

The 1996 St James Schools Governors' Report

Introduction to the report by the author

I was a governor of St James in the late 80's and 90's. As someone working in the property business my role was principally to advise on premises strategy and development opportunities. I had no expertise in the field of education. I was also on the executive board of the SES for some time and was father of four boys and one daughter (taken away from St James in 1993) who attended the schools with, as you might expect, mixed results. Towards the end of my involvement as a governor I was asked to give my personal view of St James boys school in terms of its public perception in the light of the imminent move of the senior boys school from the relative anonymity of Victoria to the high visibility of an affluent London suburb.

When I came in contact with the St James Inquiry team I felt it incumbent to ask whether this report had been provided as part of the briefing. I suggested that, if it was thought relevant, the Inquiry team should ask their clients, the St James Governors, for a copy. Some two months later this was eventually made available to the Inquiry.

It apparently had not been volunteered which is hardly surprising as Mr Lambie, 'senior tutor' of the SES tried to suppress it at the time of its publication on the grounds that it was critical of aspects of the organisation of the schools and particularly the covert connection with the SES.

This also probably accounts for why the report was not well received by the governors and head teachers (with the exception of Mr Moss) and brushed under the carpet at the time after a desultory, un-minuted, 3 hour discussion.

Following the Inquiry Team's receipt of the report I attended an interview with Mr Townend at which a lengthy discussion took place. This covered a wide range of topics including the nurturing of the child's individual psyche as expounded by Alfred Adler in his seminal work, 'Understanding human nature', to the inadequacy of the 'educational principles' - only given, I believe, by MacLaren as very general guidelines 30 years ago - as a long term intellectual underpinning of any kind of educational method, to the original founding impulses of the SES philosophic system that unavoidably cause it to behave opaquely in relation to society as a whole. I assumed, perhaps naively, that, my report having been made available in the spirit of openness that the commissioning of the Inquiry was claimed to be promoting, the document itself would be annexed to the published report. However, this turned out not to be the case. It was referred to but its contents withheld.

I have since been asked by many people to make its contents known. Ten years on it does not seem to me to have anything in it that has not already been extensively aired in the WATD forum in one form or another. Many of the less radical recommendations, such as skirt length and reduced obsession with Sanskrit and even 'non-SES' teachers, have in fact been quietly adopted as part of an effort to make the schools seem more 'normal' but the covert connection with, and recruitment to, the SES and the non-accountable shadow governorship of St James by the 'leader/senior tutor' of the SES remain and appear to have been completely untouched by the Inquiry.

At the interview I was asked a key question by Mr Townend: did I think St James could ever operate as an organisation independent from the SES? I asked for time to consider that question and replied some weeks later. An extract of that reply is relevant to the openness of the inquiry and I have made this available here together with the original 1996 report itself.

I have removed names in a few places for obvious reasons but, to the best of my knowledge, none of these refer to teachers who are part of any investigation. I do not propose to enter into any dialogue on the contents of the report but others will of course be free to comment as they see fit. If it contributes to the new spirit of openness that is being claimed by the governing body well and good.

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