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# Gazette

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Internet chatroom led to probe into events in 1970s and 1980s

# INQUIRY INTO PUPIL CLAIMS

By **Andreas Christophorus**

AN INQUIRY called by a private school into alleged past mistreatment of pupils has found that some had been subjected to unreasonable punishments.

St James Independent School for Senior Girls which is now based in West Kensington funded the inquiry itself after former pupils set up an internet chatroom which was highly critical of practices in the 1970s and 80s. The school had no legal obligation to do so, but took the action to heal a rift between former teachers and pupils.

Both the boys and girls' schools were based out of the borough at the time of the alleged incidents.

The inquiry found that both male and female pupils at the day school, then known as St James and St Vedast School had been subjected to some punishments that were unreasonable between 1975 and 1985.

James Townend QC, who headed the inquiry, said a small number of teachers did not have proper control of their tempers and some pupils had suffered. He said there was clear evidence that pupils had suffered some physical and mental mistreatment.

Former pupils at the school are calling for the resignation of chair of governors Roger Pincham CBE because he was a governor at the school during the ten year period. However, the school has dismissed the calls saying he is an excellent gov-

ernor, while the inquiry concluded that there was "little involvement of the governors in staff appointments or in complaints by parents; the governors were not in any real sense in charge of the schools".

A 37-year-old woman contacted the Gazette to tell us of her experiences, but asked to be anonymous. She said: "I was there in the 70s and early 80s from the age of seven to 14. There was some violence and what is now termed emotional abuse.

"I went through a lot of verbal stuff and humiliation and I witnessed a lot of things. Punishments such as putting a bar of soap in a child's mouth, having a haircut by a teacher. One time I remember watching a girl have to do an hour of press-ups when we were about nine years old."

Jeremy Sinclair, a governor at the school, said: "We ordered this inquiry to bring about a conciliation between former pupils and the teachers involved. At the time, none of these complaints were made to the board of governors. The governors were not aware of what was going on. For the last 10 years there has been no corporal punishment at St James. Roger Pincham has been an excellent governor and has given a lot of his time to the school. St James is an excellent school."

Robert Boyd, a solicitor who helped conduct the inquiry, said: "The school had no legal reason to conduct the inquiry. It did so to be transparent and to show integrity."



St James Independent School now in West Kensington did the inquiry to be "transparent"

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