

REPORT

BEFORE I turn to a review of happenings and progress in education during the past year, I wish to mention some consequences of long-term social trends. As the objective of Government policy in education, the task has been set of ensuring that every individual has the advantage of the best possible educational facilities up to the limit of his capacity. We consider it the birthright of every New Zealand child to have the benefit of those facilities, and we believe it is the responsibility of Government to see that the future citizens are fully equipped to take their places as responsible individuals in a modern democratic community. This task in itself requires a flexible and many-sided educational system which can be adapted and developed constantly to meet changing individual and community needs. It is sufficient to tax the energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence of all who are engaged in this task, and at present it is complicated by difficulties peculiar to the present day.

The education of the growing generation of children is something which cannot be delayed. Trained teachers, school buildings, and equipment must be ready as the children reach school age, and it is this matching of resources to needs which is causing difficulties at the present time.

Sixteen years ago we were in the depths of the economic depression, and in those hopeless days the number of children born in New Zealand sank to a low figure. In 1948 the number of children in the five-year age-group of thirteen to seventeen years—that is, those born between 1932 and 1936—was 13,000 less than the number of children born between 1927 and 1931. That is a drop of almost 10 per cent. The consequences are still with us. The demand for juvenile labour is greater than can be met by the numbers of pupils leaving school, and this shortage has been accentuated by the fact that more pupils are staying at school after reaching the school leaving age of fifteen years than was the case ten or fifteen years ago.

Out of this smaller age-group a greater proportion is needed to-day in the teaching profession to provide the additional staffing in our schools since enrolments began to rise sharply following the increased birth-rate from 1940 onwards. To provide the required staff the number of admissions to teachers' training colleges was increased from 749 in 1947 to 1,051 in 1948. By taxing to the utmost the available facilities at the newly-opened residential college at Ardmore, as well as at the other training colleges, it has been possible to accommodate the additional number of students. A further increase of admissions to over 1,200 has been approved for 1949.

The additional admissions will, it is hoped, go some way towards reducing still further the size of classes, an object which the Government would like to achieve as early as possible as circumstances will permit.

At the same time, to meet the existing shortage of teachers, an appeal was made to married women with training as teachers to resume in the teaching service. It was also necessary to engage temporarily uncertificated teachers for relieving work, mainly in schools in rural areas.

The difficult position arising out of the shortage of teachers is paralleled by a shortage of class-room accommodation. During the war the normal school-building programme was of necessity seriously curtailed, and shortages of essential materials and workmen still hinder full progress.

Immediately after the war housing needs were acute and were, rightly, given priority, but as much solid progress has now been made in the provision of housing the needs of school accommodation must in the next few years claim a very large share of the materials and labour available for construction.