

THE INTRODUCTION OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN QUEENSLAND

In the May 2014 Principal's Newsletter, Mr Fairley wrote that in 2015 "Townsville Grammar will be celebrating 10 years of 'Year 7 into secondary', following the introduction of a dedicated Year 7-9 Middle School at the North Ward Campus in 2006." He noted that this early move has brought many benefits to the School not only in the academic development of our students but also in the social and interpersonal advancements enjoyed by students entering the school in Year 7.

From the time Queensland attained its independence from New South Wales in 1859 until 1953, students in Queensland had a system that fostered nine years of primary school and four years of secondary school. The primary school structure was for two years of Prep followed by Grade 1 to 7 and then four years of secondary school; two for the Junior Examination and two for the Senior Examination. In 1953 the structure was changed to eight primary grades and no prep but without giving another year to secondary. In 1963 the structure changed again when Grade 8 was introduced into secondary schools.

It can be argued that the most important events to occur in the history of Queensland education since the promulgation of the Education Schools Act in 1860 (which placed all primary education under one central authority) and the 1860 Grammar Schools Act (which provided for the establishment of a grammar [secondary] school in any locality) were the changes mentioned above. On both of these occasions the Headmaster of Townsville Grammar played an innovative role.

One of the chief advocates for change to the Queensland Schools' structure in the 1950s was Maurie Blank, Headmaster from 1948-1965. At every Speech Night from 1949-1955 Mr Blank argued for the changes to the structure, especially after a new curriculum for the Junior Examination, incorporating eight or nine subjects, was introduced into secondary schools in 1951. Mr Blank felt strongly that it was too much for students to accomplish in two years of secondary education. His main argument was that students had to assimilate in two years about twice the formal knowledge they received in nine years of primary education. He believed that the last year of primary education was a waste and could be better utilized in secondary education. Mr Blank also argued that the State Scholarship Examination held at the end of primary was also having a marked effect on educational progress. Primary teachers were teaching to the examination requirements instead of teaching skills.

Mr Blank's vision for secondary education was rewarded in 1955 when, as a key-note speaker at a conference for secondary principals in Brisbane, he argued with great success, that secondary education become five years. However, the wheels of government often work slowly and it was not until 1961 when the scholarship examination was abandoned and in 1963 secondary schooling became five years. Grammar had led the way for this to occur with a re-structure of the curriculum in the school. The same could be said for Mr Fairley and the Trustees move to introduce the Middle School concept into Grammar well before the Queensland Government opted for 'Year 7 into Secondary' from 2015.

Many secondary school teachers were also pleased to see the Scholarship Examination go in 1961. For archival interest what follows are some questions posed in the 1950 examination:

English:

From the following passage select ten words derived from Latin. Give the root and its meaning, of each word you select.

"The banana plant has the loveliest leaves I know. It projects upwards with a copious stem, and the leaves descend in broad rippled pennants, falling outwardly, refined to points, when the impulse is lost. A world could not be old in which such a plant grows. It is sure evidence of the world's vitality. To look at the plant you would not think that growing is a long process, a matter of months and natural difficulties.

The banana is an instant and joyous answer to the sun. It is not a fragile and dainty thing, except in colour and form."

Mathematics:

A man begins work on five days of the week at 7:45am and stops at 4:15pm, having a rest period for lunch from 11:30am to 12:45pm. On Saturday he commences work at 7:45am and finishes earlier. His rate of pay is 3s.9d per hour. He is paid £7.10s 0d for his full week's work. At what time does he finish work on Saturday?

Geography:

Students had to study the geography of New Zealand, Canada, India and Pakistan, Union of South Africa, Great Britain and Australia [all Commonwealth countries at that time]. Most of the questions in the examination called for memory recall and no critical thought. Some of the sample questions were:

1. Name the strait separating the north and South Island of New Zealand.
2. Name the mountain ranges on the eastern of side of the Indian Deccan.
3. Name the provinces of South Africa.
4. Briefly state why a radio broadcast in Brisbane at 10:00pm is heard simultaneously in Perth at 8:00pm.

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist