

# Mental Deficiency Board

1922 – 1964

## Details

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The Mental Deficiency Board was established in 1922 by the 1920 *Mental Deficiency Act*. It oversaw the classification and management of children and adults deemed to have an intellectual disability. The Board supervised a number of state wards in conjunction with the Children of the State, and later, the Social Services Departments. The Guardianship Board replaced the Mental Deficiency Board in 1963.

The Mental Deficiency Board worked closely with the State Psychological Clinic. It diagnosed the children and adults who came under the Board's control.

After the establishment of the Mental Deficiency Board, more state wards, especially those at the Boys' Training School in Deloraine, were diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability known as feeble-mindedness. The stigma made it difficult for these boys to be found apprenticeships as farm hands with reasonable conditions and wages. Employees at the Children of the State Department expressed concerns about this but continued to cooperate with the Board in other matters.

A significant number of state wards came under the Board's control. This means that they had case files with the Board and the Department.

## More info

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### Chronology

- **Mental Deficiency Board (1922 – 1964)**
  - Guardianship Board (1963 - c. 1995)
  - Guardianship and Administration Board (1995 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Related Events

- [Committee of Inquiry into the State Farm and School for Boys, Deloraine, Tasmania \(1925\)](#)  
The Chairman of the Mental Deficiency Board was a member of the Committee of Inquiry.

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [Mental deficiency \(c. 1900 - c. 1969\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Children of the State Department, State of Tasmania \(1918 - 1934\)](#)  
A significant number of the children in the care of the Children of the State Department were also under the guardianship of the Mental Deficiency Board.

- [Police Department, State of Tasmania \(1898 - 2004\)](#)
- [Social Services Department, State of Tasmania \(1934 - 1961\)](#)  
A significant number of the children in the care of the Social Services Department were also under the guardianship of the Mental Deficiency Board.
- [Division of Mental Hygiene \(1945 - 1956\)](#)
- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board placed girls and young women at the Magdalen Home.
- [Elim Maternity Hospital \(1897 - c. 1973\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board assessed some of the mothers at Elim Maternity Hospital.
- [St John's Park \(1936 - 1994\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board was the guardian of children and adults living at St John's Park.
- [State Psychological Clinic \(1922 - 1964\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board worked closely with the State Psychological Clinic.
- [Lachlan Park Hospital \(1937 - 1968\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board referred potential patients to Lachlan Park Hospital.
- [New Town Infirmary \(1912 - 1934\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board was the guardian of children and adults living at the New Town Infirmary.
- [New Town Rest Home \(1934 - 1936\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board was the guardian of children and adults diagnosed with intellectual disabilities living at the New Town Rest Home.
- [Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution \(1898 - 1987\)](#)  
Edmund Morris Miller, the third President of the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution, was also the Chairman of the Mental Deficiency Board.
- [Public Health Department, State of Tasmania \(1904 - 1956\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board was a satellite to the Public Health Department.

### Related Legislation

- [Mental Deficiency Act 1920, Tasmania \(1920 - 1963\)](#)

## Resources

- Evans, Caroline and Parry, Naomi, *Vessels of Progressivism? Tasmanian State Girls and Eugenics, 1900-1940*, Australian Historical Studies, 2001
- Rodwell, Grant, ['If the feeble-minded are to be preserved': special education and eugenics in Tasmania, 1900-1930](#), Issues in educational research, 1998
- Select Committee, ['The mental deficiency bill, 1920:' report of Select Committee with minutes of proceedings and evidence](#), 1920
- Evans, Caroline, [Idealists, Pragmatists and 'Simple-Minded' Scamps: The Tasmanian Mental Deficiency Board and State 'Care' in the 1920s](#), Australian Historical Studies, 2017

## Records

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### Records

- [Reports Relating to Mental Health \(1924 - 1952\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
- [General Correspondence, Department of Public Health \(1920 - 1956\)](#)
- [Patients Case Files, Mental Deficiency Board \(1922 - 1964\)](#)
- [Case Files of Mental Defectives Placed under Guardianship \(1947 - 1974\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files-About Patients, Guardianship Board \(1960 - 1969\)](#)
- [Files of Persons Examined Under Sections 7, 8, 23, 24, 26, 27 of the Mental Deficiency Act 1920, State Psychological Clinic \(1920 - 1960\)](#)

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