



Early school inspectors in Dunedin had an unenviable job in trying to raise the standards of both the tuition and the school environment. Peter Goyen was one such inspector. In 1877 school attendance became compulsory, and the school therefore became a public place attended by a large proportion of the population. To the school inspector, the school's effectiveness in training future citizens depended on two things: good discipline and clean surroundings. "We are largely creatures of our environment", said Goyen. "There can be no question about the tendencies induced by dirt and litter", he exclaimed.

Early school buildings were frequently inadequate and dirty, lacked any effective heating, were inferior in size, style and material. Inspectors were eventually able to visit each school twice a year, one an arranged visit to examine the children's achievements, the other a surprise visit to inspect the buildings and the teachers' methods. Goyen noted that the school was scrupulously clean on the examination day, but was often the reverse on the day of the unannounced inspection. Very few schools were swept every day, floors could be 'black and greasy after dancing', and when the inspector's gaze turned with disgust to the privies, usually called 'outoffices', they reported these as extremely dirty and unseemly, especially those of the boys. In one the filth was compounded by its use as a fowl-roost, and in several others by a 'good deal of objectionable language' being scribbled on the walls. In 1882 Goyen was in despair at the condition of one school where the infant and boys' out-offices were 'inexcusably dirty'.

In 1883 he reported that in many schools the reading books were very dirty and dilapidated, and slates presented problems too over the common practice of using spit to clean them. There was a serious lack of ventilation in many rooms and it was suggested this contributed to ill-health and epidemics. With the introduction science subjects, including physiology, into schools, Goyen was forced to complain that it was useless to teach the laws of health while 'every precept of sanitary science' was 'set at naught'. These laws were 'recklessly disregarded', contradicted', held in 'supreme contempt', 'violated', 'neglected', and 'contravened'.

Peter Goyen obviously never caught any serious disease as he died aged 81 years on 10 July, 1927, and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery in a simple covered grave marked by the one word 'GOYEN'.

Research taken from "Dirt – Filth and Decay in a New World Arcadia" by Pamela Wood.

Plus usual attribution to Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust please.