

1960 - 1975

Politics above success



By 1962, the school admission age was increased to 11-16, a 60 pupil, two form entry was standardised, and a sixth form was added. To accommodate these extra pupils the school had to add a new building in Lime Grove and lease a nearby Methodist Chapel.

Changing teaching philosophy of the school

During its last 15 years, teaching at the school evolved away from "instruction and practice" towards an emphasis on creative imagination.

"Tasks from the first year onwards, sympathetic tutoring, individual guidance, group criticism, background reading, illustrated research projects, gallery and museum visits all played a vital role."

Paul Bartlett

Greater emphasis was placed on qualifications for general education to satisfy employers. A minimum of five 'O' Levels for all pupils became the school's ambition.

Printing, modelling and other industry-linked vocational crafts were replaced by nationally defined subjects, such as graphic design and woodwork, that could be examined as 'O' Levels

School aspirations increased with the introduction of a sixth form. 'A' Levels allowed entry to higher occupations, colleges or

universities. Headmasters Bill Davies (1964-1968) and Jack Taylor (1968-1975) both appointed young graduate teachers with fresh ideas.

In 1971, under John Swift as Head of Art, a Fine Art Foundation Course was developed for the upper sixth form - a Bauhaus influenced study programme

Run in parallel with 'A' Level study of Arts and Craft subjects and occupying 75% of the students' time, this was unique within Secondary Art Schools.

Political changes in Education

The last nine years of the Art School were challenging. Control of Birmingham Council alternated with a Labour or Conservative majority, each preparing educational change then having it blocked at the election box or an opposing national government. There were different plans proposed in 1966, 1968 and 1971. As soon as Labour won the General Election in 1974, there was a headlong rush to reform with a pre-planned comprehensive scheme. The school was effectively closed the following year.

"After nearly a hundred years a school where those who thought more fluently through their hands and eyes with a curriculum to match their abilities, was lost." John Swift

