

Structure, organisational changes and level of education of the General Public School in Brdów from 1919 to 1939

Abstract

The school in Brdów dates back to the mid-15th century. It was founded and managed by Pauline fathers. In the following centuries, the school functioned with varying degree of success. The real development of the Brdów school occurred in the interwar period. In the following years, the structure of the school changed due to the growing number of students. Before the outbreak of World War II, there was a general public school of 3rd level, i.e. one with seven grades, in Brdów. Teachers worked under very difficult conditions. The school building was too small to accommodate all the classes. The classrooms were overcrowded. However, the educators tried to achieve the best results possible. This was confirmed by subsequent inspections conducted by educational institutions. Just before the outbreak of World War II, a new school building was opened in Brdów, which greatly improved working and learning conditions there.

Keywords: interwar period, school reorganisation, education system, education reform, interwar school, Brdów, teachers, level of education, attendance, working conditions, school in Brdów, teaching results, taught subjects, organisation, school structure, Pauline fathers.

The first historical mention of Brdów (municipality of Babiak, Greater Poland Voivodeship) comes from the so-called golden bull of Pope Innocent II (pontificate from 1130 to 1143) addressed to Gniezno Archbishop Jakub of 7 July 1136¹. It concerns the borders of the monastery in Łęczycza. The name “Brdouo” appears among 410 names of people and locations mentioned there². The second mention comes from a 1266 document mentioning the name of Albert (Wojciech) of Brdów, the chaplain of Duke Kazimierz

¹ *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski*, Vol. 1. Poznań 1877, doc. no. 7, p. 12.

² ROZWADOWSKI, J., *Bulla z r. 1136 jako najstarszy zabytek języka polskiego*, Kraków 1909, p. 14.

Łęczycycki³. The oldest written information about the Wojciech BM church comes from 1399 and is related to a court hearing on the delineation of the boundaries of the church property⁴.

The beginnings of education in Brdów are related to the arrival of the Brothers of the Order of St. Paul the First Hermit (OSPPE⁵), commonly known as Pauline Fathers, in the village. On the basis of the foundation act issued in Kraków on 16 June 1436, King Władysław III of Poland executed the will of King Władysław Jagiełło and ordered the placement of the fathers of the Pauline Order in Brdów by an existing church⁶. This foundation was approved by Władysław Oporowski, the then Bishop of Włocławek, in 1437. The exact date of the establishment of the first school in Brdów by the Pauline Fathers is not known. The oldest mention of the existence of a parish school appeared about 1450⁸, so 14 years after the arrival of the monks in Brdów. It is related to Paweł, who is the rector of the school in Brdów⁹. No source information remains about the functioning of the school in this period. It is not known what happened to the school in the following decades. However, later sources seem to confirm the thesis that the Pauline school had been operating. A hundred years later, the Pauline Fathers received a square by the monastery to build a new school building, which they did. It existed until the mid-18th century¹⁰.

The maintenance and development of the school lay in the hands of the Pauline convent in Brdów. Based on the remarks made by the diocesan and order visitors, it is possible to learn that the prior of the Brdów convent paid the school rector. Jozafat Mozga noted:

The Brdów house was perhaps one of the few convents of the order where the scholarly traditions survived, combined with the yet-to-be-worked-out partially seminary educational mode of the future Paulines. [...] The prior paid the school rector and asked the diocesan authorities to help secure a permanent fund for the expenses related to education¹¹.

In 1598, there was a cantor in the school in addition to the rector. Together they took care of 10 or more students¹². The school in Brdów, which could only be attended by boys, had a separate budget and statute. Its first rectors were Pauline Fathers. The curriculum includ-

³ ZBUDNIEWEK, J., *Dzieje osady brdowskiej*, „Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne”, 1984, Vol. 31, issue 4, p. 158.

⁴ MOZGA, J., *Dzieje konwentu Paulinów w Brdowie*, „Studia Claromontana” 1984, Vol. 5, p. 396.

⁵ *Ordo Sancti Pauli Primi Eremitae – Zakon Świętego Pawła Pierwszego Pustelnika*.

⁶ ZBUDNIEWEK, J., *Paulini wczoraj i dzisiaj*, „Studia Claromontana” 2007, no. 25, p. 196.

⁷ WIESIOŁOWSKI, J., *Fundacje paulińskie XIV i XV wieku nas tle ruchu fundacyjnego klasztorów w Polsce*, „Studia Claromontana” 1985, no. 6, p. 151.

⁸ MOZGA, J., op. cit., p. 437.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 437.

¹⁰ MUJTA, J.S., *Gmina Babiak przeszłość i teraźniejszość*, Babiak 1995, p. 97.

¹¹ MOZGA, J., op. cit., p. 437. Cf. *Monumenta Historica Dioeceseos Wladislaviensis* 1903, Vol. 22, p. 125.

¹² MOZGA, J., op. cit., p. 437.

ed foundations of grammar, writing, knowledge of catechism in the Polish language and singing skills¹³.

In the second half of the 17th century, secular teachers started to work at the school. This was due to the fact that the assignment of other functions to the Pauline Fathers detracted them from their church duties. The level of knowledge of religious issues by lay people was sufficient for them to take the position of rector at the school in Brdów. In 1669, this role was performed by, among others, Jacek Piotrowicz, who enjoyed the opinion of a good educator¹⁴.

The Brdów school educated at least a few students who later studied at the Academy of Kraków. These included Wawrzyniec, son of Jan of Trzebuchów, who entered the Academy of Kraków in 1530. Another student was 20-year-old Józef Świdorski, who matriculated at the Academy of Kraków in 1784¹⁵. He studied at the medical faculty. The documents of the University of Kraków certify that Świdorski studied there for five years until 1789 or 1790¹⁶.

In 1748, a fire destroyed the school building, so the study was suspended for some time¹⁷. According to the Assessor's Decree issued in Warsaw on 10 November 1782, the local Pauline monastery was obliged to:

1. Build a school building with a barn and a carriage house, where the wood would be kept.
2. The monastery should maintain the teacher for the children.
3. The premises where the children learn should be heated with the wood transported from the local forests to the monastery using the monastery cart¹⁸.

The Pauline fathers took the recommendations seriously and built a new wooden school building, which burned down in 1796¹⁹. In the following years, another school building – probably made of brick – was constructed.

Taking away the Brdów farm in Pasary from the convent and the later dissolution of the Pauline Fathers deprived the school of its historical warden. One must admit that Paulines really took care of the school and the level of education was probably quite high. Thanks to the school's level, the Brdów school was attended by children of Count Jan Skarbek and Wodzicki²⁰ of Bogusławice. Children probably at all grades learned the following subjects: knowledge of Christianity and morality, Polish, calligraphy, German,

¹³ Ibidem, p. 438.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 438–439.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 439.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 440.

¹⁸ MUJTA, J.S., *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁹ MOZGA, J., *op. cit.*, p. 440.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 440.

Latin and arithmetic. Additionally, geography and the history of the Polish nation were taught at the third grade²¹. In addition to the basic education, Fr Meress and Fr Pouthieur also taught French and Italian²².

After the dissolution of the Pauline monastery in Brdów on 17 April 1819²³, the school had to count on the support of the city authorities. The financial situation of Brdów inhabitants was rather difficult, so the school could not receive support from them. An example may be the inhabitants of Polonisz. Peasant Michał Tomczak and Bartłomiej Szałaziński said in 1824 that “they could not declare school contributions for critical times”²⁴. *The difficult financial situation caused several postponements of the plans related to the construction of a new school building. Such plans already existed in 1820. The aim of the plans was to build:*

a school building made of cut wood on the foundation and shingled roof²⁵.

The equipment of the Elementary Catholic School in the town of Brdów did not look impressive as of 1824 and 1830. A preserved inventory included:

One large table for writing, 2 smaller tables, 8 desks without handrails, 4 desks with handrails, 2 large boards on pedestals for counting, a small board²⁶.

According to the same inventory, the library of a teacher who taught at the Brdów school contained the following books:

Book for peasants, Regulations for the teacher, Collection of Christian and moral learning, and for the students: 4 Lancaster boards for elementary education²⁷.

The idea of construction of a new school building returned in 1828. An architectural plan of the building was even prepared. To reduce construction costs, it was decided that a part of the construction work would be performed free of charge. However, the project never materialised due to the outbreak of the November Uprising and the subsequent Tsarist repressions, which the inhabitants of Brdów suffered, too. In 1837, mayor Kaszewski sent a letter to the authorities asking for a permanent subsidy for the school fund as well as for the fund for renovation or construction of a new school building²⁸. In

²¹ MUJTA, J.S., op. cit., p. 99.

²² MOZGA, J., op. cit., p. 440–441.

²³ ZBUDNIEWEK, J., *Paulini wczoraj i dzisiaj*, p. 197.

²⁴ MUJTA, J.S., op. cit., p. 97.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 98.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 200; Cf. AGAD KWK, ref. 2728. Inventory of the Elementary School in the town of Brdów as of 1824 and 1830.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 200.

²⁸ MUJTA, J.S., *Babiak Commune...*, p. 98.

1840, the old school building was finally renovated but it fell into disrepair in the subsequent years.

The area of the parish overlapped with the area of the activity of the Brdów school. The age of the students ranged from 4 to 13 years old²⁹. At that time, there was no compulsory education. Parents had no obligation to send their children to school. Therefore, the statistics of the children's attendance at the school in relation to the number of children at school age is quite interesting. As Józef Mujta counted:

While there were 194 "children that could attend the school" in the area of the Brdów school in 1818, 67 children (34.5%) did so; in 1837, out of 202 children at school age, there were 81 children (40%) who attended the school³⁰.

The same author divided the children attending the school by gender. The numbers were interesting:

In 1818, boys accounted for 72.7% and girls accounted for 27.3% of the total number of 44 students; in 1837, the percentage distribution changed in favour of girls and was 65.4% for boys to 34.6% for girls³¹.

In 1901, the old school building, which was in dire need of renovation, burned down. A new building was constructed on the foundations of the old school³². The building was erected with the financial support of the Brdów parish, thanks to the efforts of Fr Gniazdowski. The consecration of the newly-built school took place on 4 November 1907³³. The classrooms were equipped with 12 desks, a table, an armchair, a board and hangers. The school was taken care of by a group called "Macierz Szkolna". Both boys and girls could take part in it.

Regaining the independence by Poland in 1918 caused changes and development of the school in Brdów. The single-class mixed school which had existed in the building started to change its structure³⁴. Subsequent transformations were caused by the needs and changing regulations concerning the organisation of general public schools in the Second Republic of Poland.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 99.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 99.

³² Archives of the Primary School in Brdów [referred to as APSB], School chronicle, p. 1.

³³ MUJTA, J.S., op. cit., p. 441.

³⁴ State Archives in Poznań. Branch in Konin. School Inspectorate in Koło. The General School in Brdów: organisation, history, files showing the activity between 1924 and 1939 [SAP BK, SIK, GPS below], ref. 158, School in Brdów. Organisation.

The decree on the compulsory education of 1919 assumed that general schools would be created in such a way that all school-age children would be able to take advantage of them³⁵. It also obliged the commune to set up a general school in every location where:

the number of children at the age of 7–14 is at least 40 over the period of 3 successive years³⁶.

The decree was binding in the area of Poland that was previously part of the Russian partition³⁷. It also included the inhabitants of Brdów, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Russian occupying authorities. The legal act sanctioned the previous existence of a single-class school in Brdów. This is indicated indirectly by the list of teachers employed in the school. Antonina Dyakowska worked at the Brdów school in the period between 1915 and 1919. Afterwards, her teaching position was taken over by Jan Galewski³⁸.

The Act of 1922 on the establishment and maintenance of general public schools³⁹ defined the organisational levels of schools from one-grade to seven-grade schools, depending on the number of children in the district⁴⁰. As a result of the number of children, the single-class school in Brdów was classified as a two-class school on 1 September 1924⁴¹. A preserved class schedule for the school year of 1924/1925 shows that there were two parallel 1st- and 2nd-grade classes in the school⁴². The existence of two classes made it necessary to employ another teacher. In addition to Jan Galewski, who performed the function of the head of the school, the school employed Tymoteusz Soś. In the next school year of 1925/1926, his place was taken by Maria Płonka⁴³. Jan Galewski was the form tutor of the 2nd-graders and Maria Płonka took care of the 1st-graders. The Brdów parish priest, Father Leon Jarosiński, conducted religion classes in the school⁴⁴. The Łódź School

³⁵ Decree on the compulsory education of 7 February 1919, *Dziennik Prawny*, no. 14, item 147, Art. 2, p. 192, [access as of 11 January 2015] <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19190140147>.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, Art. 3, p. 192.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, Art. 48, p. 197.

³⁸ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Teaching staff.

³⁹ The Act of 17 February 1922 on the establishment and maintenance of general public schools, *Dz. U.* of 1922, no. 18, item 143, p. 284-285.

⁴⁰ Art. 6. The organisational level of the school depended on the number of school children living in the district. A school would have 1 grade (one teacher) if the number of children over a period of 3 successive years did not exceed 60; 2 grades (two teachers) for 61-100 children, 3 grades (three teachers) for 101-150, 4 grades (4 teachers) for 151-200, 5 grades (5 teachers) for 201-250, 6 grades (6 teachers) for 251-300, 7 grades for more than 300 children (7 teachers or more teachers in the case of existence of parallel sections). The Act of 17 February 1922 on the establishment and maintenance of general public schools, *Dz. U.*, no. 18, item 143, p. 284.

⁴¹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Organisation.

⁴² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Class schedule for the school year of 1924/1925 class II.

⁴³ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Teaching staff.

⁴⁴ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Weekly timetable of classes and activities for the school year of 1925/1926. A personnel list of teaching staff.

District Education Authority approved the structure of the school in Brdów as a two-grade general school on 3 February 1927⁴⁵. The number of students in the school increased, so new teachers were employed in the school on 1 September 1927: Antoni Kaźmierczak (who worked for only one school year) and Cecylia Urbańska, and Władysław Kędziora from 1 October of the same year⁴⁶. The school structure was changed for a four-grade general school by the decision of the Łódź School District Education Authority on 13 August 1928. It started its operation on 1 September 1928⁴⁷. For this reason, the school employed Maria Niezgodówna-Petrykowska on 1 August 1928⁴⁸.

The increasing number of students attending the Brdów institution caused another organisational change at the school. From 1 September 1929, a 6-grade school programme was implemented there, although the Łódź District Education Authority officially changed the structure of the school and raised it to the 6-grade general school level only on 1 September 1931⁴⁹. According to the preserved documents, 320 students were registered at and 316 attended the school in Brdów⁵⁰. They came from the following locations: Brdów, Kolonia od Babiaka, Kolonia od Izbicy (the current Władysława Jagiełły street), Bugaj, Nowiny, Psary, Świętosławice and Gaj Stolarski. Also, children from Modzerów, which was not part of the Brdów district, attended the school⁵¹.

In the school year of 1929/30, the general public school consisted of 7 sections and sections 1–3 had two parallel classes⁵². The teaching staff was composed of seven teachers. These were: Jan Galewski – head of the school, Maria Niezgodówna-Petrykowska, Stanisława Bałtruszajtyśówna, Józef Opic, Stefan Klotowski, Cecylia Urbańska⁵³ and priest Józef Markowski, who conducted religion class⁵⁴. All of the mentioned educators except for Father Markowski also performed the functions of form tutors. Some had students from multiple classes under their supervision⁵⁵. As in previous years, new teachers

⁴⁵ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Organisation.

⁴⁶ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Teaching staff.

⁴⁷ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Organisation.

⁴⁸ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Teaching staff.

⁴⁹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, School in Brdów. Organisation.

⁵⁰ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Weekly class schedule for the school year of 1929/30. Number of children as of 1 October.

⁵¹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Weekly class schedule for the school year of 1929/30. Number of children from individual villages (towns).

⁵² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Weekly timetable of working hours of the teaching staff for the school year of 1929/1930.

⁵³ Cecylia Urbańska worked in Brdów until 31 July 1931. Kazimiera Porążkówna took her place on 1 September 1931. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Teaching staff.

⁵⁴ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Weekly class timetable for the school year of 1929/30. A personnel list of teaching staff.

⁵⁵ Jan Galewski – school head – tutor of class 3; Maria Niezgodówna-Petrykowska – class 5; Stanisława Bałtruszajtyśówna – classes 1, 3, 6; Józef Opic – class 2; Stefan Klotowski – class 4; Cecylia Urbańska – class-

were employed. These were the teachers mentioned above: Stanisława Bałtruszajtysówna, Józef Opic⁵⁶ and Stefan Klotowski⁵⁷.

An interesting description of the organisational state of the school in Brdów is contained in the preserved reporting documentation prepared on 1 December 1930. According to it, the Brdów school had a five-grade structure⁵⁸. The children learned in seven sections, the first three of which had parallel sections themselves. According to the then existing regulations, the schools of lower organisational level than a seven-grade school taught selected sections in one class room as part of the so-called combined classes. In such a group, one section learned aloud and the other section learned quietly. At the school in Brdów, students from sections 2b and 3b, as well as 6 and 7, participated in a combined study⁵⁹. The regulations provided for the existence of one-year and two-year classes, i.e. such where students were given one year of the so-called “loud study” and the other year of the so-called “quiet study”. Such a structure was designed to increase the number of hours spent learning certain subjects. In all sections, eleven subjects were taught throughout the entire cycle⁶⁰, with the greatest number of hours devoted to learning Polish, counting and geometry⁶¹. Teachers working at the Brdów school taught a few subjects and even all of them in sections 1–3. All the educators were employed full time. The teaching plan applicable at the time contained 30 periods of instruction per week. Only the head of the school had a smaller number of periods, which was 18 hours per week. The catechists taught religion for 12 periods a week in all sections⁶².

The student qualification results in the period of 1928–1931 and 1937 are quite interesting. At the end of the school year of 1928/1929, 27% of students registered at the school did not receive a promotion to the upper grade. The greatest number of non-promoted stu-

es 1, 2, 3. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Weekly class timetable for the school year of 1929/30. A personnel list of teaching staff.

⁵⁶ Józef Opic worked in Brdów until he retired. From 1946 on, he performed the role of the school head. See RACINOWSKI, D., *Józef Opic (1904-1988) – nauczyciel, wychowawca i społecznik*, “Polonia Maior Orientalis” 2016, vol. 3, p. 181-198.

⁵⁷ Stefan Klotowski was employed on a contract from 1 October 1929 until 31 December 1929. Władysław Kędzióra, who had previously worked in Brdów, took his place on 1 January 1930. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Teaching staff.

⁵⁸ The document stated that the school was four-grade. The digit 4 was crossed-out and a correction was made in red stating it was 5-grade. This is corroborated by the number of employed teachers, as well. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, General information (as of 1 December 1930), General public school in Brdów, k. 259.

⁵⁹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisation of study (as of 1 December 1930), k. 263.

⁶⁰ The General Public School in Brdów taught the following subjects: religion, Polish language, counting and geometry, drawing, practical classes, singing and physical education (all sections); German language (sections 5–7); natural science, geography and history (sections 3–7). SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisation of study (as of 1 December 1930), Teaching subjects, no. 263.

⁶¹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisation of study (as of 1 December 1930), Teaching subjects, k. 263.

⁶² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Teachers and other active and inactive school officers receiving salary (as of 1 December 1930), k. 264.

dents was in sections 1–3. The documents show that 41% of students from section 3 did not get a promotion. 40% of students from section 2 and 23% of children from section 1 did not get promoted to the higher section. The situation was the best in section 6 (the last one), where the promotion was received by all students. 26% of students were not promoted in the next school year of 1929/1930. As in the previous year, the greatest number of non-promoted students was in sections 1–3. In this group, the smallest number of promoted students was in section 2, where 35% of children did not receive such a promotion. The situation was slightly better in section 3, where 30% of students did not qualify for the next programme section level. The students from the last 7th section proved the best. They were able to boast 100% qualification rate, which meant the graduation from the school in Brdów.⁶³ In the school year of 1928/1929, there were 205 students in sections 1–3 and their parallel sections. 62 students, or 31%, were not promoted in this group. The students from sections 1–3 and parallel sections accounted for as much as 80% of all the non-promoted students in the Brdów school. In the next school year, 29% of students (i.e. 58 of 203 registered students) from the same sections did not get a promotion to a higher programme section. They accounted for 71% of all non-promoted students at the school⁶⁴. The statistics show that the greatest number of students who were not promoted were in the lower sections. One can only assume that the teachers thought that the students in these sections should acquire some knowledge and skills that would be necessary in their further education. Some students needed more time to acquire this knowledge and skills.

78.5% of students received a promotion and 21.5% did not receive it at the end of 1931. Comparing with previous years, it is clear that the percentage of students without promotion decreased. In the discussed period, most students without promotion were in grade 6 (39%) and smallest number was in grade 1 (13%) and 2 (20%)⁶⁵. Over the years, the qualification results improved but still the number of children without a passing grade was significant. In order to reduce the proportion of failing students, the Teaching Staff Board made a decision in March 1937 to use any methods available to help the students at risk of receiving a failing grade. It was decided to do the following:

Get a better contact with the parents of those children who have failing grades. Supporting poor learners outside of the classroom was considered one of the most effective measures⁶⁶.

At the end of the school year of 1936/1937, 83% of students were promoted and 17% were not. Compared to the previous years, there was a significant decrease compared to the beginning of the 1930s. The percentage among all the non-promoted students was the highest in grades 3 and 5 (each 20%) and 1 and 2 (each 18%). The smallest number of failed students was in grade 6 (one student) and grade 7 (two students). One-fifth of the

⁶³ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Qualification results and student traffic in the school year of 1929/30, k. 270.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Annual report for the school year of 1930/31.

⁶⁶ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Minutes of the meeting... held on 22 March 1937, k. 68.

students in grades 3 and 5 did not get promoted to the higher section. There was no grade with a 100% promotion to the higher section. Even in the last seventh class, there were two students who did not get a promotion, i.e. did not graduate from the school in Brdów⁶⁷.

Teachers of the school in Brdów took the following information into account when giving the students periodical or end-of-year grades:

- child's attendance,
- uncompleted homework,
- bad home conditions,
- no light, notebooks, books and others,
- talented child's laziness,
- slow child's diligence⁶⁸,
- difficult working conditions for combined classes⁶⁹.

Nowadays, these criteria may seem somewhat archaic and would probably raise protests of the educational authorities, teachers, students and parents. However, they cannot be denied logic and common sense in choosing the criteria for assessing students in the school. The above-mentioned criteria for assessing students in the school in Brdów were used because educators who taught there knew their students and their home conditions and family situation well.

Thanks to the available documentation, it is possible to trace the origins of the students who attended the school in Brdów in the period in question. More than half of them were children from families holding medium and small farms.⁷⁰ Around 20% were children of craftsmen and fewer than 15% of children came from families of state and local government officials. The school was also attended by children of workers, merchants, state and local government officials and labourers hired for various physical jobs⁷¹. The smallest group was students from families of teachers, who were classified as servants and lower-ranking officials⁷². Perhaps this occupational structure of parents of the students attending the Brdów school was one of the reasons for such a large number of students who did not receive a promotion to a higher section. Children from farming families often helped with small farm work. For this reason, they skipped more classes. That was especially the case in the spring, which was the seed-time for cereals, potatoes and beets, and the autumn, which was the harvest time. Parents did not have time to ensure that their children fulfilled their school duties. Many parents were illiterate, which made it impossible to offer their children any help. Extra free hands seemed a better solution than hiring

⁶⁷ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Minutes of the meeting... held on 12 June 1937, k. 58.

⁶⁸ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Minutes of the meeting... held on 12 December 1936, k. 104.

⁶⁹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Minutes of the meeting... held on 22 March 1937, k. 68.

⁷⁰ The group of medium farmers included those who held farms with the surface area of 5–20 ha. Small farms had a surface area of less than 5 ha. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Profession and professional position of students' parents, k.267.

⁷¹ *Słownik języka polskiego*, Warsaw 1981, Vol. III, p. 840.

⁷² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Profession and professional position of students' parents, k. 267.

labourers, who would have to be paid for their work. It can be said that farm duties resulting largely from poverty were one of the reasons for the high absenteeism of school children from farming families or those families who were employed by others.

Janusz Jędrzejewicz, the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment developed and implemented a new system of education in the interwar Poland. The Act of 11 March 1932 on the education system⁷³ introduced a reform (called “the Jędrzejewiczowska Reform” after its creator) which organised and unified the primary and post-primary education system. The earlier legal acts governing the education system served rather to adapt the different networks of schools inherited from the three partitions. The new legislative act introduced three organisational levels for general (primary) schools. From then on, general schools were divided into three levels (1st, 2nd and 3rd)⁷⁴ with the 3rd-level school being the highest level which implemented all the three programme tiers:

The first-level schools implemented the 1st programme level and⁷⁵ the most important components of levels 2 and 3. The first-level school had four grades, of which grades 1 and 2 lasted one year each, grade 3 lasted two years and grade 4 lasted three years. [...] The second-level school implemented the entire 1st and 2nd programme level and the most important components of the 3rd level. The second-level school had 6 grades, the first five of which lasted one year each while grade 6 lasted 2 years. [...] The third-level school [...] implemented all three programme levels in entirety: the first level within the first 4 years of education, the second level within the next 2 years and the third level in the last year. [...] The third-level school had 7 one-year grades⁷⁶.

Warsaw School District Superintendent Wiktor Ambroziewicz issued the decision on the organisation of the school in Brdów on 17 February 1937. Based e.g. on the school network plan developed by the commune of Lubotyń and the minutes of the meeting of the School Supervision of the commune of Lubotyń of 20 October 1936, he decided that:

A seven-grade general public school would be organised in Brdów, commune of Lubotyń, powiat of Koło, whose district would include: the villages of Brdów, Kolonia Brdowskie Nowiny, Bugaj, Parcele Psary and Kolonia Ostrowy⁷⁷.

⁷³ The Act of 11 March 1932 on the education system, Dz. U. of 1932, no. 38, item 389, p. 639–645, [access as of 2 January 2015] <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19320380389>.

⁷⁴ The Act of 11 March 1932 on the education system, Art. 12, Dz. U. of 1932, no. 38, item 389, p. 640, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19320380389> [access as of 2 January 2015].

⁷⁵ According to Art. 11 of the Act on the education system: “There are three levels in the general school programme: the first one provides the elementary outline of general education, the second one is an extension and deepening of the first level and the third one is intended to further develop youth in socio-civic and economic dimensions. [in:] Curriculum in the general public schools of the third level with Polish as a language of instruction, Biblioteka Oświaty i Wychowania, Vol.1, Lviv [1934?], p. X.

⁷⁶ The programme of study in general public schools of the second level with Polish as a language of instruction, Lviv 1936, p. 9.

⁷⁷ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Decision on..., k. 83.

Based on the decision made by the Superintendent, the School Inspector in Konin renamed the 5-grade General Public School in Brdów to the General Public School of 3rd Level⁷⁸, i.e. with seven one-year grades, on 15 November 1937. This was the last stage of the development of the Brdów school in the interwar period. Students of just two grades managed to graduate from the school in Brdów after its reorganisation. The school's activity was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II and the Nazi occupation.

In the 3rd level General Public School in Brdów, 11 subjects were taught during the cycle⁷⁹, with 7 subjects being taught throughout the entire seven-year cycle. They included artistic subjects, such as drawing, singing and practical classes. The greatest number of time was devoted to learning Polish and arithmetic with geometry. Once a week, selected students from grades 5–7 had an hour-long class as part of the school choir⁸⁰. It is interesting to note that no foreign language was taught at the time, especially because German had been taught previously.

There were five teachers in the reorganised school, including four permanent employees and one contracted⁸¹ as well as a catechist hired on an hourly basis⁸².

Due to the large number of children in the school year of 1937/1938, two first sections (with the total number of students being 75) were organised in parallel. The small number of teachers forced them to perform the role of a form tutor in two sections (classes) simultaneously⁸³, which seems to be a daunting, or even impossible, task. One also should take into account the number of children in each class, which differed significantly from today's standards⁸⁴. Form tutors working at that time had to put a lot of effort into controlling class groups and educating students according to the rules and expectations of the educational authorities. As is evident in the analysis of the documents below, the effects of the tutors' work were, to say the least, good.

⁷⁸ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Letter from the School Inspector in Konin of 10 November 1937, k. 40.

⁷⁹ In the school year of 1937/1938 and in the next year, the following subjects were taught in Brdów: religion, Polish language, history, geography, natural sciences, arithmetic with geometry, drawing, practical classes, singing, physical exercises (physical education) and choir. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisational report... of 2 October 1937.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ The following persons worked in the Brdów school in the school year of 1937/1938: Marian Janowski – school head, Walentyna Janowska, Stanisława Kędziorowa, Józef Opic, Stanisława Stuglikowa – a contractor and a catechist. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisational report... of 2 October 1937. Teaching staff and division of classes.

⁸² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisational report... of 2 October 1937. Teaching staff and division of hours.

⁸³ Form tutors in the school year of 1937/1938: Marian Janowski – school head – classes 6 and 7; Walentyna Janowska – classes 1b and 3; Stanisława Kędziorowa – classes 1a and 5; Józef Opic – class 2; Stanisława Stuglikowa – on contract – class 4. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisational report... of 2 October 1937. Teaching staff and division of hours.

⁸⁴ The number of students registered for each class in the school year of 1937/1938: 1a – 37; 1b – 38; 2 – 60; 3 – 55; 4 – 60; 5 – 58; 6 – 34; 7 – 19. SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Organisational report... of 2 October 1937. Students as of 1 October 1937.

The weekly class schedule for the school year of 1937/1938 looks interesting, as well. The students of classes 1b and 2 attended classes on the so-called “second shift”, i.e. after the end of the classes for the students starting in the morning⁸⁵. The last classes of the students from the so-called “second shift” ended already at 2:25 PM. It is not too late, considering the today’s standards in Polish education system. Teaching on the second shift was caused by an insufficient number of classrooms in the Brdów school. There were not enough rooms to conduct lessons in all classes at the same time.

The weekly number of periods of instruction in different grades was varied. The higher programme level, the more classes there were. It should be borne in mind that the working week had 6 days and students learnt from Monday to Saturday. The distribution of the number of periods of instruction in individual classes is illustrated by the table. The weekly number of compulsory classes for students in the school year of 2014/2015, including extra classes from the group of activities available to the head of the school, conducted in the Brdów School Complex and the number of classes after the reform of education were also provided for comparison.

Table 1. Number of periods of instruction per week conducted at the Brdów school in the selected three years

grade	Number of periods of instruction per week		
	School year of 1937/1938 ⁸⁶	School year of 2014/2015 ⁸⁷	School year of 2017/2018 ⁸⁸ Beginning of the reform, liquidation of middle schools
1	15	22	23
2	18	23	22
3	22	23	23
4	24	29	29
5	28	29	31
6	32	31	33
7	31	32 [1st mid-school]	35

A clear difference in the number of hours can be seen in grades 1 and 2. The youngest students stayed at school for 2.5 lesson periods a day and the students in grade 2 stayed at

⁸⁵ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Class schedule in the general public school in Brdów for the school year of 1937/1938, k. 35.

⁸⁶ 1 SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Class schedule in the general public school in Brdów for the school year of 1937/1938, k. 35.

⁸⁷ Weekly class schedule in the School Complex in Brdów applicable from 1 September 2014

⁸⁸ The Ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 28 March 1917 on the curricular plans for public schools. Appendix 1, Dz. U., RP 2017, item 703, p. 7-8.; Weekly lesson schedule in the Primary School in Brdów applicable from 1 September 2017.

school for 3 periods per day. Grade 4 students learned for the average of 4 periods a day and students in grades 5 and 6 had more than 5 lesson periods per day. Comparing these figures with the number of periods in the school year of 2014/2015, it can be seen that the greatest increase occurred for students in grades 1, 2 and 4. The average numbers of periods of instruction are also higher due to the five-day working week. Grade 1 and 2 students learn for an average of more than 4 periods a day. Students at grade 6 and middle school 1 have 6 and more periods of instruction per day on average. The increase in the number of classes per week is significant. This is also a result of a much greater number of subjects being taught. While a student of the seventh grade in the school year of 1937/1938 was taught 10 subjects, a student of the first grade of the middle school (previously the 7th grade) in 2014/2015 had 15 subjects. Students of the seventh grade are going to have 14 subjects⁸⁹. As shown in the table, the students of this grade will have the greatest number of classes per week, i.e. 35 periods of instruction per week (or 7 per day).⁹⁰

For a more complete picture of the work of students and educators, it is worthwhile to look at the distribution of failing grades for individual subjects in all classes. The data applies to the end-of-year qualification as of 12 June 1937.

The students received the greatest number of failing grades from the Polish language and arithmetic with geometry, which accounted for 72% of all the failing grades given in the discussed school year. Fifth-graders received the greatest number of failing marks, which accounted for 34% of all the marks given. As shown in the table, this was the class that did the worst, as the students received failing grades from as many as 7 subjects, including drawing and practical classes. Many failing grades were received by the youngest students in grades 1 and 2. 7th- and 6th-graders were the best, as there were only 4 fails there. In the discussed school year, 47% of all 292 students that attended the Brdów school received at least one failing grade at the end of the school year of 1936/1937.

Some light is cast on the level of education in the Brdów school in the interwar period by the reports and protocols of visits conducted by educational authorities in the period from 1935 to 1939. A report of the inspection conducted on 5 December 1935 contains a short description of the inspected classes and teachers' work. It is worthwhile to present the entire assessment of children in the inspected classes. The inspectors wrote:

Class 1 – the children are quite shaped and sharp, they can read, write and count on a satisfactory level. The notebooks are kept neat and clean.

Class 4 – the children barely shaped and contained. Knowledge of spelling is insufficient, poor grammar. Working methods inappropriate.

Class 5 – Lively children, quite sharp, have a satisfactory level of knowledge. They have difficulty in solving counting exercises on their own.

Class 7 – Children insufficiently taught to work on their own. They have a verbal knowledge about geography and Poland⁹¹.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 7-7.

⁹⁰ The weekly class schedule at the Primary School in Brdów did not include revalidation classes for students with special educational needs.

⁹¹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Post-visit report of 5 December 1935. k. 1.

Table 2. Failing grades from individual subjects received by Brdów school students at the end of the school year of 1936/1937

Section (class)	Number of students	Failing grades from individual subjects ⁹²							Number of failing grades in sections (classes)
		Polish language	arithmetic with geometry	natural science	geography	history	drawing	practical activities	
1	57	9	9	–	–	–	–	–	18
2	44	9	9	–	–	–	–	–	18
3	51	10	10	–	–	–	–	–	20
4	49	9	9	6	1	–	–	2	27
5	50	11	10	3	11	6	2	3	46
6	17	1	1	–	1	–	1	–	4
7	24	1	1	2	–	–	–	–	4
Total number of failing grades from subjects	292	50	49	11	13	6	3	5	137
percentage share of failing grades	100	17	17	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	46.9

The inspected classes came out quite good except for class 4, which was evaluated negatively. In the conclusions of the visit, it was written that the level of spelling at school needs to improve. Attention was drawn to the lacking school hygiene and daily culture among the students. Also, an evaluation of teaching staff was conducted. It was stated that:

The attitude of teachers to children is nice, the atmosphere of work in individual classes is friendly, but the atmosphere among the teachers is not good [...] irritation and mutual animosity⁹³.

At the end of the report, the inspectors gave recommendations to strengthen the weaknesses present in the school and the teachers' work. The following areas were indicated:

Improve the atmosphere of work among the teaching staff, remove the shortcomings in the area of the everyday culture, more care should be taken to follow the rules of school hygiene, im-

⁹² SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Minutes of the meeting of Teaching Staff... of 12 June 1937, k. 58.

⁹³ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Post-visit report of 5 December 1935. k. 2.

prove the results in spelling, more attention should be paid to the principle of children's independent work in the applied working methods.⁹⁴

Another visit took place on 26 and 27 January 1938, shortly after the reorganisation of the school. Grades 2 and 4–7 were inspected. The teaching results in grades 1–2 and 7 were examined. School sub-inspector Stefan Ubysz wrote in his report:

The educational status and the level of education of the school are adequate in general. Children are quite sharp, but classes 2–4 are not well controlled. These are classes with a lot of students and they present great difficulties in conducting educational work⁹⁵.

The recommendations for further work stated that more attention should be paid to cleanliness in classrooms and among students, care should be taken of the students' outer clothing and to ensure timely arrivals of students at the school and improve their attendance in general. A lot of space was devoted to indicating the areas that would improve the level of education in the school. The inspector suggested:

- letting children work more on their own,
- increasing the involvement of children in the class,
- preparation for skilful use of textbooks;
- assigning specific, doable and controllable homework in a deliberate and organised manner,
- improve the teaching results in the area of spelling⁹⁶.

The sub-inspector made a reference to the work of the educators. He wrote that “the teaching staff is not a harmonised, uniform group personality”⁹⁷. He gave the teachers guidelines for additional work. He wrote:

Undertake self-learning activity as part of the work performed by the teaching staff board in the area of teaching methodology and application of appropriate pedagogical methods in the education of youth⁹⁸.

The inspectors drew attention to the poor situation among the teachers for the second time in a row. The need to train the Brdów school teaching staff was also emphasised.

The last school visit in the interwar period took place on 23 and 24 March 1939. The working conditions and the conditions and results of didactic and educational work were examined. The inspection covered all classes and all educators teaching at the school

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Report of the visit to the general public school of the 3rd grade in Brdów, k. 5.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Report of the visit to the general public school of the 3rd grade in Brdów, k. 5.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

in Brdów. The description of the inspected classes is interesting. School sub-inspector Kazimierz Stasiński wrote:

- Class 1 – children speak, write and read well enough.
- Class 2 – speaking and reading quite good, results in spelling and arithmetic sufficient. Clean handwriting.
- Class 3 – results in the Polish language – speaking, writing and reading are sufficient but grammar is very poor. Knowledge of arithmetic – multiplication table, addition, subtraction – sufficient.
- Class 4 – sufficient results in arithmetic.
- Class 5 – children’s reading and spelling skills are sufficient. Good knowledge of grammar. Arithmetic lessons are conducted in a proper manner. [...] Overall arithmetic results are poor. Knowledge of natural science [...] sufficiently revised.
- Class 6 – Geography and history lessons were interesting. Results from geography [...] sufficient. Results from history [...] are generally good⁹⁹.

The sub-inspector indicated a good level of education among the children, which manifested itself, among others, in children being good, polite and “generally clean”. The children also took care of the aesthetics of the notebooks. It was once again pointed out that “the group has yet to form a compact unit, which is necessary to continue the proper work”¹⁰⁰. In the post-inspection recommendations, the school sub-inspector wrote:

- Include more activities for children; reduce minor questions and use more topics; remember about trips.
- Strive to reduce the number of repeating students by taking care of slower students in particular; when determining the number of repeating students, take into account the students’ conditions at home and apply absolute objectivity¹⁰¹.

The inspector emphasised the problem of repeaters (students repeating a grade), He thought there were too many of them. A survey conducted among the students seemingly indicated the reasons for their retention in the same grade for another year. The conclusions of the report indicated the ways of solving this problem and indirectly included the causes of the excessive number of repeaters in the Brdów school. It is not known whether the recommendations were followed and whether they brought any positive results because a few months later World War II broke out and the school was closed for more than five years. The last inspection took place in the new school building, so the recommendations from previous inspections in this area were fulfilled. Working and teaching conditions did improve significantly. Moving to a new school building also had an impact on the improvement of hygiene and personal culture among students, as pointed out by the inspector. The

⁹⁹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Report of the visit to the general public school of the 3rd grade in Brdów, k. 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Report of the visit to the general public school of the 3rd grade in Brdów, k. 7.

¹⁰¹ SAP BK, SIK, GPS, ref. 158, Report of the visit to the general public school of the 3rd grade in Brdów, k. 8.

visitors saw successes but also weaknesses in the teachers' work. They saw their working conditions and educational difficulties. They appreciated the social work performed by the educators, especially the scout team, which – as stated – “shows the greatest vitality”¹⁰².

The school in Brdów, which had had a very long tradition dating back to the mid-15th century, developed fully only in the interwar period. From a one-class school employing a single teacher, it transformed into a seven-grade school with full teaching staff on the eve of the outbreak of World War II. After many years of efforts and activities, a beautiful new school, which was just the first stage of the planned school complex, was constructed. The students and teachers had the opportunity to learn and work in the new building for one year. Housing, working and learning conditions improved considerably. Despite the very difficult working conditions that prevailed for most of the interwar period, educators achieved satisfactory results in teaching and educating students who attended the Brdów school. From the perspective of the modern teacher, the working conditions in the school in the period between 1919 and 1939 were very difficult. Despite numerous problems and difficulties that are present in today's schools, it is difficult to imagine classes consisting of 40 or more students learning in a small room without the support of modern means of communication. It can be said that the interwar period was a time of construction, formation and solidification of the Brdów school. The outbreak of World War II thwarted the accomplishments, work and effort put into shaping the school in Brdów.

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