

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT FOR SCHEDULED HERITAGE BUILDING:  
FORMER ARTHUR STREET SCHOOL INFANT DEPARTMENT**



Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga image

**PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Temporary 2GP Scheduled Heritage Building Reference No:	BX005
Address	26 Arthur Street, Dunedin
Located within a Heritage Precinct	NA
HNZPT List Reference & Description	List No. 9717, Category 2 Historic Place
Heritage Covenant	No
Building Use at Time of Record	Education
Condition of Property	Not known to be at risk because of condition

**SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT**

Historic/Social	Meets criteria
Spiritual/Cultural	Does not meet criteria
Design	Meets criteria
Technological/Scientific	Does not meet criteria

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The building meets one or more of the significance criteria from Policy 2.4.2.1.b and is recommended for inclusion in Appendix A1.1.

## RECOMMENDED PROTECTION

[Tick]	Features	Details
✓	Building envelope	Entire external building envelope
	External/ancillary elements	
	Internal elements and/or rooms	Not considered as part of this desktop assessment. Owner may nominate interior elements for protection
	Excluded elements	

## SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

An edited version of Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga's Summary follows:

*'Arthur Street School has its origins in Dunedin's Beach School, established by the first Scottish settlers in 1848, moving to its current site in 1877, where it was known as Middle District School. The Infant Department was built in 1887 to remedy the cramped and unhealthy conditions at the Arthur Street School (as the school became known). The 'substantial and commodious' building alleviated the worst overcrowding at a time when there was increasing concern about the welfare of young children. The Infant Department is built to a standard Otago Education Board plan from the 1880s. As the oldest surviving school building on site, the building became the symbol of the school's history during 1998 sesquicentennial celebrations. In 2017, the former Infant Department is home to the school's library. The Infant Department was assessed as having architectural, historical, and social significance.'*

The former Arthur Street School Infant Department is comparable to scheduled heritage buildings within Dunedin of a similar function and period. When compared with other scheduled buildings, the former infant department meets the threshold to be included on the district plan heritage schedule.

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Architectural Period	Victorian (1837-1901)
Style	Standard plan Otago Education Board
Era/Date of Construction	1887
Architect/Designer/Builder	John Somerville (Otago Education Board architect) Miller and Moffat (contractors)
Historic Use & Cultural Associations	School building
Primary Construction Materials	Timber, slate
Notable Architectural Characteristics	Standard Education Board plan detailing

## HISTORY

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga's List Entry report is reproduced below:

*Arthur Street School has its origins in Dunedin's first school established in September 1848 by the Scottish settlers, and known as Beach School because of its location at the shoreline below Bell Hill. The school also served as a church. In the 1860s, the school relocated to a brick building erected on the corner of Dowling Street and York Place and became known as Middle District School. When Dowling Street was lowered, the structure became unsafe and in April 1876 it was decided to move the school to a site on Arthur Street.*

### Infant education

*Coinciding with the school's move was a legislative change that had a profound impact on New Zealand's schools. The 1877 Education Act established New Zealand's first free national system of primary education. It sought to establish standards of education, and to be free, compulsory and secular. School became compulsory for children from ages seven to thirteen, although children were entitled to attend between the ages of five and fifteen. The Department of Education was responsible for distributing grant funding to education boards. Twelve education boards (made up of nine members elected by school committees) defined school districts within their areas and established and maintained schools within their districts. School committees were elected by a ballot of local householders and had management of educational matters in their area.*

*Infant classes, then, were a non-compulsory part of primary schools, covering Primers 1 to 4 and ages five and six. Parents who could afford the fees often placed their children in privately run infant schools or kindergartens. Some kindergartens saw themselves akin to schools and taught children to read. These private schools and kindergartens were considered to be an easier introduction to schooling than the large infant rooms of public schools.*

### Middle District School at Arthur Street

*As the population in Otago became more settled so the Otago Education Board had a building programme for schools. Records show that the building programmes were based around some standard designs with variations according to local circumstances where necessary. The form of the building reflected the teaching methods, where children were 'often taught in relays in order to accommodate as many as possible in the small space available.'*

*The new school on Arthur Street (known at this time as Middle District School or Middle School) was almost complete by April 1877. Middle District School opened on 1 October 1877, with accommodation for 450 pupils. Of the 434 foundation pupils, 152 were in the 'Infant Department' under the charge of Miss Hay and three pupil teachers. The 1877 Education Act boosted rolls and the school proved to be too small, with insufficient space for senior students. The Dunedin School Committee debated how to remedy the overcrowding.*

*Overcrowding was recognised as a health issue, particularly for the infants – in Dunedin, a circular sent to fifteen schools found that two out of every five children attending school were under seven years of age. Dr Brown, reporting to the Otago Education Board, stated that the 'infant rooms were always the most crowded in the different schools, and the attention of the Government ought to be called to the way in which the future citizens of the country were being*

*sacrificed. There was nothing more conducive to infanticide than this crowding of young children in apartments which were inadequately ventilated.’ Pupils sat for hours in cramped positions ‘some of them sat with their arms folded in front, which contracted the chest and rounded the shoulders, and the children necessarily suffered in health. In some schools the children sat with their arms folded behind, which was more rational, but at the same time must be very wearisome.’ Forbury School was reported to have 180 infants in a room with only the space for 90, according to the Board’s own scale of space.*

*The development of school buildings was hampered by the Long Depression of the 1880s, which saw cuts in education expenditure. Arthur Street School Committee’s quest for adequate accommodation took place in the context of tight budgets.*

*Teacher training was also limited – the pupil-teacher system was maintained longer than had been anticipated. Campbell writes: ‘No picture of education at this period is even approximately correct unless it is kept in mind that much of the regular work of the primary schools was carried out by adolescent boys and girls struggling to impose their will on bored and unruly classes containing children little younger, sometimes even older, than themselves. The pupil-teachers received perhaps £20 per annum in their first year and £60 in their fourth; the scheme was quite as much a method of securing cheap labour as a means of training. Its typical product, among those who could stand up to its rigours, was a ‘strong disciplinarian’ and an efficient—frequently highly efficient—instructor whose outlook had been limited and prematurely hardened by over-work in an atmosphere that was often singularly devoid of grace and intellectual vitality. The miracle was that there were some who came through the mill with alert minds and warm human sympathies.’*

*The Arthur Street School Committee presented their concerns to the Otago Education Board, noting the passing of the Education Act had meant the school buildings were inadequate for the number of students. They told the Board that there was an urgent need for additions to be made to the school: ‘the present buildings are greatly overcrowded. That the wooden building at present used as class-rooms is entirely unfit for the teaching of children during the winter months.’ They had requested a meeting with the Works Committee of the Board, but to no avail, even the plea for lining the wooden buildings was rejected. A parent wrote to the committee complaining that two of his children ‘had contracted a serious illness owing to the wretched accommodation provided for temporary classrooms.’*

*The committee resolved to once again write to the board. The Board responded ‘that the attention of the Arthur street School Committee be directed to the fact that sufficient accommodation is provided in Dunedin for all the children attending school.’ Also limiting was the curriculum, Campbell again: ‘The syllabus itself breathed an abstract, bookish intellectualism from cover to cover, and its approach throughout was austere logical. Far from taking as a starting point the interests and experience of the children themselves, it succeeded to an astonishing degree in isolating facts from any human context whatsoever.’*

*In June 1886, the committee received a letter from the secretary of the Otago Education Board stating that ‘a sub-committee had been appointed to inquire into the necessity or otherwise for increased accommodation in the schools in the Dunedin district’ and requesting that a meeting be arranged to visit the school. In July 1886, the Arthur Street School Committee wrote again to the*

*Otago Education Board about the 'urgent necessity of increased accommodation at the school.' The Board's reply was disheartening: 'Your letter of the 12th current, re school accommodation, was considered by the Education Board at its meeting to-day, when it was decided to inform you that an enlargement of your school will now be rendered unnecessary, as the board has decided to erect a new Normal School on the site of the old Middle District School in Stuart street and York Place.'*

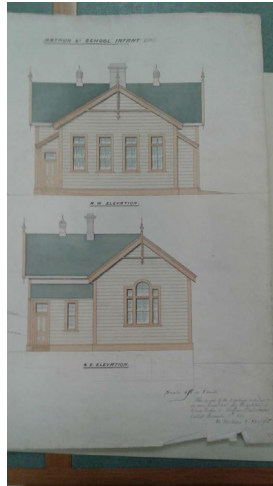
*Not to be put off, the school committee authorised their secretary to reply that 'some of the present accommodation of the school is so unsuitable to have been condemned by the inspectors; and in the event of waiting until the new Normal School is erected, a long time will probably elapse before the evil is remedied.'*

*A deputation of the Arthur Street School Committee waited upon the Board on the necessity of increasing accommodation. Mr Barr told the Board that they had been made aware some time previously that '150 children had to be accommodated in play-sheds which had been repeatedly condemned by the inspectors.' The committee proposed that an area in the square to the rear of the main building be roofed in. The Board resolved to let the committee know of their decision in due course. The November meeting of the committee was informed that the Board had decided to erect one room at the rear of the building. The December committee meeting reported that the Board had 'decided to erect a new building for the infant classes on a site at the rear of the ground and that the plans had been seen by most of the committee, who were satisfied with them.'*

#### Arthur Street's Infant Department

*The school's overcrowding went unresolved until a new infant department was built. In 1887, the school committee's report to the annual meeting of householders reported that 'the serious disadvantage under which the school has laboured for years past through insufficient and improper accommodation is now removed by the erection at the rear of the grounds of a substantial and commodious infant department, giving room for 200 children in the lower classes, and thereby leaving the main building to the classes, and thereby leaving the main building to the classes in the standards. The play sheds may now be put to the use for which they were originally intended. The committee hope and expect that this addition will be a great relief to the teachers and will give increased facilities for teaching the children without overcrowding.'*

*The contract for the infant department was let to McMillan and Moffat on 16 December 1886. The new infant school was completed and ready for the infant department in June 1887.*



*By 1900 increasing numbers of schools found their infant attendance of sufficient size to warrant a separate classroom or department. One former pupil described the typical 1920s infant room:*

*...the infant room was a small hall with a partition down the middle separating the girls from the boys, and with a classroom at either end... The girls seldom saw the boys on the other side of the partition as infants spent most of the day immobile, wedged into little seats with wide shelves on the right for slates...At roll call we listened to the names of the invisible creatures on the other side of the partition.*

*A former pupil at the 1998 reunion recalled the infant room in the late 1920s: 'staring wide-eyed at the interior of this room tiered with double desks and heated by potbelly stoves with blackboards on easels.'*

#### Infant Welfare

*During the inter war years, there was increasing political and educational interest in the health of children. Stimulated by the effects of the 1918 epidemic and the efforts of Dr Truby King and the Plunket Society, New Zealand moved towards promoting a nation of 'Better Britons'. 'Childhood' became internationally recognised as a distinct stage in human development: 'a child's value to the family was no longer seen as primarily economic. Instead, children were viewed in terms of 'emotional capital' as socially priceless'.*

*The educational sector's response was the advent of 'open air' classrooms and 'fresh air' buildings designed to encourage the health and welfare of the nation's youth. These new designs made different styles of teaching possible that were particularly suited to infant classes.*

*In 1928, the infant room was remodelled and the floor tiers removed. In 1933 an 'open air' room was added, but was, unsurprisingly, soon enclosed.*

*In the 1960s the original buildings and the 1930s brick homecraft/woodwork block were demolished to make way for new classrooms.*

#### Later history

*The building was used as the new entrants' classroom until 1985. In 1986 the interior of the infant school was modernised and a mezzanine floor added. The Otago Education Board decided*

*to retain the original exterior, including the slate roof. The works programme saw the demolition of the chimney.*

*The 1887 Infant School became the symbol of the 1998 sesquicentennial as it was the oldest building at the school to survive. In the 1990s, the infant school was known as the reading room, serving both the pupils and the wider community, being used as an adult education centre. In 1999 the infant school was converted to the school's library. The significance of the building's history was recognised as 'a visible link to the history of education in Otago, and Arthur Street's part in that history.' In 2017, the building remains the Arthur Street School Library.*

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

### Setting

*Arthur Street School Infant Department (Former) is located at the rear of the school grounds. To the rear is the Town Belt, with its mature stands of trees. A playground is located to one side, asphalt courts in front, and over the northern boundary are the dramatic buildings of Otago Boy's High School.*

*The Infant Department is built to a standard Otago Education Board plan from the 1880s. School plans were adapted to the requirements of their communities – small, single room, larger two-room, T-shaped plan etc. These buildings are becoming less common as schools are abandoned or replaced by modern buildings. Other school buildings have been converted to residences (for example Waianakarua, Category 2, List No. 3253), while other similar buildings are still in use (for example St Leonard's School (List No. 2211).*

### Exterior

*The timber-framed building is rusticated weather board, T-shaped in plan, with lean-to additions to the north and east elevations. It has a slate roof, with ventilators along the ridge line. The windows on the side elevations are multi-paned double-hung sash windows, with a hinged top light. On the front elevation there is a large arched window with sidelights flanked by double-hung sash windows.*

### Interior

*The interior of the Infant Department has been partitioned – the large main space forms the library, with the smaller spaces providing storage, ablutions and offices. A mezzanine has been added that provides a meeting space. The ceiling has been lowered, but the original lining could still be present above the modern lining.*

*Access to the mezzanine is upstairs off the lobby. Access to the offices off the main library is down a stair, the stairwell of which is evident by the roofed passage on the north elevation.*

*The original windows are in situ, as are a number of interior four-panel timber doors.'*

## SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

### HISTORIC/SOCIAL

The building demonstrates heritage values within this criterion.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga's assessments of historical and social significance are reproduced below:

*'Education was a central issue for communities in nineteenth century Dunedin. Middle District School, as Arthur Street School was originally called, was Dunedin's first school, so the school has a link to Dunedin's earliest settlement. Its history represents the story of the foundation of education in Otago, both before and after the passing of the 1877 Education Act. The subsequent history of the school's development and expansion (including the construction of the Infant Department) reflects the later history of education.'*

*'Arthur Street Infant Department has been the centre for both education and social activities. Since its conversion from Infant Department to library, the building has been a centre of community educational and adult learning, performing an important social function.'*

### SPIRITUAL/CULTURAL

The building does not demonstrate heritage values within this criterion.

### DESIGN

The building demonstrates heritage values within this criterion.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga's architectural assessment is reproduced below:

*'The Arthur Street School Infant Department has architectural significance as a representative example of a building designed by the Otago Education Board in the mid-1880s. Variations on this standard plan were used throughout Otago.'*

### TECHNOLOGICAL/SCIENTIFIC

The building does not demonstrate heritage values within this criterion.

## REFERENCES

Heritage New Zealand List Entry Report (No. 9717), saved to Pataka. List entry available online.

<b>Date Assessment Completed</b>	11 April 2023 - Transcribed from the Heritage New Zealand List Entry Report	<b>Author</b>	HB
<b>Date Peer Reviewed</b>	5 July 2024	<b>Reviewer</b>	MM
<b>Date Confirmed Complete</b>	18 July 2024		



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