

Secondly, they are not violent or humiliating. Detentions do not make other children think worse of the child who gets one. They are not carried out in public, in front of the whole class. They take place after school, or during playtime, in a discreet room, so that only the immediate friends or the family of the child will realise that he or she is being punished.

Thirdly, they are fairly effective. No child wants to have to stay behind after school, nor to miss their precious moments of playtime. Having been given a detention once, a child is likely to try to avoid being given one again. This means that they will change their behaviour for the better and are less likely to be naughty or mean again.

But finally, the strongest argument is that the detention is a traditional punishment that has existed since time immemorial in the British schooling system. J.K. Rowling draws on this tradition when she places detentions at the heart of the Hogwarts' system of punishment. Harry, Hermione and Ron find themselves in detention, rightly or wrongly, many times during their six years at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It certainly does not seem to do them any harm. Neither does it harm children in our schools today. It is an effective and humane punishment, which puts children off behaving badly. We should definitely keep them.

Teachers should not be allowed to give children detentions after school

Detentions – keeping children behind after school – are unnecessary and unpleasant ways of punishing children and should no longer be allowed.

It is certainly true that children do sometimes misbehave. They can do things which disrupt the class, making it difficult for other children to learn. They may be mean to, or even violent with, other children. Or they might damage school property or someone else's belongings. It is therefore necessary that teachers think of ways to prevent this bad behaviour and to encourage good behaviour, both at and around the school and in class.

The very best way to encourage children to be considerate and well behaved is through positive reinforcement. This means that teachers need to notice, praise and reward good behaviour. When children realise that certain actions are noticed and praised, they will repeat these actions. The good feelings they get from being rewarded by those around them will encourage them to behave in good ways more often. Rewards and praise are more effective ways of helping children to behave well than punishment. The carrot works better than the stick.

If it is accepted that punishment is sometimes necessary, then the punishments that are chosen should be related to the wrong-doing or bad behaviour that the child has just produced. If a child has been noisy or rude and disrupted the class, then they need to be given extra tasks, which help the classroom run smoothly. Perhaps they can help re-order the book corner or clean the painting equipment. If they have been unkind to another child, they can be asked to help someone else with a different task. In this way, the child can be helped to see that behaving well is actually nicer than behaving badly!

But there are other reasons why detentions are not a good idea. Children spend long hours each day in school. The time they have at home and doing their own activities is precious. It is wisely said that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. Children, like adults, need time to relax. They also need to play. Playing is physically and psychologically good for children. We know that many children have very little time left over for themselves, once the journey to and from school has been taken into account. It is quite wrong for teachers to further reduce this leisure time by giving detentions. It will benefit neither their education nor their well-being. Indeed, it is likely that forcing a child to endure longer hours doing more boring tasks will induce them to behave worse rather than better. This will prove detention a most ineffective punishment. Schools and teachers who care about their pupils' education will surely adopt better forms of punishment, such as asking them to do positive things to show that they are sorry. After all, being sorry, is the way in which children learn to change their behaviour – which is the real point!