

# Public school head faces caning probe

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ALLEGATIONS of excessive caning by a Kensington public school's headmaster are being investigated by Whitehall school inspectors.

After the disclosure that 16 of the 580 top independent schools were still beating pupils, in the Evening Standard on 5 October, the Department of Education revealed it was probing the extent of caning at St James', Queens Gate.

This is one of the strictest schools in Britain. Pop music is banned, private mixed-sex parties for teenage pupils in their own homes are forbidden and Sanskrit is compulsory from the age of five.

A department spokesman said today: "Following a routine visit by inspectors, the department and the inspectors have been discussing the use of corporal punishment at this school."

Headmaster of the 343-pupil school, which charges fees of £2765 a year, Mr Nicholas Debenham, 57, a Cambridge graduate, wrote to parents when caning was banned in State education in 1987, saying: "My view is

by Bruce Kemble

that physical punishment is a useful aid to discipline and in some cases a valuable factor in moulding character. Discipline should not be too soft, otherwise boys grow up weak."

Younger pupils, aged between four and ten, he said, must avoid "too much sleep, bad food, irregular or unmeasured days and too much television".

He wrote: "Television is the most harmful influence we find among junior school children. The easy step is to get rid of your set.

"One father recently put his in the dustbin. Failing that, put it in a room which is cold, damp and uncomfortable."

The most harmful factors in the senior school, he said, were "bad literature, pop music, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, the computer and (of course) girls".

He said: "It would be nice if a generation of young people could live through their school and university years free of the obsession

to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, a relationship which is productive of trouble of all sorts.

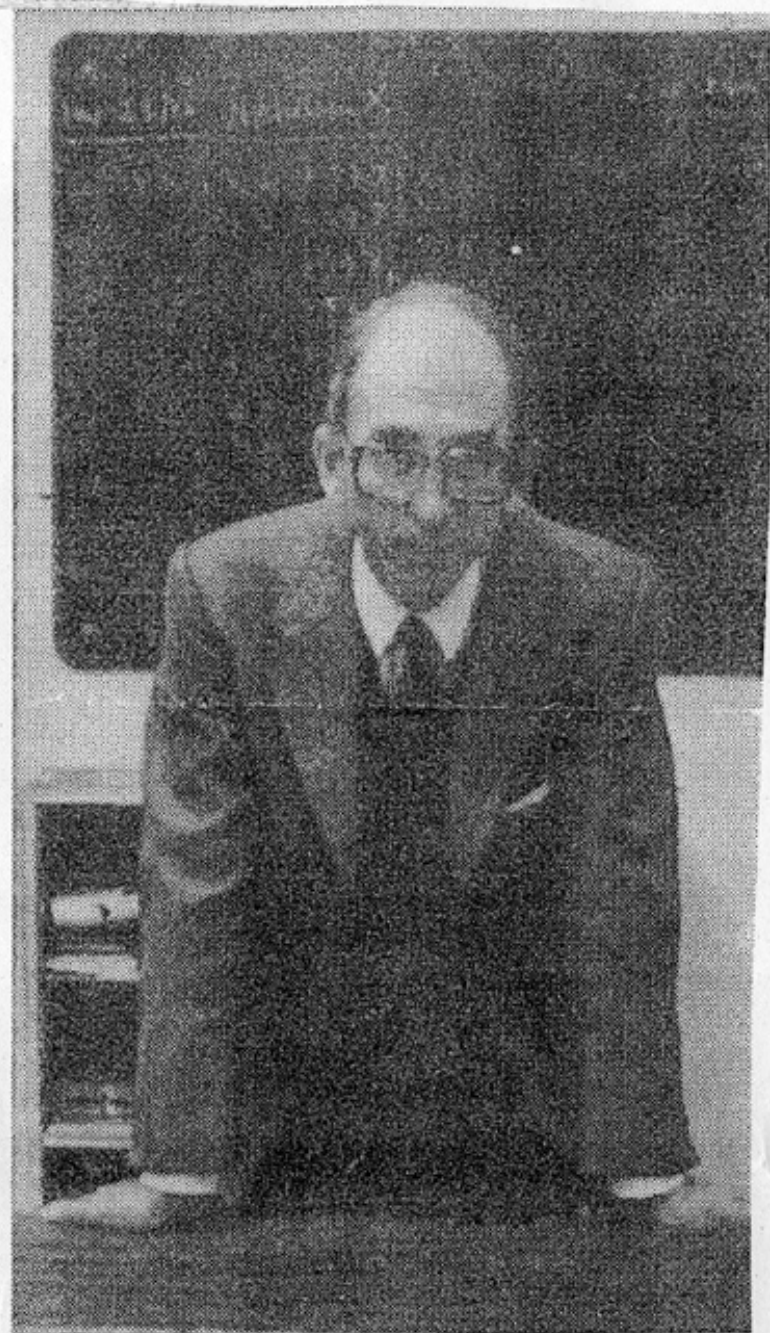
"I would like pop music banned from all boys in St James School. The only practical step is to forbid all kinds of modern music made for the popular market and especially the private machine usually known as the Walkman."

Mr Debenham said today: "I don't believe in putting up with nonsense from the boys. I haven't seen any reason to change my views on punishment.

"I remember once an unruly class needed more discipline than usual. And I caned half the class. So far this term I haven't caned anybody, but I caned seven times last term.

"The inspectors reminded me corporal punishment should not be excessive nor unreasonable. They also said an adult witness should always be present, but I haven't always adhered to that.

"I still frown on pop music. Heavy metal leads to drug-taking."



The man who banned pop music, Mr Debenham, a St James' junior school last night