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NEWS

Assaults on pupils were 'harsh and criminal'

10:47am Friday 20th January 2006

By Chris Wickham »

THE governors of St James' Independent Schools have apologised unreservedly after a report stated some pupils had been assaulted by teachers in its early years.

The schools, which includes St James' School for Senior Boys in Cross Deep, Twickenham, commissioned the report following allegations about the use of discipline by teachers during the development of the schools in the 1970s and 80s.

The inquiry, the first of its kind, conducted by James Townend QC, discovered some punishments of pupils were unreasonable and criminal'. Mr Townend states: "I am in no doubt that mistreatment of pupils took place in the boys' schools, mainly during the period 1975 to 1985."

The report continues: "A small number of teachers did not have control of their tempers. As a result several boys were subject to rough handling.

"They were criminally assaulted by being punched in the face or in the stomach, cuffed violently about the head, and had blackboard rubbers thrown at them, causing injury.

"In some cases, they had cricket balls thrown at them violently when they were not looking and were struck with the end of a gym rope.

"Other students were kicked, struck from behind, slapped about the face, thrown across a classroom. Whatever the provocation, nothing could justify the mistreatment. It was unreasonable and criminal."

The report does add that there has been a real change in the ethos and conduct of the schools, which was established by witnesses who spoke of them as happy places.

Roger Pincham, chairman of governors at St James' Independent Schools, said: "The governors accept Mr Townend's findings 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 related to the Boys' School between 1975 and 1985. It is clear that disciplinary policy was not sufficiently controlled or supervised during those early years.

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"Some physical punishments that were lawful at the time were too harsh and too frequent, some acts went beyond lawful punishment and were wholly unacceptable. That this could have happened in our schools, even a long time ago, is deeply regrettable.

"The report notes that the schools have modernised and developed since those early years and all forms of physical punishment ceased more than a decade ago."

The Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group welcomed the publication of the report and believed the findings of excessive use of corporal punishment, physical and mental mistreatment of pupils and criminal assault' by teachers vindicated former pupils and parents who have long campaigned for the truth to be established.

They added that the failings of the governing body raise profound questions for the schools today.

A statement said: "We hope the conclusion of the inquiry will prove a turning point for the St James' Schools and that the positive process of change on which they have embarked can now be accelerated.

"Following their acceptance of the inquiry's findings, St James' Schools must now resolve to act decisively."

It is believed that the governors are examining the report, and a second confidential report, which contains full details of mistreatment and the perpetrators involved, will decide what course of action to take against individuals.

Aatif Hassan, chairman of St James' Seventh Form' Old Boys & Girls Association, said: "I welcome the publication of the report. I would like to thank Mr Townend for his efforts in establishing the facts as presented to him.

"I am pleased to note that the governors accept the findings of the report and provide a sincere public apology to all those affected. I hope much good has and will come from the inquiry and look forward to this period of reconciliation, which is essential.

"I am also pleased for all concerned that the report finds the current St James school a happy place'."

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Hounslow "suspicious" death victim named

Police named a man found dead in a Hounslow park this evening as 32-year-old squatter Rasal Goldyn.



Arrested men bailed in "suspicious" Hounslow death

Five men who were arrested after the body of their housemate was found in a Hounslow park were released on bail today.



Five arrests after body found in Hounslow park

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Five men have been arrested after a body was found in a Hounslow park.

Driver arrested after Isleworth smash

A driver who flipped her Mercedes onto its side today has been arrested after refusing to give a breath test, police have said.



Former Bee key to Luton's non-League mission

Luton Town manager Mick Harford reckons former Brentford skipper Adam Newton will give his Blue Square Premier new boys an edge as his side bids for a Football League return at the first attempt.



Main on the money as the Premier party gets started

Dons hold mighty Luton in season opener



Cannizaro SOS answered by Three Musketeers

When Cannizaro Festival was cancelled you may have feared a summer without entertainment, but fear not, a specialist touring group has come to the rescue with an open air adaption of the classic Three Musketeers tale.



Film takes Croydon back to the 1960s

If you passed through St George's Walk in the town centre recently and did a double take because it looked like something from the 1960s, don't worry, you didn't go back in time.

