

The Independent, London, 30 October 1996

## **Caring headteacher who believes beating can be good for his boys**

By Charlie Bain

St James independent school for boys in Twickenham, south-west London, is one of the last bastions of corporal punishment.

While most public schools have bowed to political pressure in the last decade and followed state schools in abolishing the cane, St James has struck a traditionalist stance.

Yet in explaining the policy, Nicholas Debenham, the headmaster, discusses care for the pupils as much as discipline and describes his school of 180 boys as very happy. "You've got to have love on one hand and discipline on the other - an awful lot of love and a little bit of discipline," he said.

"If you have that and a proper relationship of trust and respect between pupils and teachers, which is what there should be, then that's the real foundation for the child's education."

The cane -- three strokes administered to the backside -- is an ultimate sanction when pupils behave really badly.

"There are certain things I wouldn't put up with," Mr Debenham said. He cites deliberate cruelty to another child, repeated lying to gain advantage, or serious theft.

But there is nothing vicious or violent about caning. "People should be able to tell the difference between a vicious assault and properly measured discipline."

He believes punishment is preferable to expulsion. "If you expel the boy, you just pass the problem on to someone else."

Outside St James, the pupils were adamant that corporal punishment worked.

Richard Smith, 16, said that he had received one stroke of the cane when he was aged 12 for skipping a number of detentions.

"I accepted it because I realised what I'd done," he said. "Lines wouldn't have been a deterrent and detention obviously wasn't, but getting the cane made me think again."

Another pupil, Simon Bonell, 17, admitted he was worried about the cane when he first arrived at the school.

"I think a lot of the younger boys are worried about the cane, but that's why it's such a good deterrent," he said.

"I went through a stage where I missed class a lot. One day I didn't go to assembly and the culmination of offences meant I got two strokes of the cane. I had bruises for a couple of days but I learnt my lesson."

Minal Patel, 16, who arrived in the fifth form at St James five weeks ago from another public school, Mill Hill in north London, said he immediately noticed the high level of discipline at the school.

"It's a lot stricter here than at Mill Hill," he said. "That, no doubt, is due to the cane to some extent. But a lot of my friends thought it was kind of strange to come to a school that dished out corporal punishment."

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