

# Education Act passed into law

(mch, 2018)

29 November 1877

MCH, 2018b



1877  
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Timeline 1

The Education Act 1877 (passed into law on 29 November) established free, compulsory and secular education for all Pākehā New Zealand children. The Act did not apply to Māori, but they could attend the free schools if their parents wished them to. Primary school education was made compulsory for Māori in 1894.

The 1877 Act required Pākehā children between the ages of seven and thirteen to attend school. The legislation only covered children up to standard six (Year 8); while a primary school education was a universal right, secondary school was only for a select few.

In practice, the schools were far from compulsory; children were only required to attend on half the days that the school was open. Parents in rural areas often kept their children at home so they could help with activities such as harvesting and haymaking.

The Act aimed to provide a uniform standard of education. The standardised curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, history and geography, as well as sewing and needlework for girls and military drill for boys.

To run this new education system, a three-tiered administration was put in place. A newly-established Department of Education supplied the national curriculum and allocated funding to 12 regional Education Boards which oversaw the school committees that ran individual schools.

Women were eligible to stand on school committees and did so immediately. In the first year, a woman was elected chair of the Selwyn district school committee, and others followed her lead. This was part of a larger movement that saw women moving from the 'private' sphere of the home and into the 'public' sphere of civic life. Education, concerned as it is with children, could be seen as a natural stepping stone.

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### External links

Primary and secondary education (Te Ara)

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