

## Education

It was not until 1870 that education became compulsory for all children aged 5 to 13. Before this date, education provision could only be described as patchy. Many children received no schooling at all and huge numbers of people were unable to read or write. Some children attended Sunday School where they received basic instruction; others, whose parents could afford it, were sent to 'Dame Schools' which tended to be run by women in their own homes. There was no curriculum and no standards! Children from well-off families might have a governess and some boys were sent to boarding school to receive a more formal education. Girls, even in rich families, often found their education neglected, being forced to concentrate on more feminine pursuits, such as needlework and music.

The Education Act of 1870 established local school boards to set up schools, levy fees and enforce the attendance of most children between the ages of 5 and 13. Although this did ensure that children were now taught the 3 R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), conditions were far from ideal. The children were taught in large groups and learnt many things 'by rote' or repetition. The school itself was often in poor condition and many school boards were reluctant to spend money on maintaining the fabric of the building. Discipline was also harsh with corporal punishment as the norm. Slight changes were made by the Education Act of 1880 which allowed children to work part-time once they were ten and had reached a certain standard of education.

A further Education Act was passed in 1902. This took control over schools away from the school boards and handed it to local government, which established Local Education Authorities. The LEAs were also empowered to provide secondary education.



A typical 19th century school photograph showing a primary class. (Image from Durham County Record Office, ref D/Ph162/15)