



# St James & St Vedast Schools Independent Inquiry Report

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## Statement from the Governing Body in Response to Inquiry Findings

*On the publication of a Report by Mr James Townend, QC, MA(Oxon), following an independent Inquiry into discipline policy and its application at St Vedast and St James Schools during their formative years from 1975, Mr Roger Pincham, CBE, the Chairman of Governors of the St James Independent Schools, said:*

“The Governors express their thanks to the Inquiry Chairman, Mr James Townend QC, for accepting their commission to conduct an independent Inquiry into discipline policy and practice at St Vedast and St James Schools during their formative years from 1975.

The Governors acknowledge Mr Townend's conscientious work to establish which of the complaints relating to school discipline during those years are justified. The Governors accept Mr Townend's findings as to those matters, and apologise unreservedly to those whose welfare and happiness were affected by the disciplinary regime at the time.

Most of the incidents of harsh or over-zealous punishment identified by the Inquiry Chairman, relate to the Boys School between 1975-85. The Inquiry Report also notes the evidence received by the Inquiry that many boys speak of their time in the Schools as a happy one. This is supported by Inspection Reports from 1984 onwards, and by other findings noted in Mr Townend's Report.

It is clear, nonetheless, that the disciplinary policy was not sufficiently controlled or supervised during those early years. Some physical punishments, that were lawful at the time, were too harsh and too frequent; some acts went beyond lawful physical punishment and were wholly unacceptable. That this could have happened in our schools, even a long time ago, is deeply regretted. The Governors whole-heartedly adopt the Inquiry Chairman's hope, now that the facts have been established, that there will be a period of reconciliation between aggrieved former pupils and their teachers. The Governors will support this process in every way they can.

The Inquiry Report notes that the schools have modernised and developed since those early years. Our schools are thriving communities with a transparent and purposeful culture, welcoming all visitors. Our position in the National League Tables each year, places us among the most successful schools in the country. All forms of physical punishment ceased more than a decade ago. The schools are proud of the quality of the young people emerging from them over the years, and of all the considerable achievements they have attained in their professional and personal lives. Much of this would not have been possible without their St James education and the extraordinary dedication of head teachers and staff ever since the opening of the Schools over thirty years ago.

The Governors' decision to establish this Inquiry and publish its Chairman's General Report, even though there was no legal obligation to do so, was undertaken out of a sense of responsibility felt towards the whole school community, which includes our former pupils.

The Inquiry will have achieved its primary aim if those who brought their concerns and responses to the Inquiry Chairman feel they have been heard. The ultimate aim is personal

reconciliation and we will continue to work towards this.

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## The Schools Today

### **A joint statement by the Head Teachers of the St James Independent Schools, Olympia & Twickenham**

“When Mr Leon MacLaren started these schools he said that they needed to be open to all who wanted this kind of education, a schooling based on strong values where young men and women could be helped to discover the source of human happiness by leading lives of real use to the societies in which they would be living.

At each of our schools there is a wonderfully committed staff of dedicated, professional teachers. Each child is special, and our approach is designed, from the earliest stage, to ensure that body, mind and spirit can be nourished and enriched so as to allow each individual's qualities and strengths to be magnified.

Without the pioneering approach of our former colleagues we could not be as confident in our efforts today. Of course mistakes will always be made when something new is underway, and these are regrettable. We very much hope this Inquiry has enabled pupils with a past grievance to set it behind them and to come and see the schools of today for themselves.

Between us we look after more than 800 pupils. Nearly everyone who visits, including the official Inspectors, comment on how happy the schools are. Academically, we achieve excellent results, and in some cases, outstanding results, as various league tables testify. Our pastoral care is loving and in line with the best educational practice throughout the country.

Our approach to philosophy remains centred on the idea that we are all members of the same human family, and the fact that we now have all of the great cultural and faith groups represented at the schools shows that we are touching many hearts with our message of tolerance, respect, understanding and unity. Some have commented that we are ploughing new furrows in the multi-faith educational debate.

We very much hope this Inquiry allows reconciliation and settlement of past differences. We are looking forward to a very bright and happy future, and like all good schools, we deeply value the support of our alumni, a considerable number of whom are now sending their own children into our care.”

**Mr Paul Moss**, Head St James Junior Schools for Boys & Girls

**Mrs Laura Hyde**, Head, St James Senior School for Girls

**Mr David Boddy**, Head, St James Senior School for Boys

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