

Report of the Committee on State Education in Victoria

Victoria. Committee on State Education in Victoria, 1960 (Chair: Alan Ramsay)

Overview of the document

180 page report of the Committee on State Education in Victoria. The Committee examined problems facing the present system and made broad recommendations for future reform in the areas of administration, certification, government support, curriculum, teacher training, maintenance, equipment and finance.

Keywords

Educational problems; material problems; administration; teaching; schools; equal opportunity; memory and mental ability; post-school life; knowledge; skills; basic competence; character; democracy; citizenship; leisure; emotional experiences; individual differences; number; communication; general knowledge; habits of thought and action; future citizens; rapidly changing world.

Terms of Reference

1. Historical Introduction
2. Statement of the Present Position
 - a. Administration
 - b. Schools
 - c. Teaching
3. Problems Facing the Present Position
 - a. Educational Problems
 - b. Material Problems
4. Conclusions and Recommendations

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Summary of Contents

COVER LETTER TO MINISTER OF EDUCATION

- Identifies “financial stringency” as the cause of many problems.
- Identifies associated professional issues, notably the staffing of schools.
- Identifies staffing and teaching standards in the post-primary sector as the most serious challenges to education in Victoria.

INTRODUCTORY—TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROCEDURE

- Outlines the Terms of Reference as: Historical Introduction, Statement of the Present Situation, Problems Facing the Present Situation and Conclusions and Recommendations.
- Notes that the Committee considers the Conclusions and Recommendations part of the report the most significant as it embraces the opportunity for assessment of progress and needs and the drawing up of vital plans for the future.

PART I – THE BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1 – HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF STATE EDUCATION IN VICTORIA

- Traces the development of Victorian state education under the following subheadings:
 - The Beginnings – the Dual System

- Common Schools Act of 1862 (The Board of Education)
- The Education Act of 1872
- Retrenchment
- The Commission on Technical Education
- The First Director of Education
- The Content of Compulsory Education
- Physical Training and Health
- Kindergarten and Infant Teaching
- Education of Handicapped Children
- School Enrolments
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- Technical Education
- Examinations and Certificates
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- School Committees and Parents' Associations
- School Buildings
- Conclusion: Education – Compulsory, Secular and Free.

CHAPTER 2 – AIMS AND OBJECTS OF STATE EDUCATION

- Begins by noting that the Committee has considered the purposes of schools.
- States that the overriding principle is “that within the resources of schools and teachers available there should be opportunity for every child in the State to receive an education suitable for his age, ability and aptitudes, and that no child should be debarred by mental or physical handicap, or distance from school, from receiving an appropriate education. So far as it is within the power of the State system to do so, its broad goal is equal opportunity for all to make the most of the native endowment.” (p. 34)
- Notes that while this broad goal is useful, objectives must also be determined because at present the legislative enactments “give us little guide to what general or specific objectives the system has”. (p. 34)
- Identifies the general objectives of state education as follows:
 - “It must provide for all children within the ages of compulsory schooling, in suitable buildings, and with the direction of properly trained teachers – by a course of instruction and by such other means as are found suitable, an education which will:
 - a) exercise and develop their memory and their mental ability with knowledge that is immediately useful and/or has a direct relevance for their post-school life;
 - b) store the memory with knowledge, and develop skills by practice in using it, which will enable the child after leaving school, although not immediately, to be an effective worker (or a competent student at a higher level), to understand and use his obligations and rights as a citizen to undertake marriage and home-making with a knowledge of the importance

- and a due regard for the responsibilities entailed, and to employ happily and fruitfully those hours when he is by himself and not under the constraints of the many social groups and organizations of which he belongs;
- c) give experience in self expression by the many means that are available – e.g. art, music, drama, writing, craft, handwork, creative thinking etc., to help him develop and control his own capacities;
 - d) expose children to appropriate emotional experiences – fine and beautiful things in music, painting, drama, poetry, prose, etc., which will supplement their won experiences and enlarge their range, enabling them thereby to learn to control their own actions and to develop a sympathy or a tolerance for others’ emotional experiences, and to widen their perception of emotional factors affecting their attitudes and general thinking;
 - e) provide an understanding for those children whose parents do not consciously object, of the beliefs and teaching of Christianity;
 - f) develop, support, and strengthen an understanding of our democratic system of life as this is exemplified in political, economic, social and cultural activities;
 - g) develop the type of character, based for most of us on our religious heritage, but for others on high ethical standards derived from other bases, that must be observed to enable our community life to function now and to improve in the future – including such traits as physical and mental courage, honesty of thought and action, kindness, loyalty, respect for the integrity of others, unselfishness, truthfulness, and the capacity for self-sacrifice;
 - h) develop an appreciation of the joy to be found in hard work.” (p. 39)
- Argues that “the basic educational characteristics which are developed thereby can be conveniently summarized as –
- a) Communication: “To express ideas clearly and readily in speech and writing; to acquire ideas readily from the speech and writing of others; to spell correctly the common words required in written expression; to write legibly and with appropriate speed.” (p. 39)
 - b) Number: “To know the tables of number and of common weights and measures, and to be able to work common examples requiring addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.” (p. 39)
 - c) General knowledge: “To have some knowledge and understanding of facets of the world the child lives in; geographical, historical, artistic, scientific, and religious.” (p. 39)
 - d) Habits of Thought and Action:
 - (i) “Some ability and the desire –
 - (a) to think logically; to draw appropriate conclusions from data; to analyse an argument; to refrain from judgement where possible until adequate data is available.
 - (b) to apply the process of logical (critical, scientific etc.) thought to personal, social and community problems.
 - (ii) Some appreciation of the interrelationship of peoples, and of personal responsibility for national and international amity, and the will to accept this responsibility.
 - (iii) Some appreciation of the nature of physical and mental health, and the will to develop these both personally and in the community.

- (iv) Some appreciation of the contribution of one's job to personal satisfaction and community progress, and the conviction that to do less than one's best hurts oneself and one's fellows.
- (v) Some sensitivity to the deficiencies no less than to the beauties of the world and human life.
- (vi) Some ability to transform thought into action". (p. 39)
- Under Respect for Individual Differences notes that in doing these things the economic necessity of educating children in groups must be considered and that there should be proper regard for individual differences.
- Under Higher Secondary and Technical Education notes that:
 - The same principles apply for students who remain at school beyond the compulsory years and increasing the proportion of time at school for these students will be devoted to those studies which provide them with the best vocational preparation.
 - "It is *not* the function of schools to turn out students completely equipped as workers in any job requiring a developed skill (although on graduation from a Technical College this is close to achievement). It *is* their function to have provided a student with the basic competence to enter a job with some confidence in his success and to have equipped him with the basic skills to enable him to go on learning, and to proceed to a higher level of studies if he so desires. It is also their function, even in the specialized studies, to keep steadily in mind the general objectives which apply to all students whatever their vocational future". (p. 40)
- Concludes that "Within this broad charter, which we think is acceptable to the community, to parents and to teachers, we believe that the professional educator can devise the school programme—its subjects and its general life. It is the obligation to plan the school life of the child so that there is progressive development for each child towards each objective, to determine by experience what are reasonable achievements to expect, to indicate what kinds of behaviour at various stages of the child's school life indicate that such achievement has taken place". (p. 40)

PART II – THE PRESENT SYSTEM & METHOD OF OPERATION OF THE VICTORIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

CHAPTER 3 – ADMINISTRATION

- Overviews present administrative arrangements of the Department of Education and the role of other departments and statutory bodies (Public Works, Department of Health, Children's Welfare Department, Department of Labour and Industry, Public Service Board, Teachers' Tribunal – as well as the University of Melbourne) that play a part in education or affect the role of the Education Department.

CHAPTER 4 – SCHOOLS

- Overviews types of schools including Primary, Secondary and Technical.
- Considers buildings, equipment and school transport.

CHAPTER 5 – TEACHING

- Considers issues of recruitment, teacher training, curriculum and correspondence.
- Overviews subjects and courses of study for primary schools, secondary schools, higher elementary schools, central schools, girls secondary schools, technical colleges, and special schools.

- Discusses Special Services including the Curriculum and Research Branch, the Survey and Planning Branch, library services, music and speech training, Physical Education, school forestry, psychology and guidance, the Publications Branch and welfare officers.

PART III – PROBLEMS FACING THE PRESENT SYSTEM

CHAPTER 6 – EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

- Begins with the observation that “Present day children are growing in a rapidly changing world”. (p. 92)
- Notes that “Each child and adult, with increasing leisure, higher living standards, increased life expectancy, has to adapt himself to new ways of living”. (p. 92) Notes that education has an important part to play in this.
- Discusses the changing patterns of employment, the increase in demand for skilled workers and the increase in enrolments in higher years of school.
- States that “The daily increasing fund of knowledge being added to the existing store makes it necessary to continually review and revise the aims of our schools and the curriculum, so that children, as future citizens, will be able to match the increasing responsibilities placed upon them by this accelerating rate of development of the material environment in which they are required to live”. (p. 93)

CHAPTER 7 – MATERIAL PROBLEMS

- The first section of this chapter discusses problems of accommodation and staffing that have resulted from “the doubling of the school population in the past twelve years to the present figure of approximately 400,000”. (p. 127)
- Discusses the need for additional accommodation and staff to reduce class sizes and the financial aspects of site maintenance.
- Considers transport services, equipment needs of schools, maintenance of school grounds, cleaning and teachers’ residences.

PART IV – SUMMARY OF REPORT WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Involves a 17 page summary of the report with recommendations for each of the areas investigated by the Committee. A summary and a list of major (relevant) recommendations are listed below.

Historical Introduction

- Notes that the introduction covered the period from mid-19th century to present “a picture of a Department created by visionaries and embodying today the virtues and the faults of a system evolved, not imposed”. (p. 146)
- Covers ‘Aims and Objectives of the State System of Education’, noting that general aims are outlined in the Education Act of 1872 and subsequent amendments and that specific aims are outlined in printed courses of study. The Committee suggests a need for “re-adjustment of the community in the role of education”. This takes the form of “a continuing exchange of ideas and needs between the schools and the community they serve”. (p. 146)
- Goes through a ‘General Charter of Objectives’, noting that the Committee submits a “broad charter of education” for the whole period of schooling, that embraces religious and aesthetic values as well as academic, “whilst stressing that the function of the school extends beyond the purely vocational”. (p. 146)

The Present System and Method of Operation of the Victorian Education Department

- Covers administration, statutory bases of the Education Department, finance, relations with other Departments, organisation of the Education Department, staffing of schools, types and purposes of schools, school transport, recruitment and training of teachers, and teacher colleges and hostels. (pp. 147-149)

The Curriculum

- Notes that the Committee has examined the curricula of Primary, Secondary, Technical and Special Schools and has noted the increasing range of subjects and the continuing processes of revision of curricula “to meet changing conditions”. Notes that research into educational problems has highlighted the need for the “development of individual abilities and interests” and the need for a wide range of subjects to meet this challenge. (p. 150)
- Notes that considerable attention has been devoted to the development of special services to assist pupils, teachers and teaching. Commends the extension of services in such areas as psychological services, publications, forestry, broadcasts and voluntary activities.
- Strongly recommends “the enlargement of the present Curriculum and Research Branch to embrace all teaching divisions, and the creation of a research committee to co-ordinate research programmes into such matters as study and teaching methods, aids, compulsory subjects and age of transition”. (p. 150)

Educational Problems

- Begins this section with noting the importance of emphasizing the close relationship between education and the “changing world of which it forms a part”. Notes that the role and function of education is varied but stresses the importance of education for meeting the needs of a skilled nation. Mentions the importance of recognizing difference and promoting equality of opportunity. Reiterates the belief of the Committee to provide “non-vocational training as the basis for citizenship”. (p. 150)
- Discusses pre-school, transition from home to school, parental attitudes to choice of school and transition to secondary education. Discusses the two distinct forms of post-primary education and notes that it is not possible to rebuild the system, but that it is possible to overcome disadvantages of the present system to give the fullest opportunities for social development.
- Recommends “that courses and administration of post-primary schools be reviewed in 1960 to provide that –
 - i). the subject studied, and the method of treatment thereof, be such as to facilitate inter-school transfer within the first two years without the loss of time;
 - ii). the work of all post-primary pupils to be reviewed at the end of the second year with regard to progress and, if required, recommendation of transfer to a more suitable type of school or course;
 - iii). specialisation in all courses to be deferred until the *third* year of post-primary education, and that such courses include a common core of general education material;
 - iv). the choice of post-primary school be the right and responsibility of parents and pupils, assisted by teachers and where required, without importuning by schools.” (pp. 151-152)

- Discusses transitions from school to work and the need for continued education beyond the age of fifteen or sixteen. Recommends greater provision of education.
- Recommends that “continued education in Victoria be examined and planned as soon as possible”. (p. 152)
- Further discusses examinations, scholarships and certification. The Committee unanimously agrees that the Intermediate (4th Year) certificate be retained but opposes certification at lower levels.
- Strongly recommends “the introduction of a 6th Year Secondary School Certificate, attested by the Schools Board, and existing beside but not replacing the present Matriculation Certificate”. (p. 153)
- Recommends an increase in the number of Commonwealth Scholarships and living allowances for senior post-primary education.
- Discusses university entrance, handicapped children and problems of technical education. Makes three specific recommendations in relation to closer cooperation between the University and the Education Department with regard to teacher training and qualifications.
- Notes that individual schooling should take into account individual differences and provide education that allows for the maximum development of the capacities of all students. Argues that attention to the gifted should not be given at the expense of others.
- Makes three recommendations in relation to catering for diverse student need and abilities – the establishment of experimental schools to trial grouping and individual advancement, the development of different courses in the same subject to suit different capacities and the development of counselling and guidance. (pp. 154-155)
- Notes that financial constraints are hampering work in regards to handicapped children. Notes the problems of technical education and recommends the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Council to advise the Education Department on the needs of industry, especially in relation to courses, equipment and the organisation of technical education, apprenticeship training, examinations and funding. (p. 155)
- Makes a number of recommendations to increase decision making at the school level.
- Notes the limited parental involvement in curriculum and that further participation should be encouraged.
- Covers a broad range of other topics and makes recommendations in the following areas:
 - Inspection of schools: recommends that inspection should be less frequent with greater responsibility placed on the head of the school and more time given to the advisory role of inspections.
 - Staffing: makes recommendations regarding the frequency of staff changes and the system of classification and promotion.
 - Temporary teachers: notes the need to reduce unqualified temporary teachers.
 - Training of teachers: makes a number of recommendations for improvements to teacher training at different levels.
 - Decentralization of administration: recommends that this question be examined once again with a view to trialling some form of decentralization.
 - Accommodation and population growth: notes the increasing demand for school buildings.
 - Staffing requirements: notes the increased number of teachers required.
 - Planning of schools: supports current processes.

- Competing demands for funds: discusses the problem of increasing funding not meeting demand and makes some suggestions regarding Departmental finances.
- School transport services and conveyance allowances: recommends that costs for transport services for country schools should be met by the Department and that the conveyance allowance for metropolitan schools should be discontinued.
- Makes a series of recommendations in relation to equipment, maintenance, teachers residences, relations with other government departments and finances.