



**Hislop, John** 1821 - 1904  
Teacher, school inspector, educationalist, public servant

John Hislop, one of New Zealand's foremost pioneer educationalists, was born on 7 December 1821 and baptised at Lasswade, near Edinburgh, Scotland. He was the son of Walter Hislop, a ploughman, and his wife, Isabella Aitchison. He was educated at the Edinburgh School of Arts (now Heriot-Watt University), and at the age of 18 was appointed assistant master at Burntisland Grammar School. After undergoing a period of teacher training at the Normal School in Edinburgh, Hislop taught in several parish schools in Scotland, notably at Kirknewton where he was the master for 12 years. On 2 June 1846 he married Johanna Campbell Horne at Edinburgh; they had six children. One son, T. W. Hislop, served as minister of education in the Atkinson ministry, 1887--91.

Hislop was one of several experienced teachers brought to Otago under a special scheme devised by the first provincial government, whereby attractive incentives were offered to qualified persons. After arriving in Dunedin on 2 October 1856 on the *Strathmore*, he taught at the East Taieri school as the foundation master for 4½ years [not correct per Phil Kydd 61205, he was the 2nd]. During the provincial years Otago attracted a higher calibre of teacher than was then common in New Zealand but even in this select company Hislop stood out. In 1861 he was appointed secretary and inspector of the Otago Education Board, and so began his career as an educational administrator.

Hislop proved a firm administrator, whose concern was to implant the best educational practices of Scotland into Otago. Communities had to establish and maintain schools through locally elected committees, with the provincial government a major provider of finance. The secretary-inspector had considerable power over the school network. Hislop carefully vetted applications for teaching positions, exhorted school committees to keep proper accounts and discharged his duties with Calvinistic authority. School committees which dared to allow a dance to take place in the schoolroom were quickly informed that the practice was forbidden, and teachers who were reported to be indulging in alcohol were presented with an ultimatum - reform or resign.

Hislop did not confine himself to elementary schools. He facilitated the development of the Otago Boys' High School, the Otago Girls' High School (the first secondary school for girls in New Zealand) and the Athenaeum (a forerunner of adult education). He fostered the development of the Normal School (the first teachers' college in New Zealand) and was the first secretary of the council of the University of Otago. When special education needs arose, Hislop attended to their development. In 1869 he oversaw the development of the Otago Industrial School. Otago's reputation for solid educational achievement was built largely on John Hislop's tireless energy, enthusiasm, and sense of duty.

Hislop recorded his greatest achievements as an administrator by learning successfully to serve politicians, guide teachers, and cope with what he once called 'that great creature the public'. He studied educational change in the United Kingdom and Australia with care and introduced reforms into the Otago system of schooling. He supplemented his official reading with an extensive network of correspondents, especially in Scotland and Victoria. In 1874 he was instrumental in appointing an additional inspector, Donald Petrie from Melbourne, and introducing, with some misgiving, a more centralised and 'efficient' school assessment system. In 1871 the premier, William Fox, was persuaded to introduce an education bill and Hislop travelled to Wellington to draft the legislation. Had the bill succeeded, Hislop would undoubtedly have taken charge of the new national system but by the time an education act, drafted by Hislop and Charles Bowen, was finally passed in 1877, he felt that he was too old to take up national responsibility. Nevertheless he was persuaded to accept the newly created position of secretary to the Department of Education in January 1878, and served in this capacity until his retirement in 1886. Ironically, the provincialist sentiment which Hislop had earlier espoused now restricted his freedom of action as a national administrator.

Hislop's great strength was that he never forgot his own teaching background and always saw the role of the administrator as one of enabling the teacher to produce the best educational experiences for the pupil. Nowhere was this more evident than in his rejection of the British system of payment by results as a model for New Zealand. Hislop pointed out that no matter how efficient and accountable such a system might seem to be, 'the teachers depend on the numbers who pass for their bread and butter therefore everything good in a school is sacrificed to cramming the scholars so as to pass the *minimum* standard'. This kind of perception marked off the enlightened administrator from the mere bureaucrat.

On retirement Hislop returned to Dunedin where he once again served on the education board, the city council and other public bodies. Although he suffered in his later years from increasing deafness, he remained interested in promoting new educational developments. He was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1879, and in 1882 received an honorary LLD from the University of Edinburgh for his services to education. Hislop died on 19 May 1904 at Dunedin and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery, just on the left inside the gate.