The Indian Affairs schools branch maintained that the principals and the staff were "appointed by the church authorities, subject to the approval of the Department as to qualifications."[203] In reality, the churches hired staff and the government then automatically approved their selections.[204] The churches placed a greater priority on religious commitment than on teaching ability.[205] Because the pay was so low, many of the teachers lacked any qualification to teach.[206] In 1908, Indian Affairs inspector F. H. Paget reported that at the Battleford school, "frequent changes in the staff at this school has not been to its advantage." The problem lay not with the principal, but with the fact that "more profitable employment is available in the District and, furthermore, the salaries paid are not as high as are paid in other public institutions."[207] When a British Columbia Indian agent recommended that schools be required to hire only qualified staff, he was told by his superior, British Columbia Indian Superintendent A. W. Vowell, that such a requirement would result in the churches' applying for "larger grants." And, as Vowell understood it, Indian Affairs "is not at present disposed to entertain requests for increased grants to Indian boarding and industrial schools."[208] In 1955, 55 (23%) of the 241 teachers in residential schools directly employed by Indian Affairs had no teacher's certificate.[209] In 1969, Indian Affairs reported it was still paying its teachers less than they could make in provincial schools. "As a result, there are about the same number of unqualified teachers, some 140, in federal schools [residential and non-residential] now, as ten years ago."[210]

In the minds of some principals, religious training was the most valuable training the schools provided. In 1903, Brandon, Manitoba, principal T. Ferrier wrote that "while it is very important that the Indian child should be educated, it is of more importance that he should build up a good clean character." Such a heavy emphasis was required, in Ferrier's opinion, to "counteract the evil tendencies of the Indian nature."[211] Louise Moine recalled that religious instruction and observation were a constant part of life at the Qu'Appelle school in the early twentieth century: "From the time we got out of bed at the sound of the bell, we went down on our knees to pray. After we had washed and dressed, we headed for the chapel to attend Low mass which was always held at 7 a.m."[212] The staff handbook for the Presbyterian school in Kenora in the 1940s stated it was expected that, upon leaving the school, most students would "return to the Indian Reserves from which they had come." Given this future, staff members were told that "the best preparation we can give them is to teach them the Christian way of life."[213]

Not surprisingly, many of those who succeeded academically followed careers in the church. Coqualeetza graduate Peter Kelly became a Methodist Church minister. Emmanuel College graduate Edward Ahenakew became an Anglican minister. Others worked for government or taught school. Qu'Appelle graduate Daniel Kennedy became an interpreter and general assistant for the Assiniboine Indian Agency. Joseph Dion, a graduate of the Onion Lake school, taught school for many years in Saskatchewan. Still others pursued business and professional careers. After attending the Mohawk Institute, Beverly Johnson went to Hellmuth College in London, Ontario, where he excelled at sports and drama. He