



The Roman Catholic school in Fort George, Quebec, opened in 1931. Deschâtelets Archives.

reportedly 28,429 school-aged Aboriginal children. This meant that 31.1% of the school-aged Aboriginal children were in residential school.¹³⁵

Regulation

The residential school system operated with few regulations; those that did exist were in large measure weakly enforced. The Canadian government never developed anything approaching the education acts and regulations by which provincial governments administered public schools. The key piece of legislation used in regulating the residential school system was the *Indian Act*. This was a multi-purpose piece of legislation that defined and limited First Nations life in Canada. The Act contained no education-related provisions until 1884. There were no residential school-specific regulations until 1894. These dealt almost solely with attendance and truancy.

It was recognized by those who worked within the system that the level of regulation was inadequate. In 1897, Indian Affairs education official Martin Benson wrote, “No regulations have been adopted or issued by the Department applicable to all its schools, as had been done by the Provincial Governments.”¹³⁶ The situation did not improve over time. The education section of the 1951 *Indian Act* and the residential school regulations adopted in 1953 were each only four pages in length.¹³⁷ By comparison, the Manitoba *Public Schools Act* of 1954 was ninety-one pages in length.¹³⁸ In addition to the Act, the Manitoba government had adopted nineteen education-related regulations.¹³⁹