

The Management of Schools

Until 1866, education policy was so contentious that it was difficult to pass any legislation, despite mounting dissatisfaction with competition between the government and denominational schools.

Eventually the Martin-Parkes government steered the Public Schools Act, 1866 through parliament. The Act abolished the Board of National Education and the Denominational School Board and in January 1867 a Council of Education became responsible for public education.

The Council's functions were:

- control of expenditure and government grants for elementary education,
- establishment and maintenance of public schools,
- granting of aid to "certified" denominational schools (schools with at least thirty children),
- appointment, training and examination of teachers.

Training Colleges were formed and teachers certified. The Council set a scale of fees payable in public schools and certified denominational schools. Four hours of secular instruction per day was required and religious instruction by a clergyman was permitted. Religious instruction in denominational schools was unregulated. Denominational schools could seek certification and National Schools became public schools.

In the next decade a system evolved, providing a basic education for most children. Nevertheless there was pressure to change the Act, arguing that education should be 'free, secular and compulsory'. The increasing number of schools and expenditure led many to press for a government department rather than a part-time council. There was also a belief that the State's role should be paramount, and that the role of the churches, especially the Catholic Church, should not be encouraged by state aid.

The Public Instruction Act, 1880, established a Department of Public Instruction and ended aid to Denominational Schools from December 1882.