

1877

(Swarbrick, N., 2012a)

## Story: Primary and secondary e

The best years of your life, or a time of boredom and restrictions? People have different experiences and memories of the school years, but **since 1877 education has been compulsory for all New Zealand children**. Over time schools have become less authoritarian and more diverse, and assessment has shifted from exams to internal assessment.

*Story by Nancy Swarbrick*

Main image: The students of Tukurumuri School, Wairarapa

### Story summary

#### The state education system in the 2000s

In New Zealand children must attend school between the ages of six and 16. There are three levels of schooling:

- primary (Years 1–6)
- intermediate (Years 7–8), which is often at stand-alone intermediate schools, but is sometimes included in primary and secondary schools
- secondary (Years 9–13).

State primary and intermediate schools, and many secondary schools, are co-educational, while some state secondary schools are just for boys or girls.

#### Other school options

Specialist state schools include kura kaupapa Māori, where teaching is in the Māori language, schools for students with disabilities and the Correspondence School.

There are also private schools, or parents may choose to educate their children at home (home schooling).

#### Education to 1918

Māori had traditional whare wānanga (houses of learning). From 1816 European missionaries established schools for Māori.

Provincial governments began funding some schools in 1852. From 1877 there was free education for children from ages five to 15, and it was compulsory between the ages of seven and 13, though not all children did attend school.

At first there were few secondary schools, and they were private and expensive. From 1903 [www.govt.nz/en/primary-and-secondary-education/#:~:text=in specific exams.-,Education from the 1920s to 2000s,age was raised to 15.](http://www.govt.nz/en/primary-and-secondary-education/#:~:text=in specific exams.-,Education from the 1920s to 2000s,age was raised to 15.)

children could get some free secondary education if they got good marks in specific exams.

## Education from the 1920s to 2000s

In the 1930s the education system was reformed, and after 1936 children no longer had to pass a 'Proficiency' exam to go to secondary school. In 1944 the school-leaving age was raised to 15.

In the 1950s and 1960s more high schools were established and it became more usual for children to stay longer at secondary school.

In the 1980s, there were reforms in the education system, partly to save money and partly to give parents and teachers more say in the direction of schools. In 1989 the school-leaving age was raised to 16.

## Student assessment and examinations

From 1877 to 1904 all primary-school students were assessed each year by a school inspector. Later teachers were able to do their own assessment of students up to Standard 5 (Year 7). Major secondary-school exams in the 20th century included School Certificate, University Entrance and Bursary. Between 2002 and 2004 the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) became the main secondary-school qualification.

## Curriculum changes

Changes in the curriculum – what students are taught – reflect changes in society. Reading, writing and maths were initially the most important, and other subjects have been added over time.

## School administration

In 1877 the Department of Education was established to oversee schools. Education boards managed schools in regions, and each school was run by a small committee of local residents. The department became larger and more influential. In the 1980s the department became the Ministry of Education, education boards were abolished and more-powerful boards of trustees replaced the old school committees.

## Teachers

In the 19th century most primary school teachers were badly paid. Many teachers were women, and women were paid less than men. Pay was made more standard in the 20th century, making teaching a more attractive career. Teacher training improved as funding was increased to training colleges.

Over time, teaching styles became less formal. As well as teaching lessons, teachers are also involved in coaching sports or in cultural activities, and act as role models and social workers.

## Pupils

For some students the school years are the best of their life, while other pupils are reluctant to attend and may play truant. Schools are often places where conformity is encouraged, but from the 1980s schools have been more accepting of diversity.

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