

Public statement in response to the St James & St Vedast Inquiry

16th JANUARY 2006

The Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group welcomes the publication of the Report by Mr James Townend QC into the St James and St Vedast Schools in London. The Inquiry's findings of excessive use of corporal punishment, physical and mental mistreatment of pupils and "*criminal assault*" by teachers vindicate those former pupils and parents who have long campaigned for the truth to be established. The failings of the Governing Body of St James and St Vedast Schools - and the finding that for 20 years the Schools were in fact run by the School of Economic Science (SES / SoES) - raise profound questions for the Schools today.

The St James Schools have issued a statement accepting the Inquiry's findings; they must now resolve to act on the findings. We call for immediate action including the resignation of Mr. Roger Pincham CBE, Chair of the Board of Governors since 1975.

This public statement sets out our full response to the St James and St Vedast Inquiry

Setting up of the Inquiry

Whilst the chairing of the Inquiry and the Inquiry Report were wholly independent of the Schools, their approach to setting up the Inquiry has had a significant impact on its result and raises questions about the Schools motivations. To what extent was this a damage limitation exercise and to what extent was it motivated by a genuine desire for the truth?

The Governors' initial Inquiry proposal denied the participation of female complainants and parents, covered only the Boys Schools and restricted complaints to the period from 1975-84. During the establishment of the Inquiry the Schools initially restricted the number of former pupils it notified. The original choice of an 'independent' Inquiry Chairman was subsequently found to have a connection to the Chair of the Board of Governors. The Schools' statement - that their consultation with some complainants led to changes in the final terms of reference - should not be read to imply they were willing to make these changes. In any event, as the Inquiry Report states, the final terms of the Inquiry were "*not wholly accepted*" by some participants.

We are aware of a number of potential complainants who were not informed of the Inquiry and that some complaints relating to the current Schools were not submitted due to the presence of the Schools' solicitors at the Inquiry hearings. Nevertheless 81 complaints were submitted to the Inquiry including from a former headteacher.

Limitation of the scope of the Inquiry

The Governors limited the scope of the Inquiry to "complaints about past discipline policy and practice" at the Schools. The Inquiry was therefore prevented from addressing complaints and significant concerns about other aspects of the Schools. The Inquiry was able to establish the extent of the relationship between the School of Economic Science and the St James and St Vedast Schools. It was not, however, able to investigate whether the SES / SoES's ideology propagated through the Schools was detrimental to children, nor was it able to assess the extent to which the SES / SoES is still using the Schools to recruit children. Aspects of the SES / SoES's 'philosophy' which have been criticised in the past include its views on homosexuality, its disposition to the disabled and the role of women and girls in society and the family. The occurrence of marriages of a number of St James and St Vedast 6th form girls to teachers at both Schools raises other concerns.

The extent to which the Inquiry was able to assess issues of wider pastoral care and child protection policies and practice also appears to have been limited.

The 'General Report' of the Inquiry

We thank the Inquiry Chairman, Mr James Townend, for conducting the Inquiry, and are grateful to him for the sensitivity showed when dealing with witnesses and complainants, for whom this process has been particularly painful. We are disappointed that the Governors limited the scope of the Inquiry, but appreciate the Inquiry Chairman's of his thoroughness and the clarity of his findings. The high standard used for ascertaining the credibility of complaints gives veracity to these findings.

The Inquiry found that when the Schools opened there was no formal discipline policy and teachers' treatment of children was not properly monitored. Until the early 1990s, School Governors had little involvement in dealing

with complaints from parents or in the appointment of their staff. The SES / SoES had a “powerful influence” on the running of St James and St Vedast Schools but “the Governors were not in any real sense in charge of the Schools”

It is on record that the ‘parent body’ of the Schools met in the presence of senior staff, and the current headteacher Mr David Boddy (in his role at the time as SES spokesman), after negative newspaper reports in 1983. Some parents complained about punishment methods and lack of transparency. They called for the establishment of a Parent Teacher Association and the appointment of non SES governors. An internal report thirteen years later (1996) called for a more open and transparent organisation, for the Governors to govern more proactively and for an end to SES / SoES involvement in the Schools. The Inquiry found that the Schools have failed to act on many these recommendations.

As of 2006 the Governing body is largely composed of SES / SoES members, all staff in the junior and two thirds in the Senior Schools, are members of the SES / SoES.

The Inquiry found physical and mental mistreatment of pupils took place in the Boys' Schools. Several boys were “*criminally assaulted*”, punched in the face or in the stomach, kicked, struck from behind, slapped about the face or thrown across a classroom. The Inquiry found this to be unjustifiable, “*unreasonable and criminal.*” Pupils were damaged by their experiences in the Schools and some continue to suffer.

Corporal punishment was found to be harsh and frequent, but not unlawful. Miss Caldwell [Girl School Head 1975-95] stated that corporal punishment was never allowed in the Girls Schools; however the Inquiry found that it was practiced until at least 1982.

Some girls were mistreated physically and mentally by male teachers. Girls and boys were verbally humiliated. Public or private interrogations of girls and boys involving attacks or criticism that were hurtful and distressing took place. These were used “*in order to obtain confessions.*”

The Inquiry found no evidence of sexual abuse in any of the Schools.

Full details of mistreatment that occurred at the Schools and details of perpetrators are contained in a second confidential Report to Governors. We do not know if the confidential Report contains recommendations.

The St James Schools today

The welfare of children at St James today is paramount. In light of the Inquiry finding that abuse did indeed occur, the Schools’ assurances that ‘everything is OK now’ can no longer be taken at face value. The Schools must demonstrate that change in both policy and practice is real. Such change will ensure that the Schools grow and thrive.

We recognise that there have been changes. The emphasis on ensuring all teaching staff are appropriately qualified is welcome. Changes in headship and other key staff have given an opportunity for institutional change to be initiated. The fact that a large proportion of the pupil intake is no longer children of SES / SoES parents is significant. The clearly stated policy of no physical punishment is welcomed. We hope that these developments reflect wider cultural change within the Schools management and the SES / SoES.

The Inquiry Report is however ambiguous about whether the School is now genuinely transparent, particularly in relation to the SES / SoES, and key questions including the role of the Governing Body and who really runs the Schools remain. The Inquiry Report states:

“there seems to have been little involvement [until early 1990s] of the Governors in staff appointments or complaints by parents” ...and...the Governors were not in any real sense in charge of the Schools” (GR 5.11.4)

“initially the governors were chosen by Leon Maclaren [late head of SES / SoES]... and... “as late as 1995 Lambie [the head of the SES / SoES] was in apposition to exercise real influence over senior appointments [at the Schools]” (GR 1.1.4e) *The current headteacher of the Girls School, Mrs Laura Hyde was appointed directly by the head of the SES [SoES] Donald Lambie in 1995* (GR 6.1.4)

A confidential internal report in 1996 (The St James Schools Report) concluded that the “*the St James set-up is as yet, far from transparent*”, that it “*is really still a school for “SES families”, controlled by the SES...*” (GR 1.3c). The Inquiry chairman asks...“*Has the transparency advocated in the 1996 Report really been created?*” (GR 6.1.4)

The published Inquiry Report does not clarify whether any of the current teaching staff at the Schools today are amongst those found to have criminally assaulted or mistreated pupils (although we assume that the Confidential Inquiry Report to Governors will have done so).

As the Inquiry Report highlighted, the Schools have recently received excellent inspection results. It should be noted, however, that the Schools also received positive inspection reports during the period when some of the worst abuses were found to have occurred.

It should also be noted that another member of the family of SES / SoES children's schools, the Plato School in Amsterdam, closed in 1990 following two Police investigations into illegal physical punishments. It is unclear whether any of the former Plato School teachers subsequently held or hold posts in any of the SES / SoES 'family' of schools in the UK and abroad.

The Schools' response to the Inquiry

The Schools response contained in brief public statements from the Governors and from the Headteachers is woefully inadequate and fails to specify whether they intend to take any action in response to the Inquiry. Given the implications of the Inquiry findings for the current Schools it is inconceivable that no action should be taken.

We welcome the decision of the governing body to accept the findings of the Inquiry and their statement of 'regret' that some pupils were mistreated and criminally assaulted by their teachers. The statements from the Governing Body and the Headteachers, however, demonstrate a failure to understand the nature of the deep and lasting damage and trauma caused to some former pupils by the Schools. We note the governors' desire for reconciliation and support the Inquiry Report's conclusion that, unless there is an acknowledgment that some pupils were damaged and some still suffer from their experiences at the Schools, *"talk of reconciliation is a waste of breath"*. (GR 7.1.3)

We consider the governors' apology contained within the *'Statement from the Governing Body in Response to Inquiry Findings'* (14/1/06) inadequate. The apology is limited and given as part of a general statement whose primary audience is not the recipients of the apology. The presentation and 'packaging' of the Inquiry to protect the current Schools is understandable, but undermines the sincerity of such an apology.

There has been no public response from the SES / SoES, who the Inquiry found were in effect running the Schools for many years.

Demands for immediate action

In light of the Inquiry's findings, we demand that the governing body of St James Schools take the following immediate action:

1. The removal of Mr Roger Pincham CBE as current Chairman of the Board of Governors and trustee of the Independent Education Association (IEA), and of Mr Bernard White, Mr Bernard Saunders and Dr James Armstrong as current Honorary Governors of the St James Schools. We regard the position of these four governors as untenable in the light of Inquiry's findings that children were mistreated and criminally assaulted whilst the Schools were under their governance. They bear moral responsibility and, by their own admission, failed in the discharge of their duties.
2. Issue a public apology on behalf of the Schools addressed directly to all former pupils. The written apology should be sincere, unqualified and unequivocally acknowledge the extent of the mistreatment and its damaging effect on pupils. The apology should include the Schools' acceptance of the findings of the Inquiry but contain no other statements.

In light of the Inquiry's findings that the SES / SoES ran the Schools, we also demand that:

1. Mr Donald Lambie, current head of the School of Economic Science (SES / SoES), issue a public apology on behalf of the organisation addressed directly to all former pupils of St James and St Vedast. The written apology should be sincere, unqualified and unequivocally acknowledge the extent of the mistreatment and its damaging effect on pupils. The apology should include the SES / SoES's acceptance of the findings of the Inquiry but contain no further statements.

In light of the Inquiry's findings of abuse at St James Boys Schools under the under the headship of Mr Nicholas Debenham, we also demand:

1. The immediate resignation of Mr Nicholas Debenham as a Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Education Renaissance Trust. Following the Inquiry findings we consider his position as chair of the organisation charged with mainstreaming and expanding the "*St James educational approach*" around the world untenable.

For the Governors urgent consideration

In light of the Inquiry and with regard to the situation of the St James Schools today, we call on the governing body to urgently address the following:

1. Confirm whether any of the staff currently teaching at the Schools are amongst those found to have criminally assaulted or mistreated pupils.
2. Confirm whether any of the staff found to have criminally assaulted or mistreated pupils are now teaching in any of the 10 St James 'sister' schools in the UK or worldwide.
3. Confirm that appropriate education and child protection authorities including the Metropolitan Police have been notified of staff found to have criminally assaulted or mistreated pupils, who are no longer employed by the Schools but who may be teaching in other schools.
4. Whether your position on the establishment of a St James Parent Teachers Association remains that you "*would not agree to the establishment of an association which had the power to bring direct influence on the way the Schools are run. We would consider that to be unjustifiable interference in the freedom of professional people to do their job*" (Letter to parents from St James Schools 1983 following parent complaints and requests for a PTA. [Hounham and Hogg: Secret Cult 1985])
5. Whether, now that the Schools have found their feet, the appointment of Parent Governors is desirable. It is our understanding that as of 2005 there were none. Laura Hyde responded to a prospective parent at a 2005 open day "*No parent Governors, no*"
6. Given the now high proportion of non - SES / SoES parents, whether it is acceptable that the composition of the Governing Body it almost entirely drawn from the SES / SoES membership.
7. Confirm that the SES / SoES are no longer involved in appointing staff (including the headteachers) and that the Governors are now solely responsible for the selection and appointment of staff at the Schools
8. Take steps to ensure the complete separation of the SES / SoES and the St James Schools, advocated by the 1996 Report commissioned by Mr Lambie is now finally implemented in full.
9. Notify all members of the current school community (including parents of children enrolled in the Schools) of the existence of the Inquiry, and make the Inquiry Report available to them

This statement has been sent to Mr Roger Pincham (the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the St James Schools), Mr Nicholas Debenham (former Headteacher St James School) and Mr Donald Lambie (current Head of SES / SoES).

<Ends>

Contacts: Parents and Pupils Inquiry Action Group - Email: info.Inquiryactiongroup@gawab.com

www.StJamesInquiry.org