

From Boarding School to Day School (Age Extension) 1968-1977



Figure 1

When former pupil, Matthew, described his experience at Ibstock Place School in the 1970s, he was keen to highlight a substantial distinction between life then and now. During his enrolment at IPS, the School was a boarding school and a day school – indeed, most pupils who attended at that time were boarding pupils. School space was not unaffected by alternative infrastructure. To the left of the main staircase (upon entering the School), the present-day first floor classrooms were dormitories for boys. To the right (where offices and the staff room are presently found) were the girls' dormitories.

Beginning in 1968, conversations about the discontinuation of the boarding school were arising. Some parents and staff preferred to extend the age of the school – which then ended at 13 years. To accommodate a larger pupil population, likely relinquish the boarding facilities – a decision which was not attractive to all IPS stakeholders. One board member, remarking in 1968, was utterly inimical to the prospect. 'I am loathe to get rid of boarding' he asserted. He proceeded to suggest that a removal of the boarding facility would leave the School bereft of a 'home like quality' which he believed many found valuable.¹

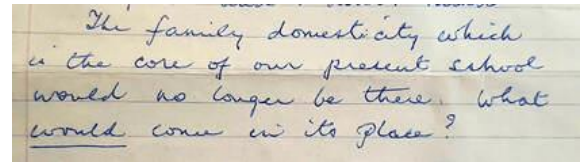


Figure 2

The identification of IPS as a boarding school is important to this age-extension narrative. Interestingly, this was not part of the School's historic provision. IPS, formerly the Froebel Demonstration School, had been a day school from its inception in 1894 until the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. Indeed, it was in this year when the School became a boarding school by necessity, as pupils evacuated to Little Gaddesden, in Hertfordshire, to a lovely house discovered by their Headmistress Barbara Priestman. The home-like quality was already in Miss Priestman's mind when she found the house. In a letter to the School committee she noted this house – soon to be home for the School – was, characterised by its 'warmth and light'.²



Figure 3

Thus, the School began its boarding school years as a safe haven during the Second World War. Central to its remit was to provide a happy and protected space for children. In 1971, two former boarders at that house in Hertfordshire visited the grounds with the School Headmistress; they remarked fondly upon the safe and happy memories they had acquired there.³ Indeed, such safety and happiness was paramount. In a letter home to a parent in 1939, Barbara Priestman tried to assuage concerns about their child, remarking upon how happy and safe

¹ Age Extension Minutes, 1968

² Letter from Barbara Priestman

³ Reminiscences of former School pupils, 1971

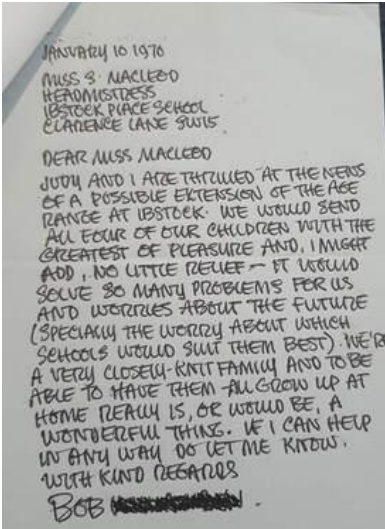
their son was 'like a person at peace with himself and the world; suspecting no evil & so far I hope finding none.'⁴

When the School moved into Ibstock Place House in 1946, this facility continued, and the emphasis on a 'separate space' perpetuated. For some children, as was reported by the committee, the boarding facility provided a safe space for to remove from difficulties at home: 'it is undoubtedly true that there seems to be a growing number of broken homes & a growing need for schools such as ours where children can get stability & security for at least part of their lives.'⁵

As discussions about extending the age of the School began in 1968, through the 1970s, a key factor in this debate was space, which was in short supply. Staff and parents in favour of age-extension were happy to abolish the boarding facility to make space for extra classrooms. This would involve 'dormitories turned into classrooms, ancillary rooms to cloakrooms...' as noted in the plans. Ostensibly, extending the age of pupils from 13 to (minimally) 16, accompanied changes which were unpalatable to some who viewed the loss of the boarding facilities too great a sacrifice.

On the other hand, there were stakeholders who vehemently advocated for the age extension as a priority over boarding facilities. One parent, in 1970, wrote enthusiastically in favour of an age extension. 'We would send all four of our children with the greatest of pleasure and, I might add no little relief' he asserted in his letter. His family lived in the area of Roehampton and identified the benefit this would be for their 'very closely-knit family'.⁶ This point was echoed by others in the IPS community. In February 1970, a working party investigated the mood regarding age-extension. Evidently, parents who lived in the area benefited from no close progressive co-education day schools. Bereft of this option, children over 13 were being sent away from home to comparable boarding schools. If a suitable option existed closer to home, they suggested, they would happily make use of it.

Which was of a greater benefit to children? Close access to their domestic life into their older years, or the preservation of a separate-from-home boarding facility? The debates over this issue were significant enough to close the matter temporarily from 1970 until 1975. Once the project reopened in 1975, the age extension was agreed within a year. The first cohort of year 10 pupils were admitted in 1977 and the boarding facility ceased.



JANUARY 10 1970
MISS S. MACLEOD
HEADMISTRESS
IBSTOCK PLACE SCHOOL
CLARENCE LAKE SWISS

DEAR MISS MACLEOD
JUDY AND I ARE THRILLED AT THE NEWS
OF A POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE AGE
RANGE AT IBSTOCK. 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.
WITH KIND REGARDS
BOB

Figure 4

⁴ Letter from B Priestman to a parent 1939

⁵ Age Extension Minutes, 1968

⁶ Letter from Bob Williamson 1970