

PRESS RELEASE

Abuse findings: calls for resignations after school fails to act

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The Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group today responded to the release of an Inquiry Report by Mr James Townend QC into the St James and St Vedast Schools in London. The Inquiry, which followed a long campaign by former pupils, investigated multiple allegations of mistreatment of pupils over the last 30 years.

In the report, released on Saturday (14th Jan), Mr Townend found that pupils had been subject to punishments that were *“unreasonable and criminal.”* *“I am in no doubt”* he stated *“that mistreatment of pupils took place [mainly during the period 1975 to 1985]”*.... the report continues, *“they were criminally assaulted by being punched in the face or in the stomach.... other students were kicked, struck from behind, slapped about the face, thrown across a classroom”*. He sited examples of how some girls were mistreated physically and mentally by male teachers at the Schools, describing how pupils would be *“interrogated”* in order to obtain a *“confession”*. Some pupils, he said, were damaged by their experiences in the Schools. The inquiry found no evidence of sexual abuse in any of the Schools

The Inquiry found serious failures in the schools' governance and management, and revealed that for nearly 20 years the schools had been run by the School of Economic Science (SES / SoES) – which critics have branded a cult. He described how the SES / SoES directed the schools, appointing teachers and governors.

The Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group is **releasing a public statement today demanding the resignation of governors**, including the Chair Roger Pincham CBE.

Following a written statement by the schools, accepting the Inquiry's findings, we are calling for the Governing Body to confirm whether a confidential second report named any teachers currently at the schools as responsible for the abuse. We believe the Inquiry's findings raise serious questions for the Schools today.

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The St James Schools have a controversial history including an investigation by the London Evening Standard into the schools' harsh punishment regime and their links to the School of Economic Science (SES / SoES), which the newspaper branded a cult. Former pupils have long called for an apology and criticised the Schools for failing to investigate complaints in the past or acknowledge its links with the SES / SoES.

In 2004 the previous headteacher of St James, Nicholas Debenham, rejected requests for a private apology (although two former and one current teacher issued public apologies.) In October the schools announced that the Governors would hold a private but independent inquiry into the allegations following a growing number of complaints posted on the internet.

The inquiry was held in July 2005, 81 submissions of complaints against the schools were heard by the Chairman, Mr Townend, including one from a former headteacher.

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The SES / SoES movement, which has many branches around the world, has been criticised for its views on the role of women in society, indoctrinating members and being responsible for marital and family breakdowns. The organisation was the subject of a critical exposé by two investigative journalists published in 1985 in the book 'the Secret Cult'. It has been criticised by church leaders, and monitored by anti-cult groups in the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland and Canada. The Belgian Branch was classified as a cult in a Belgian Government report in 1997.

As well as the St James children's schools the SES / SoES has established a 'family' of private children's schools worldwide, the children's school in Amsterdam closed in 1990 after two Police investigations into illegal physical punishments. Over the past year the SES / SoES has spread its influence to state schools, running in-service teacher training through its offshoot the Education Renaissance Trust, a UK registered charity.

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Attached:

- Statement in response to the Inquiry - Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group 16/1/06
- General Report of the Inquiry into St James and St Vedast Schools 14/1/06

NOTE TO THE EDITOR

- The Schools' and Governor's statements in response to the Inquiry can be found at www.iirep.com
- SES / SoES: Both these acronyms are used by the School of Economic Science (it is the same organisation).
- Parents & Pupils Inquiry Action Group: Is an informal group of people who have been involved in the inquiry including former pupils and parents. We believe the inquiry presents the best opportunity to date to ensure current pupils of the schools are safeguarded and that former pupils are able to move on from their experiences at the schools.
- Further information is available from our website www.stjamesinquiry.org