

10 YEARS OF ABUSE

Inquiry finds pupils at independent school were assaulted

By JO McDERMOTT

AN INQUIRY has found that pupils at an independent school suffered 10 years of criminal assault at the hands of teachers.

In response to complaints made by parents and former pupils about teaching at St James Independent Schools, one of which is based in Earsby Street, West Kensington, James Townend QC interviewed 62 people.

He said several boys were "criminally assaulted by being punched in the face or in the stomach, cuffed violently about the head, had blackboard rubbers thrown at them causing injury in some cases, had cricket balls thrown at them violently when they were not looking at the thrower 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.

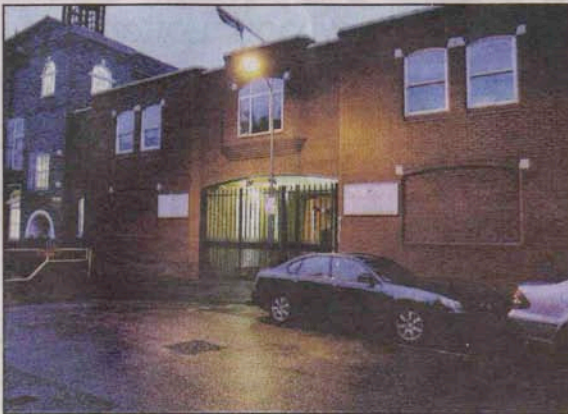
"Whatever the provocation, nothing could justify this mistreatment. It was clearly unreasonable and criminal."

The independent inquiry published last week finds that mistreatment took place in the boys' school mainly between 1975 and 1985 when the school was situated at Queen's Gate, Kensington.

Four teachers from the period in question still teach at the school but no teachers are named in the report so it is unknown if they played any part in the abuse.

The school started in 1975 and almost 100 per cent of the parents of pupils were members of the School of Economic Science (SES) - which believes in a system of economic justice.

Mr Townend said: "A small number of teachers had no proper control of their tempers. Whether this was as a result of inexperience, lack of training



APOLOGY: St James Independent School for juniors on Earsby Street

'I'm really happy that we've been vindicated'

or their innate temperament is difficult for me to say."

A former male pupil, who did not want to be named, said: "I'm really happy that we've been vindicated.

"But I'm despondent that the extent of the abuse in the girls' school remains largely uncovered."

Governors resolved to establish an independent internal inquiry in October 2004.

Roger Pincham, chairman of governors of 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."

But The Parents and Pupils Inquiry Action Group has called for resignations and a public apology from former headteacher Donald Lambie.

Corporal punishment is now illegal and ceased completely in the junior school in 1993 and in the senior school in 1996.

A spokesman for Hammersmith and Fulham Police said no criminal investigation would be launched unless individuals came forward with specific allegations.

● *Did you suffer abuse at a St James Independent School? If so, send an email to newshammersmith@trinitysouth.co.uk and put school abuse in the subject box.*

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