

Age Extension at IPS: 1968-1977

A. Governors first discuss age extension

Governors of the School first discussed the possibility of age-extension in May 1968. It was largely believed that extending the age (whether to 16 or 18) would require forfeiting the boarding facilities of the School – for the sake of space and resources. Disagreement ensued regarding the suitability of this change for the present circumstances.

Advocates of age extension

- *Savings of £3,000 per year if boarding was reduced*
- *Continuity of education according to Froebelian aims*
- *Extension was requested directly by parents*
- *It was believed that 1/3 to 1/2 of children would stay if the age was extended*
- *It would alleviate some pressures caused by Common Entrance examinations, which restricts the curriculum to ensure these children are prepared to switch schools at age 13.*

Opponents of age extension

- *Losing boarding would be undesirable, it provided a service for many children who needed it and added to the character of the School*
- *Concerns that local patronage and support might decrease if the School ceased to offer boarding*
- *State Education was considering expanding boarding, so abolishing it at IPS did not seem sensible.*
- *Even without boarding, space available at IPS was not sufficient for the age extension experiment.*

B. Letters in support of age extension.

Some parents and staff were strong supporters of age extension. One such family was that of B Williamson, who sent the following letter in January 1970:

Letter from B Williamson, 14 January 1970

Judy and I are thrilled at the news of a possible extension of the age range at Istock. We would send all four of our children with the greatest of pleasure and, I might add, no little relief - it would solve so many problems for us and worries about the future (specially the worry about which schools would suit them best) we're a very closely-knit family and to be able to have them all grow up at home really is, or would be, a wonderful thing. If I can help in any way do let me know.

C. Concerns about age extension.

However, there were a plethora of concerns about age extension as well. Among the concern that the boarding facility would cease (as addressed in the history article on IPS website) there were also abundant concerns about the financial feasibility of such a project. In a letter to a 'Mrs Murray' in February 1970, a plethora of staffing concerns were raised in a letter from a stakeholder. She concluded that there was 'no point in extending the leaving age of Ibstock'. A brief glimpse into some of these concerns:

- No framework which could be used to prepare teachers to teach children older than 13 with Froebelian pedagogy
 - *Although, as Miss McLeod said in answer to my question, Froebel did continue his teaching to children beyond the present leaving age of Ibstock, (13-14 say) there seems to be little written about it and the Froebel Institute and College - as far as I am aware - does not train teachers for children beyond this age. There is therefore no theoretical framework on which to base an extension of Froebelian teaching and no trained teachers.*
- Concern that male teachers would be sparse, which would be essential for 14-18 lessons.
 - *The majority of Froebel students are girls. This is fine for the present system, but I feel that a fair sprinkling of male teachers for mixed classes of the 14-18s is necessary.*
- This was further exacerbated by the expectation that 14-18 lessons would likely be covered by part-time teachers.
 - *Part-time women teachers with their own families are no doubt a great help, but what sort of person is a part-time man teacher if he exists? Anyhow, part-timers should only form a small proportion of the teaching staff.*
- Inconsistent relations between Froebel and the Demonstration School.
 - *I must admit to being muddled about the relationship between the Froebel Institute, the College and Ibstock. Having always understood that Ibstock was a sort of demonstration school for the Institute and College, I am surprised at the apparent lack of co-ordination. This view is shared by College students to whom I have spoken.*

D. Froebelian pedagogy.

In February 1970, the board addressed one of the pre-eminent concerns about age-extension – how they would identify and procure qualified teachers, since Froebelian pedagogy was typically directed at the younger years. Here are some of the questions (with answers) as discussed in Feb 1970:

Q: Did Froebel direct his method of teaching towards younger children?

A: Froebel's philosophy would apply to every stage of learning and he himself had taught older children, but his writings were directed to the younger ages.

Q: Were facilities available for children who had sat 'O' level to take 'A' levels elsewhere?

A: Both 'O' and 'A' levels are offered in Local Authority Colleges of Further Education and in certain Authorities Sixth Form Colleges. Also, a number of schools admitted 'students' to their sixth forms for 'A' levels.

Q: Was it a good thing for a child to stay in the same school from 3-18 years of age?

A: This was a matter of opinion as was the best age at which to effect a change from one school to another.

Q: If the age range were to be extended, should it devote itself to conventional examination?

A: As there were a number of children at the school who would wish to enter a profession at a later date that there would have to be facilities to offer entry to conventional examinations. The teaching staff feel that there would not be the same degree of pressure in the lower forms if the school was aiming at 'O' Level as against Common Entrance. Children are going to be faced with competitive examinations, but it is felt better to defer the stage as long as possible.

Q: Is there any information as to Academic results of past pupils?

A: A survey was carried out in 1966 of pupils at the school in the previous 10 years and copies are available. There was then a discussion on 'O' and 'A' levels and the number of subjects to be offered, whether to finish the age range at 16 years with a further year if necessary for retake or to finish the age range with the 'A' levels. Many views were expressed; the consensus was to continue to 'A' level if at all possible.

E. Why is the Froebel system advantageous, i.e., why would it be useful for pupils older than 13?

In June 1970, the board discussed the advantages of a Froebelian education for older pupils. The following reasons were collated:

- 1. It is independent and progressive.*
- 2. It is associated with a teaching Institute capable of developing a doctrine and philosophy, and the people to implement it. An unusually good relationship exists between parents and teachers who in addition are aware of the difficulties we all face today.*
- 3. It has long experience in producing a well-rounded type of student and is fully aware of the importance of a unified approach to problems and to the need for motivation, participation, and contribution - a solid body and a basic philosophy on which to build!*

F. What are some problems faced by the Froebel system?

Likewise, the board discussed problems implicit in the Froebelian model for older years at the same meeting:

- 1. It has long been teaching the importance of a child's whole development by self-activity and personal motivation through the inner connection between a pupil's mind, the objects studied, and*

the spirit with which life is approached. Today however many of its best ideas have come to be accepted by the more progressive educational authorities so that the present contribution it has to offer as a separate teaching system is much less marked than was formerly the case.

2. *The present necessity of leaving the Froebel System at 13/14 so as to complete secondary or pre-University education can be a source of serious difficulties for certain of the children*
3. *School such as Ibstock still retain an essentially private character and in facing the problems listed above are not really serving others besides their own students.*

G. A new school recommended.

In March 1970 - the working party recommended a totally new school should be advanced, the cost to be estimated at around 100K. Proposals set forth by the working party. They proposed that pupils up to GCE O level would be the first priority, and A levels would eventually be incorporated as well. Here are their recommendations, including curriculum:

There is a need for a new type of secondary school which will:

1. *Respect the continuing education of the whole person, this would include*
 - a. *The early recognition of specific talents and resourcefulness*
 - b. *The balancing of all sides of personal development*
 - c. *The full appreciation of spurts and retardations and phases in growth.*
2. *Update our educational approach to accord with our rapidly evolving society. Art and Science are closer to merging than perhaps they have been for centuries. It should be the prime tasks of any educational curriculum to focus on their common roots and potential integration in human experience.*

Such a school might have the following curriculum:

1. *Life sciences to cover*
 - a. *Botany*
 - b. *Hygiene*
 - c. *Zoology*
 - d. *Pollution*
 - e. *Biology*
 - f. *Ecology*
2. *General sciences to cover:*
 - a. *Chemistry*
 - b. *Physics*
 - c. *Oceanography*
 - d. *Meteorology*
 - e. *Geology*
3. *Technology to cover*
 - a. *Theory of machines and mechanisation*
 - b. *Automation*
 - c. *Electronics*
 - d. *Computers*
 - e. *Technical Drawing*

4. *The Human Sciences to cover:*
 - a. *Geography*
 - b. *History*
 - c. *Government*
 - d. *Politics*
 - e. *Economics*
5. *Background studies to cover:*
 - a. *Philosophy*
 - b. *Anthropology*
 - c. *Drama*
 - d. *Music*
 - e. *Movement*
 - f. *Painting*
 - g. *Comparative Religion*
6. *Means of communication to cover:*
 - a. *Mathematical and logical symbols*
 - b. *Theory of numbers*
 - c. *Languages – English, foreign, classical*

H. Objections to this project.

Age-extension continued to receive significant objections from those who were concerned about the cost and stretched resources already extant... other concerns included where children would go after O Levels. Here is one of the disagreeable letters received:

To Miss McCleod from Mr Spielman (4 Jun 1970)

My wife and I feel very strongly indeed that the whole of the proposals is irresponsible, ill-considered, and irrelevant to present conditions. I set out the reasons below.

1. *We do not know the "standard for school premises regulations 1959", but on the basis that our present house comprises 500 square feet and provides very cramped accommodation for only five people, to provide accommodation for 150 pupils in 7,000 square feet is an absurd underestimate.*
2. *To estimate that a school could be built and equipped for 150 pupils, and staff, for only 100,000 is equally absurd. The figure is more likely to be upwards of 250K.*
3. *On the basis of fees being charged by other schools with buildings and equipment which have been wholly or partially depreciated and on the basis of the 650,0.0d per term we are paying for kindergarten facilities for our children, to suggest tuition fees of 100,0.0d to 120,0.0d per term in respect of worthwhile tuition and brand new equipment for the age group concerned is wholly unrealistic.*
4. *The views expressed at the beginning of the Prospectus are liberal and rationalist; but their application, in our view, will have very different effects:*
 - a. *First, the breadth of the proposed curriculum covering over thirty headings will mean that none of the pupils will have a worthwhile grounding in depth of any subject.*
 - b. *Secondly, this is recognised by the fact that the scholastic aim is set only at 'O' levels - normally appropriate only to a sixteen-year-old.*

- c. *Thirdly, we cannot conceive any parent who can afford a private education for his children will be prepared to spend the amount of money involved in the knowledge that, whatever the merits of the educational theory, the end result will be that his child will not be qualified for any worthwhile job or educational position in the competitive conditions of today's society, however much one may regret those competitive conditions.*
 - d. *Fourthly, it follows, in our view, that the children of any parents who are permitted to undergo such an education are likely to be wholly different in outlook from other children who are undergoing one of the currently-standard forms of education, whether fee paying or otherwise; and in our view this is likely to result, not in a liberal and rationalist atmosphere community end product but in a society of uneducated, irresponsible drop-outs.*
5. *In short, my wife and I will have nothing whatsoever to do with the proposal, will oppose it utterly and are only concerned to ensure that the facilities of the school, which are already strained, are not squandered further in ill-considered proposals of this nature.*

I. Parent Group revisits the discussion in May 1975.

After June 1970, the project all but dissipated – little was said again about the possibility of age extension until a parent group in 1975 raised the question yet again. Here is a glimpse of their reasoning.

The arguments in favour of the extension are familiar: the desire to free children from the restricting pressures inherent in preparing them for common entrance; the absence of “progressive” educational facilities in the south-western sector of London; the increasing desire among parents to be involved in the adolescent stage of their children’s growth, by educating them from home instead of sending them away to boarding schools at thirteen; even the escalating cost of boarding fees increases the pressure to offer continuing day-school education at Ibstock Place.

Every year many of the parents of thirteen-year-old leavers face the formidable prospect of finding a suitable secondary school for their children. It is a problem which many parents confront with despair. Many of the more far-sighted, in fact, are known to take their children away from Ibstock Place for the negative reason of not having to face that problem later on, a practice which can only damage the stability of the school, even if it leaves the children unharmed.

In recent years one new, and possibly critical, factor has entered the argument. It is the development of new styles of sixth form education. The most obvious form of this new type of education is of course the sixth form college, one of which is now operating successfully quite near to Ibstock Place School at East Sheen. It may be that this particular school will be relocated in the near future, but it is unlikely that this form of specialist sixth form education will suddenly be withdrawn from the Richmond children for whom it was designed. It opens up one possible opportunity for children leaving Ibstock Place at, say sixteen to receive pre-university education in the public sector.

Thus, the parent group suggested that the new sixth form options meant that Ibstock needed only fill a gap between 13 and 16 for their pupils. Accommodation and facilities need only to facilitate this gap, which greatly reduced the financial burden.

The boarding school argument was again raised, since it was admitted that the boarding facilities would need to cease. However, it was perceived that a great proportion of pupils were lost owing to an absence of provision for 13-16-year olds than would be lost by divesting themselves of boarding. In 1976, it was agreed that the age extension of pupils studying for 'O' levels should begin in 1977.