

The Mail on Sunday, October 13, 1996

THEY REFUSE TO TEACH - AND THE PUPILS WHO BACK BEATINGS



EIGHT words in the prospectus of a small independent school on the banks of the Thames mark it out from the rest.

St James retains corporal punishment for senior boys.

While Elon, Harrow and Rugby have succumbed to politically correct pressure to ban the cane, parents sending 10-year-olds to this traditional school in Twickenham, South-West London, have to sign a form permitting its use if necessary.

Simple

And as the Government examines how it could bring back corporal punishment to state schools, headmaster Nicholas Debenham is adamant that caning works.

What's more, most of his pupils agree.

Yet Mr Debenham's is certainly a lone voice, the antithesis of the views of the liberal-minded educational establishment, the very people now battling to enforce discipline in class.

Corporal punishment has been outlawed in state schools 10 years ago... and any school would find this hard to deny.

Even the boys here voted to keep the cane



CONVIVIAL: St James School oozes care and purpose

difference between right and wrong,' he says. 'They don't mind a simple whack on the backside if it is just.'

This mild-mannered Cambridge graduate, head of £5,000-a-year St James since it was founded 22 years ago, believes society has suffered since corporal punishment was outlawed

in state schools 10 years ago... and any school would find this hard to deny.

His beliefs go back to childhood - he was caned at a Berkshire prep school before attending Radley College in Oxfordshire.

Yet to most heads - and even parents - the words corporal punishment go

hand-in-hand with repression and classroom brutality.

St James, though - where there was a 100 per cent pass rate at GCSE and A-level - oozes conviviality and purpose.

And when its 180 boys were asked recently if the cane should be banned, the majority voted No.

Senior prefect Simon Coulson, 18, says: 'There's certainly a fear of it, but it is more a deterrent than anything. Boys know it will be used for repeated serious offences.'

But caning - three whacks across the backside in the head's study - is resorted to only after several warnings.

Mr Debenham's argument for retaining corporal punishment will surprise many.

'The real care of children is a two-handed operation - the hand of love and the hand of punishment. You



CANER: Headmaster Nicholas Debenham' Picture: PHILIP IDE

must use them both.' Parent Marian Boddy, who has two sons at St James, agrees.

'They've always been happy there,' she says. 'We chose the school for its style of education - and strict discipline is part of that.'

Even so, Mr Debenham

rarely has to use his cane, and now keeps it at home.

Last year only one boy, aged 14, was beaten.

And the head would be pleased if he never had to use the cane again.

'I keep it,' he says, 'because I reckon the country needs it.'