

Page 2. Private schools, 1820s to 1990s

First private schools

New Zealand's first schools were private, set up by missionaries to teach Māori and the children of missionaries in the 1820s. As settlements grew, both church groups and individuals established schools, most of them primary.

When provincial governments became responsible for education from the 1850s, they often simply subsidised existing private schools. A variety of ways were used to gather money – in some areas, parents paid a quarterly fee for each child; in others there was an annual levy.

The response to state education

From 1877 the state provided free and secular primary education to all children, excluding the churches from the education system. In response, the Catholic Church began to set up its own network of schools. Many parishes opened a primary school, and the first Catholic secondary schools were set up in the 1880s.

Protestant churches tried to get prayer and Bible study included in the state system. This continued to be prevented, and in the early 20th century the churches formalised links with existing private schools, providing Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist schools.

Evangelical expansion

Evangelical Christian groups began setting up their own schools in the mid-1960s. They were concerned at what they saw as a lack of deep Christian commitment in existing private schools and the 'rampant humanism' of the state education system.¹ The first was Middleton Grange School in Christchurch, which opened in 1964. Numbers grew fast – in the 1990s there were nearly 90 Christian schools using a scriptural base for their teaching and school structure. About half of them became state-integrated.

Funding crisis

A steady trickle of government funding and support began in the 1930s. From the 1960s onwards private schools received substantial grants from the government. Initially these grants took the form of a tax rebate and capitation grant, which were given regardless of the wealth of the school. State aid, introduced in 1970, was lower for wealthier schools.

By the 1970s the Catholic education system was in crisis. The cost of running the schools overwhelmed many parishes. Buildings and facilities were run-down to the point that schools were likely to close.

Faced with the possibility of an influx of Catholic school pupils into a state education system that was already

How special is the character of state-integrated schools? The Catholic school system used to be staffed by clergy or members of religious orders. Dwindling numbers meant that in the 2000s most staff were laypeople, and not all were Catholic. A proportion of parents were described as 'cafeteria Catholics' – people who liked the school but had no commitment to the church. Despite such challenges, Catholic education leader Brother Pat Lynch argued in 2006 that integrated schools had 'to get stronger in terms of what they stand for, because if their special character is not clear and demonstrable, then they have no reason to exist'.²

full, the government came to an agreement with private schools. In 1975 the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act was passed. In return for using the state curriculum, the act allowed private schools to gain substantial government funding. They were able to maintain their special character, charge fees and restrict entry.

Opposition

State integration of church schools was attacked from both sides. Teacher unions and a lobby group set up to oppose the 1975 act argued that religious schools were undermining the secular education system and taking money that should be spent on state schools. Catholic critics argued that the act was a socialist conspiracy designed to rob Catholic schools of their independence. Both complained that the act was designed behind closed doors.

Funding, 1970s to 1990s

After decades of trending upwards, the level of government funding varied widely in the 1970s to 1990s.

The state aid introduced in 1970 originally covered 20% of teachers' salaries, increasing to 50% in 1975. The salary subsidy was progressively removed from 1985 to 1990, then reinstated in 1991 at 20%. This subsidy was in addition to grants existing before 1970.

A new method of calculation introduced in 1995 saw the private schools get a percentage of the average cost of educating a child in the state system. The subsidy increased as the state-system cost did. By 1999 private schools received 30% of the state cost of educating a year 1–10 student, and 40% of the cost of a year 11–13 student. The subsidy was capped in 2000.

Footnotes:

1. 'A brief summary of the history of Christian schooling in New Zealand.' New Zealand Association of Christian Schools, , last accessed 8 November 2011.
2. 'Integrated schools - compromising their character?' *New Zealand Herald*, 29 July 2006, (last accessed 21 May 2012)/

How to cite this page:

Megan Cook, 'Private education - Private schools, 1820s to 1990s', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/private-education/page-2> (accessed 28 February 2017)
Story by Megan Cook, published 20 Jun 2012