

EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

In 2015, secondary schooling in the State will become six years instead of the five years now current. This is the first major change in our education system since the Prep year was reintroduced in 2007. Previously, major changes to the educational structure had been made in the State in 1963.

Prior to 1953 students had to attend nine years primary school and four years secondary school. The primary school structure was for two years of Prep [Prep 1 and Prep 2] for the first year, then [Prep 3 and Prep 4] for the second year. This was followed by Grades 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 (one year less) but without giving another year to secondary. In 1963 the structure changed again when Grade 8 was introduced into secondary schools.

One of the chief advocates for change to the Queensland Schools' structure in the 1950s was Maurie Blank, Headmaster of the School from 1948-1965. Mr Blank had joined the staff of the School in 1939 and resigned at the end of 1942 to enter the Royal Australian Air Force. At the end of World War Two he re-joined the School staff but resigned at the end of 1946. In May 1948 the Trustees of the School invited Mr Blank to be the Headmaster. An energetic and far-sighted educator Mr Blank was to increase numbers from 79 students when he became Headmaster to close to 300 students at the time of his resignation. His tenure also saw rapid developments and improvements in School buildings, a comprehensive and exciting sports' programme and extremely good results at the Queensland Junior and Senior Examinations. More importantly Mr Blank continually pushed the principles of Honour and Service to Fellow Man and this philosophy is perhaps best reflected in the fact that the great majority of past students who have been awarded Australian Honours have been students who had Mr Blank as their Headmaster.



Mr Maurie Blank

In spite of teaching a full load of subjects [Mathematics and Physics], running a school as well being in charge of the boarding house of more than 70 students Mr Blank also became a leading figure in advocating changes to Queensland's education structure. One of his foremost arguments was for the establishment of a tertiary institution in the north of the State. Mr Rowland, Headmaster from 1905 to 1938, was a strident supporter of this concept and Mr Blank continued with the argument. His drive met with some success when in 1961 a University College was set up in Townsville. Mr Blank was invited to be one of the inaugural members of the council, a just reward for his efforts in this area.

In spite of his success at getting a tertiary institution in the north Mr Blank's prime aim was to drastically change the structure of the primary/secondary system of education in Queensland. At every speech night from 1949 to 1955 Mr Blank argued strongly for changes to the structure. He believed that nine years was too long for primary schooling and that an extra year should be added to secondary education. In 1949 he was highly critical of students not staying on for their senior years. He believed education was far more important than students leaving early in search of money. He continued this theme in 1950 by stating that in that year only 7 per cent of seventeen year olds, 17 per cent of sixteen year olds and 35 per cent of fifteen year olds were still in full-time education.

A new syllabus was introduced to secondary schools in 1951, a move of which Mr Blank, in his speech night report, was highly critical. With the new curriculum students had to study either eight or nine subjects over two years before writing the Junior Examination. While not specifically against the number of subjects to be studied Mr Blank argued that it was too much for the students to accomplish in two years. 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. Mr Blank believed that the last year of primary education was a waste and could be better utilised in secondary education.

Mr Blank was to continue his attack on the Queensland education structure in 1952 and 1953. In 1952 he reported that only 25 per cent of Queensland students completed their Junior Certificate and only one-third of that number went on to Senior Certificate level. In 1953 he went further and said that Queensland would suffer unless an extra year of secondary was added. This was borne out by the fact that in that year there were five high schools in Townsville but only one per cent of every thousand people in the city completed their senior year. Mr Blank's view was that this would lead to a dearth of candidates for professional positions such as teaching, engineering and medicine.

Mr Blank's vision for secondary education was rewarded in 1955 when as a key-note speaker at a Conference of Secondary Principals in Brisbane he argued, with great success, that secondary education become five years. However, it was not until 1963 that his dream became a reality. In anticipation of a five year secondary education Mr Blank had introduced in 1961 a range of subjects into the Grammar Junior School that covered 25 per cent of the Junior Certificate Examination. The School was thus prepared for the change and it also allowed Mr Blank to offer, for the first time in the school's curriculum, an Academic and Commercial stream. It had been a long struggle for Mr Blank to see his vision become a reality but it had been worth the fight.

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