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Statement from the Governors

The Townend Inquiry - Current Teachers

The Townend Inquiry into discipline policy and practice 20-30 years ago at St Vedast and St James school received complaints against three teachers who are still on the staff of the St James schools.

The Governors have studied the report of Mr Townend QC and its findings, and in relation to those three teachers they have taken the following action -

1. They appointed a Committee of the Governors to carry out a review of the entire employment record of each of those teachers and make recommendations to the Governing Body.
2. The Committee received reports of the general response to the Townend Report from within the School.
3. Each of the teachers attended a private meeting so that the Committee could hear the teacher's response to Mr Townend's specific findings.
4. The Committee took professional advice as to the law relating to child protection, employment and procedural fairness and followed that advice when deciding on its recommendation in each case.
5. When considering whether disciplinary action was appropriate, the Committee considered the following options in each case: dismissal; suspension; a formal reprimand; a formal warning, and as an alternative to these, no formal action.

As part of their review of Mr Townend's report, the Committee also sought assurances from the Headteachers that proper monitoring of classroom behaviour and discipline is in place together with a complaints procedure that complies with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 and that the Schools' child protection policies and staff training and related processes are current and up to date. The Committee received these assurances and were satisfied as to those matters.

The Committee took account of the difficulty any individual would experience when asked to recall the detail of events that happened up to thirty years ago.

The first member of staff ("Teacher A") had been accused of throwing chalk and board rubbers at pupils in class. He recalled one specific incident from the period 1975-85 when he threw a blackboard rubber and chalk at an inattentive pupil. He also admitted that he was sometimes excessive in his general approach to discipline, a view accepted by Mr Townend. Teacher A has formally apologised to former pupils and to the Governing Body. The Committee took note that Teacher A's record in the classroom and in the pastoral care of his pupils, over the last twenty years and more, has been more than satisfactory. The Committee was satisfied that the Teacher's apology was genuine and heartfelt. The Committee decided to recommend that no disciplinary action was warranted in the circumstances. Teacher A made a commitment to participate in a reconciliation process.

The second member of staff ("Teacher B") had been accused of harsh treatment in a series of incidents between twenty and thirty years ago. Mr Townend accepted these accusations as proved. When Teacher B met the Committee he accepted responsibility and apologised unreservedly for his actions many years ago. The Committee took note that Teacher B's record in the school and in matters of pastoral care and discipline has been more than satisfactory for more than twenty years. The Committee considered that after so many years there were no legal grounds for action leading to Teacher B's dismissal or suspension. The Committee decided to recommend a Formal Warning, which Teacher B accepted, that a future incident of harsh treatment would result in his dismissal. Teacher B has made a commitment to participate in a reconciliation process.

The third member of staff ("Teacher C") had been accused of harsh discipline, again many years ago. He vigorously contested certain of the allegations made to the Inquiry. Nonetheless Mr Townend found the complainants reliable and made a finding that Teacher C's treatment of some of his pupils was harsh and occurred because of loss of temper, but he cleared the teacher of accusations of sadism. Mr Townend commented that he felt the teacher had matured very significantly since the time of the incidents. The Committee took into account evidence from the present Headteacher that Teacher C has not been the subject of a complaint since the events reported to the Inquiry from more than twenty years ago. The Committee found that Teacher C had demonstrated control of his temper to the required standard for many years. This finding was consistent with other observations made by Mr Townend. Teacher C accepted Mr Townend's findings and apologised unreservedly for his actions many years ago. The Committee decided to recommend that Teacher C receives a Formal Reprimand, which will remain on his employment record. The Committee decided also to recommend a Formal Warning that any future incident of harsh treatment would result in his dismissal. Teacher C accepted this decision and made a commitment to participate in a reconciliation process.

The Committee noted that all of these teachers were cleared by Mr Townend of any sadistic tendency or behaviour, and no teacher, either past or present was accused of any sexual impropriety.

The Governing Body considered the Committee's reports at their meeting on Thursday 9 March 2006. They accepted the Committee's recommendations and decided accordingly. Formal written notification was subsequently sent to Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C respectively.