



Kukum Valley Seventh-day Adventist High School, Honiara, Solomon Islands.
Photo courtesy of George Kaola.

Seventh-day Adventist Education, Solomon Islands

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The Solomon Islands is an independent nation in the southwest—Pacific Ocean. According to its 2016 census, the country has a population of 635,000. The capital city is Honiara, situated on the largest island, Guadalcanal. More than 95 percent of the population are of Melanesian ethnicity, with 3.1 percent Polynesian and 1.2 percent Micronesian. While most inhabitants speak a Melanesian pidgin, there are more than 120 indigenous languages. The official language is English. Seventy-three percent of the population identify as Protestant, and 19.6 percent identify as Roman Catholic; 11.7 percent of the population identify as Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). The country has an 84 percent literacy rate, though it is slightly higher in males than females, and most Solomon Islanders have nine to ten years of schooling.¹

There are approximately 163,000 pupils enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the Solomon Islands. Seventy-four percent of this number are enrolled in primary schools.² There are 986 government educational institutions in the Solomon Islands. Of these, approximately 251 are early childhood centers. The government has also responded to the number of church-run primary schools by allocating a higher proportion of its education budget to secondary schools so that students may be able to obtain both primary and secondary education.³ The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Education Authority operates 121 education institutions in the Solomon Islands comprising 15 early childhood centers, 89 primary schools, 13 secondary schools, two vocational colleges, a Bible school, and a nursing school⁴

History

Formal education in the Solomon Islands has a recent history and is aligned with the arrival of Christianity.

Previously, children learned subsistence skills from their family and local villagers. These skills were strongly connected with agriculture and fishing, traditional culture and belief systems, fighting, gender roles, and behavioral norms. Children were also taught social skills and respect. As Christian missionaries arrived in the country in the late nineteenth century, schools were started, and these emphasised literacy, numeracy, and religious education.⁵

The SDA Church began its education program in 1914. A school was started at Viru Harbour and another at Batuna. These early initiatives were interrupted by World War II and the Japanese invasion of the Solomon Islands, which saw most expatriate church employees return to Australia. With the conclusion of hostilities the missionaries returned.⁶ However, much of the infrastructure had been destroyed by the war.

A report from Herbert White in the early postwar years confirmed that education was a key priority for the SDA Church.⁷ Several schools were quickly established, each with an expatriate teacher. The training school at Batuna was revived, and a school at Kukudu was started. Both of these institutions were in the Western Solomons. Two schools on Guadalcanal Island were opened. One was initially known as Betikama Missionary School and later became Betikama Adventist College. Another was on the southeastern tip of the island, at Kopiu. A further school was opened at Ruruvai, on the island of Choiseul. One of the first SDA educators to return to the region after the war was Lyndon Thrift, who was to become headmaster of the Batuna Training School and later the school at Betikama.

Significant Seventh-day Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands

All of the Seventh-day Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands are significant insofar as the growth of the Church and fulfillment of its mission are concerned. Historically, however, some have been pivotal.

Batuna Adventist Vocational School (see article “Batuna Vocational school”) was featured as early as 1924 in the *Australasian Record* as a school for training Solomon Islanders to become SDA missionaries to their own people and villages.⁸ Located on the Marovo Lagoon, it was originally part of an SDA complex that included an administration center, hospital, slipway for mission vessels, sawmill, and printing press. In 1946 Lyndon Thrift was appointed to revive the training school after the war. However, experience soon revealed that Batuna was too isolated, removed by a day’s travel by boat from the capital, Honiara. Sites were chosen on Guadalcanal a short distance from Honiara. Kukudu was selected as the site for the new SDA Church headquarters, and land at Lunga was purchased for a new school named Betikama. Both were just a few kilometers from the center of the capital. In 1947 Thrift was transferred to Honiara to begin the new school at Betikama. The school at Batuna later became a central school. Then it became a vocational school and primary school.⁹

Kukudu Adventist College (see article “Kukudu Adventist College”), originally known as Kukudu Vocational School, was located in Kukudu village on Kolombangara Island. Established in the early 1950s, it was designed to allow students in the Western province to have easier access to SDA education and relieve the need for students to travel to Papua New Guinea for their education. The SDA hospital in the area contributed as well as the school to considerable growth of the church in the region, and this in turn meant that the school’s facilities were extended, in the 1970s, to cope with the influx of students.¹⁰ The church was determined to keep the standard of academic learning high across their schools, and in 1972 the Kukudu Vocational School opened with 25 form 7 students. By 1974 the school had grown to more than 200 students.¹¹ Some principals in the 1960s and 1970s included Laurie Haycock, Andrew Borlace, Max Miller, Robert Flynn, and Joini Tutua. The school was originally a primary school. It has been developed into a complete secondary boarding college in the Western province of the Solomon Islands.¹²

Betikama Adventist College (see article Betikama Adventist College) was founded in 1947 and classes commenced in 1948. The curriculum emphasized the teaching of Bible, English and practical skills. Within a year 65 students were enrolled at the school.¹³ In 1951 four classrooms, offices, storerooms, and school chapel were constructed under the supervision of Doug Gillis. Girls were first admitted in 1954. Teacher training classes were given to some of the best Betikama students. The school grew, as buildings were created to house more students, and by 1969 the school was teaching grades up to year 9.¹⁴

The school faced several challenging natural disasters, including earthquakes, cyclones, and floods, which made it difficult to maintain food supplies. The Australasian Division office provided funds to ensure adequate food during these times. By the 1980s enrollments had grown to 350 students, and the school industries were flourishing. The school had its own dairy, carving industry, shop, copper art industry, and sewing industry.¹⁵ In 1983 form 6 was introduced, and the enrollment at the school increased further. An administration block was constructed on the school campus. Students from both Vanuatu and Kiribati were coming to Betikama to complete their final years of high school.

Toward the end of 1998 civil unrest erupted in the Solomon Islands. It was the result of a number of social and tribal issues, which led to the formation of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) on Guadalcanal in 1998. Violence and chaos occurred particularly in and around Honiara. People from the island of Malaita formed a paramilitary group referred to as the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) in 1999.

All efforts to resolve the tension failed until Sir Allan Kemakeza, prime minister of the Solomon Islands, requested Australian assistance in April 2003. A meeting was held between the governments of Australia and Solomon Islands on June 4–6, 2003, to discuss the issue of Australian assistance. Growing out of the meeting, an agreement was drawn up, and a peacekeeping force known as RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands) was installed.¹⁶

During the time the civil unrest was at its height the school was forced to close. Students were sent home, and most

of the staff returned to their villages or left for Australia, leaving a small group to care for the facilities. When the violence de-escalated, many staff returned and RAMSI forces ensured peace.

Betikama Adventist College has had a strong focus on biblical study, worship, and service, and the school has become well known for its quality education. Betikama students have represented the Solomon Islands many times at Pacific cultural, sporting, and musical events. Graduates are highly regarded by employers throughout the country.

A number of other SDA schools are located in Honiara. These include Burns Creek School, with more than 1,300 pupils; Kukum School, with 800 pupils; and Naha School, with more than 500 students.¹⁷ During the years between 2008 and 2018, many SDA schools began operations throughout the Solomon Islands. These schools, in the main, are highly regarded by the Ministry of Education, and students are encouraged to become supportive citizens of the country and supportive members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Contemporary SDA Education in the Solomon Islands

The SDA education system in the Solomon Islands has not only the largest number of schools of any denomination, but also the most consistent growth.¹⁸ Of the nine different denominations that provide educational centres of some kind in 2017, Adventist schools make up 35 percent of that total number.¹⁹ The Solomon Islands government has made education a priority by devoting between 3 and 10 percent of its annual budget to education. This money not only funds the schools, but pays the wages of the teachers in both government and registered nongovernment schools.²⁰ In 1999 the government began an arrangement with the SDA Church to pay their teacher wages in the Solomon Islands via a grant to the church itself. This agreement came about largely because of the efforts of Titus Rore, the education director of SDA schools in the Solomon Islands at that time. More recently SDA teachers have been paid directly by the government.²¹

The SDA Education Authority in the Solomon Islands is overseen by the Solomon Islands Mission (SIM). The current education director (2017) is Billy Letta. The system also has an associate director, who acts as a government affairs officer, looking after the registration of teachers, teacher pay, and school registration as well as liaising with the Solomon Islands minister of education. The current associate director is Merton Tommy Toata.

There are also three regional associate directors who oversee education in their areas. The regions are Guadalcanal and the Eastern Solomon Islands; Malaita; and the Western provinces. There is an authority board of education, which is an adjunct board to SIM executive committee. The Trans Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) education director has an overseeing and advisory role within Adventist education in the South Pacific Division.

The office of Adventist education at the SIM headquarters office in Honiara has a secretary and a dedicated accountant. Local Adventist schools have their own school board, which administers the operation of the school. The government provides these school boards with a yearly grant, which is to be spent on textbooks and student stationery. Other costs, such as building requirements, desks, chairs, and other equipment, are the responsibility of the local school board. School fees and levies are paid by parents to support the day-to-day operation of the schools.

SDA schools have set the standard in curriculum development, as well as in school-based work programs. Industries developed by SDA schools help to fund the growth of the school and also add to the national income of the country. In the case of Betikama they have also been significant in the tourism industry and in representing Solomon Islands culture internationally. Other school systems have also introduced this work system after studying its success at Betikama.²²

Teacher In-service Education

With rapid growth in the number of new schools many untrained teachers have been hired to staff these schools. By 2009 there were approximately 300 untrained primary school teachers. Trained teachers traditionally received their qualifications from Fulton Adventist University College in Fiji, Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea, Sonoma Adventist College in Papua New Guinea or Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, now known as Solomon Islands National University. Peter Roberts was asked to develop an in-service Certificate of Education on behalf of Fulton Adventist University College in order to provide an initial qualification to untrained teachers. This three-month course covered curriculum studies, teaching and learning, Christian education, Christian beliefs, and human development. By July 2017 approximately two hundred primary teachers had graduated from the course. Roberts has been assisted by lecturers Lynnette Lounsbury (of Avondale College of Higher Education), Veronika Chester, Dawn Hankinson, and Glenda Roberts, who have lectured in their areas of expertise. A final cohort was taught in June 2018. The Solomon Islands Mission and Fulton University College are developing an in-service Diploma of Education program as the next stage of teacher development.²³

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