

Boy slams his comprehensive school

A 17-year-old Chichester sixth former has described his comprehensive school as an educational white elephant. The attack, made in a letter published by a national newspaper, has been strongly rebutted by the headmaster.

Robin Gates, a pupil of Chichester High School for Boys, said: "If this school is anything to go by, the comprehensive plan must be doomed to failure."

Robin, who hopes to study botany at Durham University, wrote: "Uniform disinterest has replaced the former enthusiasm and healthy air of competitiveness which was once the tradition in both of the schools which were merged to form this educational white elephant."

'DECLINE'

"Academic results have steadily declined, and only a handful of the original staff remains."

Robin maintained that one of the main aims of com-

prehensive education — the broadening of opportunities open to pupils — has failed.

Subjects such as Greek, Russian, botany and zoology had been abolished, he said, and Latin has all but disappeared.

For the less academically minded he said there has been no expansion of practical subjects, and in the lower forms subjects "are generalized to such an extent that they are almost indistinguishable from each other."

'NOT FAIR'

He criticized the fact that the school was not purpose built for comprehensive education.

"I do not feel that it is a fair policy for a local authority to experiment with education in such a radical fashion.

"The experiment is not even well organized, for while plans hang in the air for a proposed new site for the school, money is being wasted on renovating old buildings that were originally put up as temporary shelters during the war."

The headmaster, Mr. Peter Watkins, said it was a shame

Robin had attempted to castigate the whole comprehensive system with his limited knowledge. Robin was a bright boy who was expected to do well at university.

"I am not going to say anything to him about the letter. Unless he wants to discuss it I will let the matter rest," he said in his study.

REPLY

The headmaster has written a reply to the newspaper saying that many of Robin's points are inaccurate.

In it he said: "I am under no illusions about Chichester High School for Boys. The comprehensive reorganization in 1971 was not accompanied by the provision of new buildings and the addition of much needed facilities.

"Many staff were placed in unfamiliar situations and there was a period of transition when inevitably the school suffered.

"I do not, however, believe that the one-sided view presented by Robin Gates does justice to the hard work of staff nor to the positive achievement of recent years."

ENTHUSIASM

Mr. Watkins said that "uniform disinterest" had not replaced enthusiasm, and he pointed to the school's teams and clubs as proof.

Fewer boys gained places to Oxford and Cambridge, but he said this was because the more academic boys were now shared between about six comprehensive schools.

"As far as staff are concerned, of course some have left, preferring to go to independent or grammar schools.

"However, among those who have joined the staff since we went comprehensive and are still with us are three Doctors of Philosophy."

It was true, Mr. Watkins said, that Russian had been stopped, but he said Greek and Latin were still studied.

NOT WASTED

Finally, Mr. Watkins commented: "Money has not been wasted on renovating old buildings. Until recently it was hoped to build a new school on a new site and so no renovations were carried out.

"Now with financial stringency and a falling school population it is clear that there will be no new school in the