

## Pain of the cane a distant memory

**In 1987, corporal punishment was in its dying days in New Zealand schools. Wintec journalism student Susana Talagi talks to teachers and a student about the practice of caning.**

IAN MCKINNEY remembers being caned frequently at secondary school.

"You'd come home and look in the mirror and you had big red lines across your bum, which would bruise. It would be quite sore to sit down for a couple of days."

McKinney, 37, now a police officer in Christchurch, was a student at Fraser High School in Hamilton in the 1980s.

He says he was caned throughout secondary school, but less frequently as he got older.

The pain varied from teacher to teacher.

"Some teachers it [would be] a couple of light whacks and you'd think, 'Oh, yeah nothing to it'. But when you got it from another teacher who put a bit of oomph into it, it'd bring a tear to your eye."

However, he says he never cried in front of the teacher who inflicted the punishment. "You didn't want them seeing you cry. But when you walked away you'd find it hard to breathe and you were sort of hyperventilating."

McKinney says schools had no obligation to tell parents when their children were caned. "I never used to tell my parents because dad would give me another walloping."

In 1987, corporal punishment was still practised in New Zealand schools but its days were numbered. It had just been banned in British state schools and many people were campaigning for similar action to be taken in New Zealand.

An anti-caning group had gained momentum fuelled by concern that some teachers were aggressively caning students for minor offences. Many schools began phasing the practice out and it was eventually abolished in 1989.

Tony Steel, principal of Hamilton Boys' High School from 1979 to 1990, says canings were carried out at his school only according to a strict formula.

"The caning was logged with the time, the date, the reason why, the teacher who caned, and it had to be witnessed."

He says he never caned a student himself, but adds with a smile: "They were sent to the deputy headmaster."

Susan Hassall, now headmaster of Hamilton Boys' High, was a young teacher at the school in 1987. She says she remembers increasing debate over corporal punishment and concern there would be a backlash



PICTURE: Times file

**Hamilton Boys' High School headmaster Susan Hassall says caning was "an appalling thing".**



PICTURE: Supplied

**Ian McKinney as a fresh faced third former in the 1980s.**

from parents and teachers because of its brutality.

"There was concern from some people that using corporal punishment was going to be a complete disaster."

Hassall, who is the only female principal of a boys' secondary school in New Zealand, now looks back on the practice as "an appalling thing". She says the challenge to teachers in 2007 is to incorporate some of the traditions of the past, "but add the best of the future".

"Kids haven't changed. They still want to be loved."

These days, Hamilton Boys' High School uses a demerit system for punishment. Being late for school earns five demerit points. Students who reach 100 demerits do a Saturday detention.

Martin Elliott, principal of Hamilton's Fraser High School, says he caned two students in his teaching career but does not regret it.

Nor does he agree with the abolishment of the cane. "For some kids, even now, I would rather cane them than expel them. I'm not convinced that total banning of corporal punishment is the correct thing."

He says some children need a physical correction. "A whack on the bum would change their behaviour."

Against a background of increasing violence among young people - one recent survey showed one in seven primary school teachers had been struck by pupils - some people are now calling for corporal punishment to be reintroduced in schools.

Bob McCoskrie, national director of the organisation Family First NZ, blames "political correctness" for increasing violence among young people. "It is significant that as schools have removed corporal punishment, schools have become more dangerous," he says.



**THAT WAS THEN: Former principal Tony Steel says in his day caning took place according to strict criteria.**

Ian McKinney says that as a police officer he sees huge differences in the relationships between students and teachers today compared with his own time at school.

"Now there is lack of respect for teachers. Kids come and go from school and swear at teachers."

McKinney, who has first-hand experience with juvenile offending, looks back on his caning experience with mixed feelings.

He says whacking a person with a stick was a "pretty high level of violence".

"If someone did that on the street, I would arrest them."

He concedes caning had an effect. "It was the pinnacle of punishment. It sort of kept you in line because you knew if you played up you were in for it. It worked for me, even though it hurt and it [was] pretty barbaric - some kids respond better to talking about things but I needed it whacked into me."

But he says the effect was only temporary. "It keeps you on the straight and narrow for a little while until you get your confidence back."