

## ***With the Enactment of the Basic and Secondary School Act of 2023, School Authorities Battle With Corporal Punishment***

***By Saidu Ibrahim Kamara***

The enactment of the Basic and Secondary Education Act, 2023, which bans corporal punishment in schools across Sierra Leone, has sparked a nationwide debate. While the law aligns with international human rights standards and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), many educators and parents believe it has left schools struggling to maintain discipline.

### **Teachers Left Out of the Conversation**

School authorities argue that they were not adequately consulted before passing the law. Joseph Kosia, principal of John F. Kennedy Secondary School in Freetown, says teachers were not allowed to share their perspectives on alternative disciplinary methods.

*“We were not consulted on what measures should replace corporal punishment,” Kosia says. “Now, we are expected to discipline pupils without the one tool that traditionally maintained order in classrooms, “the cane.”*

His concerns are echoed by Abu Bakar Kamara, a senior teacher at Dr. S.M. Broderick Municipal Secondary School, who says the absence of corporal punishment has emboldened some students.

*“Since the ban, lateness, recklessness, and even drug use around the school compound have become rampant,” Kamara explains.*

*Another secondary school teacher, speaking anonymously, was blunter: “The cane is the only thing students’ fear. Without it, lawlessness has taken over.”*

### **A Divided Public Reaction**

While human rights advocates applaud the move, some parents worry that the law removes a key tool in shaping their children’s behavior. Amanita Sesay, a mother

of three school-going children, believes that controlled physical discipline plays an essential role in education.

*“Physical pain is necessary to shape a child’s future,”* she asserts.

Another parent of five, who asked to remain anonymous, agrees, but with caution.

*“Teachers should use discipline wisely. Some take it too far,”* she says.

She and other parents cite increasing reports of students assaulting teachers and classmates, a trend they attribute to the removal of corporal punishment.

### **The Legal and Historical Context**

The ban stems from Sierra Leone’s post-war push for a new human rights culture, as outlined by the TRC. The Commission’s Volume 2, Chapter 3, Page 134 strongly condemned corporal punishment, stating:

*“Children are the future of Sierra Leone. There is no justification for allowing another generation to suffer brutality, whether in the name of education or ideology. The Commission recommends the outlawing of corporal punishment against children, in both schools and homes. This is an imperative recommendation.”*

This stance influenced the 2023 law, specifically Section 72 (1) of the Basic and Secondary Education Act, which declares:

*“Corporal punishment and all forms of degrading punishment designed to cause or create the reasonable fear of physical pain in pupils, administered or threatened for domination or control, are prohibited.”*

### **Finding New Ways to Enforce Discipline**

Despite resistance to the law, some school authorities have found alternative ways to maintain order. Principal Joseph Kosia says his school now requires misbehaving students to leave the classroom and calls their parents to intervene.

*“For me, this is the best way to discipline a child without using physical pain,”*  
he says.

While the transition away from corporal punishment remains contentious, the government insists that schools must adapt. But with increasing concerns from both educators and parents, the question remains: can Sierra Leone’s schools maintain discipline without the cane?

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