

Dear Editor

I could not agree more with the sentiments expressed by David Skinner in the Summer 2004 edition of *ACT Now*. My first teaching experiences as a supply teacher and NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) left me shocked at the disgraceful behaviour of many pupils.

Daily I witnessed violence between pupils both in and out of the classroom. I was personally assaulted with rubbers and pencils thrown at the back of my head. Once a pupil threw her schoolbag at me after I ordered her out of the room (I was about six months pregnant at the time). Some pupils stole from my desk, others emptied my coffee and sugar all over the floor. Some tore up and threw down crumpled worksheets I had spent hours preparing the night before. Pupils would wet paper and throw it in balls at the classroom walls, which were covered in them. Wall displays were torn down even in the presence of staff. A French teacher who taught near to me would be in tears nearly every morning; she could scarcely believe the behaviour she was encountering.

After the first three months, I was suffering serious asthma attacks for which I had been placed on steroids and was fighting for breath at night-time. Up to this time, I had not suffered asthma since early childhood (now it is permanent). Many of my fellow NQTs dropped out of teaching purely because of pupil behaviour.

The sanctions for the above mentioned pupils constituted a fifteen minute detention even for telling me to F... O... (you know what I mean). I was told that pupils did not even turn up for detention and even when they were there, their behaviour was deplorable. The Deputy Head was obviously completely disillusioned with his job and gave NQTs like myself hardly any support. In fact he made us feel guilty when we asked him to intervene. The Headteacher felt she could solve behavioural problems through drama. However, the drama teacher who came in especially for this project left after one morning, never to return.

Thankfully I eventually took a permanent job in a small private Christian school where the staff and pupils were on the whole delightful. This job gave me the opportunity to really practice and improve my teaching skills since I was not simply exercising crowd control.

To return to the point of corporal punishment, I totally agree with David Skinner that it should be reintroduced to create a healthy element of fear amongst pupils. The majority would be too scared to 'cross the line' whereas, at the moment, the majority do not fear any person or any sanction. When we talk about fearing God, this is a healthy fear of punishment for persistent wrongdoing. If God is the loving Father we expect He is not going to allow his children to 'run wild' damaging themselves and others in the process. As loving teachers and parents, we must follow His example.

I would, though, like to sound a note of caution. It appears to me that in the past there were many abuses of corporal punishment and this must be strenuously avoided. I believe only certain members of staff should be able to inflict this kind of punishment and it should be rigorously controlled as to its severity, frequency, reasons why, etc. There is no doubt that for some pupils the lasting memory of corporal punishment instilled in them a sense of hate and sometimes desire for revenge whereas for others it kept them on the right path for life. If there are persistent re-offenders, then obviously some other more effective punishment must be found.

It is dreadful to see a generation so lost and unhappy through lack of discipline. The strain on our teachers will worsen if nothing is done to arrest this decline. With prisons full of young offenders and the exclusion rate ever worsening, is it not obvious to all concerned where the problem lies? What do other readers think? Should ACT institute a campaign to restore corporal punishment in schools?

Yours in Christ,

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notes in the post

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