

The Christian Brothers and education

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Sir, – Fr Con McGillicuddy (January 4th) is correct when he writes that the Christian Brothers were not alone in using corporal punishment. However, in my experience not all Christian Brothers did so.

I attended a lay-run national school in Finglas during the 1960s and witnessed corporal punishment being regularly meted out by lay teachers. On one occasion I was caned three times on each hand by the lay assistant principal for not getting into line fast enough. He always used a whip-like cane that caused excruciating pain.

I subsequently attended St Kevin's CBS, Ballygall Road East, for three years from 1969 and never experienced, or witnessed, any corporal punishment. St Kevin's was then located in 12 prefabs and was run by the inspirational Br Edward McKinney. He was assisted by the Belfast-born Br Samson and a great group of lay teachers.

In the weeks leading up to our state exams, Br McKinney gave free additional classes in Latin and maths every Saturday. He would also ride his Vespa scooter around the late-night takeaways and fleshpots of Ballymun and Ballygall to spot any of his students who were swinging the lead and not at home studying. Br McKinney was determined that all his students should achieve their maximum potential in life and would quote the Italian maxim, "Dream big, be big". He spent the last 35 years of his life working with the poor in Zambia.

All Christian Brothers are now invariably portrayed as damaged ultra-nationalists and religious fanatics. This is unfair to the decent, hard-working Christian Brothers that many of us were lucky to have met. – Yours, etc,

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