

previous year, he had worked in the school barn every day between “6:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M. and from 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. again at recess, from 4:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. and had had to stoke up the furnace with coal at 10:00 o’clock before retiring.” Ross said that “he liked school but not working like a hired hand.” Bell recommended that the amount of student labour being done at the Birtle school be investigated.²⁶⁰

Language and culture: “The Indian language is indeed seldom heard in the institution.”

The government’s hostile approach to Aboriginal languages was reiterated in numerous policy directives. In 1883, Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney instructed Battleford school principal Thomas Clarke that great attention was to be given “towards imparting a knowledge of the art of reading, writing and speaking the English language rather than that of Cree.”²⁶¹ In 1889, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs Lawrence Vankoughnet informed Bishop Paul Durieu that in the new Cranbrook, British Columbia, school, meal-time conversations were to be “conducted exclusively in the English language.” The principal was also to set a fixed time during which Aboriginal languages could be spoken.²⁶² In 1890, Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed proposed, “At the most the native language is only to be used as a vehicle of teaching and should be discontinued as such as soon as practicable.” English was to be the primary language of instruction, “even where French is taught.”²⁶³ The Indian Affairs “Programme of Studies for Indian Schools” of 1893 advised, “Every effort must be made to induce pupils to speak English, and to teach them to understand it; unless they do the whole work of the teacher is likely to be wasted.”²⁶⁴

Principals regularly reported on their success in suppressing Aboriginal languages. In 1887, Principal E. Claude boasted that his thirty students at the High River school “all understand English passably well and few are unable to express themselves in English. They talk English in recreation. I scarcely need any coercive means to oblige them to do so.”²⁶⁵ In 1898, the Kamloops principal reported that “English is the only language used at all times by the pupils.”²⁶⁶ That same year, the Mission, British Columbia, principal wrote, “English is the common language of the school, the Indian language is indeed seldom heard in the institution, except with the newly arrived pupils.”²⁶⁷ The 1898 report from the principal of the Anglican school at Onion Lake indicated that the school was one of the few exceptions. There, the children were taught to “read and write both Cree and English.”²⁶⁸ Inspectors viewed the continued use of Aboriginal languages by the students as a sign of failure. The principal of the Red Deer school was taken to task in 1903 by an inspector who felt that a “serious drawback to school work, as well as an evidence of bad discipline, was the use of the Cree language, which was quite prevalent.”²⁶⁹

This policy of language suppression continued well into the twentieth century. After a 1935 tour of Canada, Oblate Superior General Théodore Labouré expressed concern over