

Task 1. Script

In the 1860s, around one third of children in England and Wales did not actually go to school. That's one in three children. Children didn't *have to* go to school until 1880, when it became compulsory for 5–10 year olds. This went up to the age of 12 in 1899 and to the age of 14 in 1918. Then from 1918 onwards, if children didn't reach a certain level by their last year, they would have to stay on at school.

If you sat in a school class from 100 years ago now, you would probably recognise most of the lessons. There were the three 'Rs', so reading, writing and arithmetic, that's maths. Children also used to study history, geography and religion. Girls would do needlework, as it was important to learn how to sew clothes and other things in the home, but boys would study drawing. The children also used to do physical education or PE, led by the teacher, which was called 'drill'. The children would do a series of exercises in the classroom, for example marching or jumping. Even then, educationalists realised that exercising helped children to stay awake and to concentrate.

The children probably quite enjoyed doing physical exercises in winter, when the classrooms were usually freezing cold. Physical exercise was the best way to warm themselves up. There was generally only one small coal fire, near the teacher's desk, so if a pupil was sitting at the back of the class, it would be freezing and that pupil would often shiver with cold. The teacher used to sit on a high chair at the front of the class, to see everyone. The windows were also high, so that the pupils could not look outside and get distracted by people passing by. The children often sat on wooden benches, with no chair back to lean on, which was quite uncomfortable as

the day went on. The desks were heavy and fixed in one place – so pupils couldn't move around, and in the room there was always a picture of the monarch, King George V. Discipline, as you can imagine, was very strict. Teachers frequently used a stick or a ruler to punish children and keep control. Many classrooms had a corner where naughty children used to stand, sometimes with a pointed hat on their head. On the hat was written 'Dunce', or 'D' for dunce, meaning 'stupid'.

The children used to have a slate and chalk because paper and books were too expensive. They used ink to write, and in those days, even if you were left-handed, the teacher generally made you use your right hand. Learning is certainly much more enjoyable now!