



Boys of hard knocks: Ross Scrymgeour with happily muddied pupils Scott Maultsaid, 12, left, and Jordie Thomas, 11.

Picture: LYNDA FORREST

Boys just want to play rough

TY SHARPE

Bubble-wrapped boys are being let out on crucial rough and tumble in a "feminised" school system that doesn't allow them to puff steam, a headmaster says. Ross Scrymgeour, head of private Hereworth School, Havelock Bay, says the banning of physical games like bullrush and roller-ball illustrates a "softly wrapped" approach to education that does not suit boys. At his boys-only school's "play rough" philosophy made pupils more attentive in class and taught them about physical boundaries. "Boys need to be exposed to this kind of thing," Mr Scrymgeour says. "I'm not talking about brawls,

or fights, but physicality. Even the meekest and mildest, when put in a group of their own ability, will get something out of that. "It's a natural part of their behaviour, going back to hunter-gatherer times." Girls consistently outperform boys at secondary school. Some commentators blame the National Certificate of Educational Achievement's heavy reliance on internal assessment, which they say suits girls better. Mr Scrymgeour said the feminising of New Zealand schools was breeding boys who could not express themselves or cope when things did not go their way. "More and more of the curriculum has been integrated to suit

girls. There were things I just couldn't do in the co-ed situation. As soon as we started encouraging boys to be a bit physical, some parents would cause all sorts of hassles." Hereworth is one of seven private boys' schools in New Zealand. Sport is compulsory and supervised rough play encouraged. Mr Scrymgeour said the "designed for boys" philosophy had brought academic improvement. A Hereworth team won last year's Hawke's Bay literary quiz. "Some kids we get have been held back from having any physical contact because they might get hurt. Boys need to find out how they react to these things. "It equips them for life's

knocks. It's not fair to boys to let them avoid taking knocks." Joseph Driessen, who runs an international consultancy on boys' education, agreed. "There's a lot of research on this. Brain scan research shows boys actually need physical movement for their brains to operate properly." Risk-taking raised adrenaline and testosterone to natural levels, he said. Educational researcher Sarah Farquhar said she hoped Mr Scrymgeour was not criticised for his approach. "I've been arguing against the feminising of the education system for over 10 years. There's this bubble-wrapping of children... and this removal of all risk-taking."

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