

is only adequate when dealing with the educational functions of the College. But what proportion of members of the Council and its key committees has no academic appointment or University affiliation? If only a minute percentage, is there not a danger that the needs of, and problems experienced by, the majority of psychiatrists may be overlooked? It is not a question of good will: this is not in question. By the nature of things, each section sees its own situation in sharper focus than that of its neighbour. It is also likely that regional consultants may be better informed about, and have more direct experience of, some of the problems the College has to consider. Elections are of course open and democratic, but over-worked regional consultants, unable to delegate their responsibilities, are not keen to stand and take on additional medico-political work. The College should address itself to this problem and find a solution to it. Less disparity between staffing ratios may lead to a more representative College structure. The RMPA was considered by some to be a 'Super-intendents' club'. We must avoid the emergence of an updated version of this cynical description.

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CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

DEAR SIR,

Our memorandum on corporal punishment in schools (*Bulletin*, April, pp 62-4) illustrates once again the hazards of straying out of one's field of expertise. Our learned representatives rightly note that any comments must be based on 'informed professional opinion' as there are few special studies on the subject, but then venture the conclusion that 'there is nothing to support the continuance of corporal punishment in schools!' As there is no evidence for or against, why should we recommend abolition?

Some conspicuous absurdities in the memorandum perhaps result from a failure to consult psychiatrists who have taught in schools (there are a few such). For example, 'many children are themselves horrified by the idea that teachers should inflict physical punishment on a child' is unbelievably naive, unless we are speaking solely of neurotic children and special schools. It is more difficult to excuse the failure of logical thought behind the repeated comment that 'the same names appear over and over again in the punishment book'. By this argument the Maudsley, too, should be abolished, since the same names

appear over and over again in our admissions book.

I deeply regret that our representatives have tendered a memorandum without considering the practical realities involved. These include:

- (i) a society which continues to force its children to attend school by law, regardless of interests or desires, up to an ever-increasing age limit;
- (ii) an educational process which includes compulsory mathematics, history and religion, subjects which have little appeal to a substantial and vociferous minority of children;
- (iii) social mores requiring teachers to suppress various natural activities of children while in school, including homosexual and heterosexual drives;
- (iv) a political system demanding that teachers cope simultaneously with groups of 35-40 children, often of varying abilities and interests.

In these circumstances, as in an army, there must regrettably be means of coercion. The College has misread its brief in attempting to recommend whether punishment itself is desirable: the problem is *which* punishment?

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Dr Carr's letter was forwarded to Dr J. H. Kahn, who was the Chairman of the Committee which produced the Memorandum on Corporal Punishment, and the following is his reply:

DEAR SIR,

Dr Carr points unerringly to the confusion which arises when two opposing principles are followed simultaneously to their logical conclusion. In this case the principles are the freedom to choose one's behaviour whatever the consequences, as against the enforcement of what is thought to be good together with prohibition of what is thought to be bad. A balance is achieved by the acceptance of changes in what is tolerable within a particular community at a particular time.

The use of corporal punishment in schools is no longer as generally acceptable as it was in the past. Views amongst the general public and amongst psychiatrists are not uniform, and those initially responsible for the College Report on Corporal Punishment in Schools did not expect the unanimous agreement of their colleagues.

Dr Carr's criticisms can themselves be challenged. I take it that his suggestion that the Maudsley 'should be abolished' was not meant seriously, but if treatment