

School Buildings.

I found that out of the sum allotted by Parliament—£120,000—for expenditure during the year 1915–16 on all classes of school and college buildings, additions to schools, and the acquisition of school-sites over £90,000 was to meet liabilities of the previous year. The amount allotted for primary-school purposes was £65,000, out of which the liabilities of the previous year—£54,000—had to be provided for. This condition placed a severe handicap upon me in dealing with the applications received from the Education Boards during the year 1915–16. Nevertheless, the more urgent cases were dealt with; in other cases temporary provision was made, and in not a few cases of additions to schools and the acquisition of additional school-ground area the applications were postponed for the time being. As the attendance, however, at these schools shows a further increase, the demand for increased accommodation will become more pressing and must be acceded to. The liabilities at the end of the year were reduced to £42,000. An unexpended amount, representing the unclaimed balance of grants made to Education Boards, will always be shown at the end of each year, but steps will be taken in future to reduce this amount as far as possible.

I wish here to express my appreciation of the very cordial support which I have received from the Education Boards in these matters.

For the current year it will be necessary to provide a sum sufficient to enable me to deal in a reasonable manner with the applications which have already been received from the Education Boards, and which will be made by the Boards during the remainder of the year. The applications now before me amount to £60,000, and many of these are to provide for schools in new settlements in the country and in the more inaccessible backblocks, and also to relieve the overcrowding in existing schools. Overcrowding must not be allowed to continue for any undue length of time, otherwise the health of the children will be seriously affected. In this connection my serious attention is being given to the question of open-air schools with a view to their wider adoption.

As previously indicated, I hope also to bring about an improvement in the country schools by the adoption of a more systematic and suitable means of conveyance to central schools of children residing in widely scattered districts.

Cost.

It will be said that we cannot meet the cost of much extension of education. Even if the war has caused a tremendous expenditure of money, it has at least shown that that money was available for a great national purpose. Voluntary contributions to the war funds would, in New Zealand, about pay for a whole year's education, and the givers are the better for giving.

However, most of the reforms mentioned above would result in saving money, or would not involve increased expenditure, though there would undoubtedly be an increase of efficiency.

It is deplorable to find that some people cavil at the cost of education. Provided the money is wisely spent, no department can give the State such a profitable return as can the Education Department. Its work is the foundation of the success of every trade, industry, and department in the country. As one great educationist in England said recently, "Whatever else is retrenched as a result of war, education must not be touched." To do so would be to cripple our main resource for national recuperation.

Expenditure on education should be estimated in terms of child-life, child-health, child-efficiency, and citizen-training. Only for purposes of accounts should these values be translated into pounds, shillings, and pence.

There never has been a time when interest, patriotism, and honour alike may more justly be pleaded in support of a generous endeavour to remedy the deficiencies of our educational system. With the unexampled destruction of life and property entailed by the war, there will come an unexampled call to make the most of the brains and hands of the coming generation, whose task it will be to replace the loss.

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