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NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS.

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER DEALING WITH SOME PHASES OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS
AND REVIEWING EXISTING CONDITIONS IN THE LIGHT OF NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.

Office of the Minister of Education,
30th June, 1916.

OWING to the extraordinary conditions and problems created by the war, I have felt it necessary on the present occasion to place before Parliament a memorandum in addition to the Education Department's report setting forth certain views relating to educational matters.

I am convinced that the education and training of the present and immediately following generations constitute the greatest reconstructive agencies at our disposal for the repair and reorganization of national life after the present destructive upheaval. The principles of educational progress on which I hope to base the successive practicable reforms in educational procedure which may contribute to the reconstruction referred to are therefore presented in very general outline. The goal cannot be reached at a bound, but I am certain that we need now to make a kind of educational stocktaking and to give some perspective to educational effort, so that the people of the Dominion, on whose cordial support so much depends, will be able to follow and encourage each movement towards a thoroughly reconstructive national policy.

It is also my desire to enlist the closest attention and earnest co-operation of the members of the Legislature in the future possibilities of education, the progress of which is so closely interwoven with that of the Dominion.

Education and the War.

The present war has severely tested our various national resources, revealing our strength and our weakness, but after-war problems will test our ability to profit by the lessons of the war. Education, being one of the most important inspiring principles, and at the same time the direct reflection of national life, finds itself in a special measure assessed by the great national test. Whatever defects have been revealed, we find our type of manhood and womanhood vindicated and our position as a people justified by the extraordinary response of a free people to the call for national service. Our educational system in New Zealand may justly claim a great share in the honour of sending forth thousands of our former scholars as volunteers in the great cause. Moreover, one of our training-college Principals, four Inspectors, and over four hundred teachers have enlisted with the boys trained under them directly or indirectly in our schools.

However, our weakness in educational as in national affairs had been an over-reliance on our resources, without appreciating the real need for system and control ; an extreme deference to individual and local considerations ; and the entrusting of expert and professional matters too much to lay administration. We could surely introduce more co-ordination and economy of effort, dependent on a wholesome amount of social and national discipline, without approaching the type of regimentation and autocracy against which we are fighting.

Our educational system must lead the way in a keener sense of national co-ordination and efficiency, in a readiness to abandon useless forms and practices, in a demand for a higher standard of work and of life ; in short, in an application of the simple axioms that "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points," and "The whole is greater than its part."

Realities.

All educational effort must in future be devoted to dealing with realities as contrasted with abstractions, formalisms, and pedantic studies. Modern kindergarten and Montessori methods at the one end, and the reformed methods of teaching such subjects as practical applied science and economics at the other, condemn a great deal of what lies between as mere beating of air. All education must concern itself with actualities and activities of life, and (in proportion to its advanced nature) must increasingly justify itself by what it does for the community.¹¹

This is not a utilitarian, materialistic standard. When a subject ceases to be studied for use it ceases to be of value for culture. Language is for the development and communication of thought and knowledge ; mathematics for calculation ; science for power to use the forces of nature as well as to understand them ; yet thousands of secondary scholars are spending a fifth of their time at Latin, in which not 1 per cent. of them can ever read, or think, or express themselves. They spend another fifth on mathematics, by which not 5 per cent. of them will ever calculate or reckon anything. They spend about a tenth of their time to a study in science, which in the form adopted in many cases does not widen their personal interest in nature, nor enrich their lives, nor render them of any service to the world of industry about them. This does not deny that a small percentage of our secondary and university scholars do carry the study to as fruitful an issue as the present somewhat academic instruction permits them. The fact remains that the great majority of the scholars receiving the most expensive education we can provide spend under these three headings alone, as above indicated, about half of their time in what is for them mere futile pedantry and study of abstractions.

Mental Discipline and Culture.

The claim for such formal, abstract, unapplied study—that it provides good mental discipline and culture transferable to other activities—is now fighting in the last ditch all the world over. Such production of chaff for a grain of wheat has as much justification as would the pounding of the earth with one's fist for several hours a day to develop muscle when that purpose, and a much greater one, could be secured by getting a blacksmith's hammer and doing something. Surely if the proper methods of teaching are used and powers of thought developed, an even greater mental discipline and culture can be secured by studying real things in a practical manner. There is no real antithesis between culture and vocational study. That false distinction is merely a relic of old class barriers and of an age when the best educated people were not expected to be or to do anything outside a very limited sphere.

The Old Order changeth.

It can be safely said that primary education with all its faults is more progressive, more in harmony with the best educational thought and with the nature and powers of children, better organized, better controlled by inspection, more valued, and more heartily supported by public opinion than is higher education. The reason is that it is the type of education provided for the whole community, so that its universal needs and benefits constitute a claim for general concern and general study resulting in a fairly close realization of its possibilities.

The extension of free education from the primary school to the secondary school now places the same demands on the latter. It must meet the needs of the general community. Once upon a time secondary schools were for a privileged class irrespective of ability, and gave what was regarded as a provision for certain select professions. This has changed. We now provide that any pupil showing ability can enter a secondary school. Of over ten thousand secondary pupils, about 85 per cent. are free-place pupils, and the State now pays nearly the whole cost of secondary education; even the so-called endowments consist almost entirely of grants of public lands. Not a tenth of these free pupils, and only a small proportion even of those who matriculate, intend to enter the University. Yet the old traditional studies and methods referred to under the heading of "realities" are imposed on all secondary schools because once upon a time they were merely university portals. We can surely keep that portal open for the few who need it without forcing all secondary pupils to traverse the same path. General secondary education and pre-university education cannot now be regarded as parallel.

Increasing Demands.

Secondary education must be kept free to all, and perhaps made compulsory for most, simply because even our best primary education relative to the multiplying requirements of our modern civic life, our national responsibilities, and even to the needs of our skilled industries, leaves a boy or girl as comparatively under-educated as did the dame's school in relation to the needs of a generation or two ago.

The former limitation of general education to the primary-school period, with the growing demands referred to, are largely the cause of the overcrowding in our primary syllabus to which public attention is so frequently called. The growing consciousness of the complexity of life and a desire to cover all its phases kept up the cry that still another something was being left out, and the only general form of education—the primary system—was considered to be, like the tram-car, never too full. Thus an apparent width of education was secured at the sacrifice of depth and thoroughness. It is intended to do all that is possible to secure simplification of the curriculum and concentration on essentials through the agency of a more discriminating and practically useful and helpful style of inspection.

Admitting that the old formal study was defective, there is no doubt that the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction, and that teaching often lacks the definiteness and exactitude that a truer recognition of principles would demand.

Solutions.

The fact that the present traditional secondary school cannot in any adequate sense meet the needs of the majority of our free-place pupils does not prove that it is unnecessary to provide free secondary education. Neither does the inability of the secondary course to interest and retain for any length of time pupils who show that the privilege should be restricted, any more than the unsuitability of secondary-school studies and methods to the equipment of ex-primary pupils proves that the primary schools should be made to conform to the requirements of the high schools.

The whole situation indicates that our secondary-school system should be adjusted to the new conditions, so that, while encouraging and providing for the small minority of university aspirants, the very large majority should not be unfairly sacrificed on the altar of university preparation. This means that primary and secondary education must be considered as a whole, since for an ever-increasing number of pupils it should form a continuous course, which will provide for all as adequately as primary education does now up to the old limit.

The Pivot.

The secondary-school question thus becomes the pivot of the whole education question. Its proper solution would simplify the primary curriculum, leaving time for a more natural education on kindergarten principles, up to the age of seven or eight years, a more thorough attention to the broad essentials of general primary education, and the dovetailing of much of the present higher primary and lower secondary stages.

The problem of general secondary education and the problem of university education must be kept quite distinct. It is the former that is the pressing problem of this generation, and it must be dealt with in and for itself. When we have laid the foundations of a general secondary-education system we shall realize both the reforms which our elementary schools require and the true value of a university education. But until such a system has been created all educational endeavour on other lines would be more or less futile.

Primary Education.

Though it has been shown that secondary-education problems form the pivot of the education question, primary education will always be of prime importance as the necessary foundation of all education for every child in the Dominion. We have to admit that by all evidences we have not in the past acted up to this conviction. If we compare the area of playgrounds, size of schools in comparison with number of scholars, size of classes per teacher, equipment and furnishing of buildings as between primary schools on the one hand and secondary and technical schools on the other, we are struck with the relative poverty of the former. Yet the same children now pass through both types of school. It would be absurd to state that the same children from the age of five to thirteen may properly be provided with smaller play-areas; poorer lighting, heating, ventilation, and seating; more dingy rooms; much more crowded classes; less individual attention; and a much poorer type of building than they are to be provided with when they pass at the age of thirteen into the secondary and technical schools. Though such a stated policy would be ridiculous, we unfortunately see no incongruity in acting as if it were seriously defensible.

Types of Secondary Education.

There are four types of secondary education which seem to be necessary to meet the new requirements—(1) The university course leading to the skilled professions; (2) the general secondary or general vocational course on modern lines; (3) the continuation or special vocational course; (4) the country secondary course.

The basis of selection of pupils for these courses should not necessarily be one of mere intellectual ability. Of course, only the really capable pupils should be allowed to take up the first course, and failure to realize expectations should mean a transfer to one of the other groups. Yet equally bright pupils should find full scope in any of the courses, and pupils in one course would not necessarily be of inferior calibre to those in any other.

Further, a considerable portion of the course in all groups should be of much the same nature, because all the pupils are to be future citizens and have certain common human possibilities and needs. English of a thoroughly literary type, history and civics of a character calculated to give a sound basis for patriotism and desire to serve one's country, practical geography, some form of applied science, and some form of manual work for all boys, with domestic education for all girls, must be adequately taught in all secondary schools. The difference would be largely in the material on which the instruction would be based, and the completeness to which the requirements of the course would permit the study to be carried.

This initial general training cannot be dispensed with in a democracy where equal opportunities are claimed for all. There is no justification for giving the good start, the broad vision, to a few, and condemning too many to a narrow unenlightened existence. Not all will fully profit by this opportunity; but all have a right to it; and the opportunity should be held open for a reasonable length of time, even though there are those who seem slow in taking advantage of it. The thing to do is not to take away the opportunity, but to open the eyes of those who are missing what they might have.

(1.) *University Preparation Course.*—Subject to such reforms as the University could be induced to make possible, course (1) would be the same as the present Matriculation course, with a condition that such essential subjects as English, writing, spelling, oral and written expression must be kept up and improved to a far greater extent than at present. I have found reason to complain of the sad neglect of these common though essential subjects in high schools. A more thorough type of secondary-school inspection will need to be instituted.

That I am not alone in this criticism of the English of the intermediate school may be seen from the following extracts from the Reports of the Inspectors of Continuation and High Schools to the Minister of Education, Ontario, 1915:—

"I gave some figures to show the unsatisfactory nature of the pupils' work in reading, writing, and spelling. Pupils who read fairly well in the oral reading-lessons are permitted to mumble their words or to speak rapidly and indistinctly in giving oral answers or in reading aloud work in other subjects; pupils who write and spell well in the classes in these subjects are permitted to scribble or to write in a slovenly way in the other subjects. Too often the teacher, who neglects the pupils' work in the subjects of reading, writing, and spelling, except in the class periods devoted to these subjects, excuses himself for the poor work of his class by the old, old story of poor preparation in the public schools. I confess I have no patience with this excuse, time-worn as it is, and well founded as it also sometimes is, but my experience has shown me that the teacher can easily secure fairly satisfactory results by ceaseless vigilance."—(Report on Continuation Schools.)

"As it is, I am convinced that many pupils after three or four years in a high school go out into life with a writing vocabulary—certainly with an oral vocabulary—not much more extensive than that with which they began their high-school studies.

"The ignorance and clumsiness of the average pupil in expressing his thoughts and sentiments are appalling. In every class of every school there are, of course, brilliant exceptions, but the general average of capacity is low. I fear that a considerable number of teachers are at present relying too much on the text-book as a means of producing the desired results, and are not allowing sufficient scope and swing to their own initiative."—(Report on High Schools.)

(2.) *The General Secondary Course.*—Latin would be left out. The foreign language taught should be conversational French. There should be a thorough English of a direct type based on wide reading, also a course of mathematics, but only of a directly applied character—*e.g.*, in connection with the economic and statistical side of geography and calculations in connection with science experiments. Among other subjects, science of a general type based on practical work related to industries and surrounding natural conditions should be a dominant feature. This course would provide for that 50 per cent. of our secondary pupils who would not choose a University course, or who had not decided on a trade or calling, or who were prepared to postpone special preparation for it.

Further, pupils should not be driven into a course of study unsuited to their needs, merely to pass an examination necessary for entrance to the Public Service, the teaching profession, pharmacy, or other occupation. A pupil should, from any one of the above courses, be able to prepare for any of the qualifying examinations above mentioned. The Matriculation Examination should be used only for qualifying for University entrance and closely kindred purposes.

It is possible so to arrange affairs that each child may have the benefit of the broad, general, or universal foundation before he finds it necessary to direct his energies into narrower channels. It has been freely admitted that the State should make this possible by extra expenditure if necessary. It is simply, in this connection, a policy of self-defence. "A specialty founded upon ignorance" is a detriment to the specialist, and a menace to the State. "A specialty founded upon knowledge"—upon breadth and richness of experience—is a social asset, an insurance against narrowness and self-seeking.

There is also another good reason why general training should come first and the choice of a specialty be deferred. Those who know children know how disastrous it is to try to make life choices and to differentiate courses during the years of the elementary school. Wise choices cannot be assured when choice is made before the child is fourteen years of age. It is doubtful if in most cases they can be made until much later than that. Children at the end of the elementary-school stage are at a changeable rather than at a decisive period. They cannot know, nor can it be certainly known for them, what specialty is best. One day they have decided to pursue one vocation, and the next day another.

(3.) *The Continuation Course.*—The continuation course would provide for pupils who go direct from primary schools to a definite trade or occupation. This course, with the evening classes for definite technical training, would represent all

that is really technical education in the sense that it has a direct effect on industrial efficiency. The course should centre round the trade interest, but should also provide a continuation of general education.

The end of all education is not merely the technically competent workman, but the citizen of the State, who not only seeks to advance his own welfare through his work, but also consciously places his work at the service of the community. The essential of the continuation school is, therefore, the attitude of regarding this stage of technical education as a means for mental and moral training.

The idea is to give these youths a pleasure in receiving instruction in their trade, and to make them good at their trade; not to educate them out of their trade into a higher one, but to make them good in the trade they are already engaged in, and good citizens.

Employers would, of course, need to co-operate by granting the necessary facilities to their junior workers.

(4.) *The Country Secondary Course.*—In the country secondary course the curriculum should include the ordinary cardinal subjects of secondary instruction as specified in the general secondary course (2). The main difference would be in regard to the material on which the instruction would be based.

Between a "ruralized" secondary school and a secondary school of the ordinary type the difference should be one not of aim, but of teaching-material. They should both aim at furnishing their pupils with the general intellectual equipment (as distinct from specialized knowledge) which is needful if they are to pursue with interest and intelligence any avocation, either in town or country, which they may be expected to follow. The rural bias to be given to the curriculum is not intended to supply a course of work which will be useful only to intending farmers. On the contrary, it aims at making the curriculum really more suitable in many rural schools than one of the ordinary type, both for those who intend to pursue rural industries and for the majority of those who do not. It would have a certain obvious appropriateness for the former class, but it should be capable also of supplying, in its own way, and with all the more effect because of its essentially practical character, a kind of education which would be valuable to the whole body of the pupils, whatever their subsequent occupations might be.

It is important, and, indeed, vital, that the work in each subject should, so far as possible, be illustrated by, and even based upon, the facts open to the pupils' own observation; but this does not mean that the attempt should be made to substitute illustrations from everyday life for the principles which they illustrate.

Just because it draws its illustrations from the environment with which the pupils are in some degree familiar, and relies more on actual practice in the garden, the workshop, or the laboratory, than on theoretical instruction from books, it may be expected in proper hands to stimulate interest and encourage mental alertness. From this point of view, then, the test which should be applied to each portion of the detailed schemes of work is not whether it has an obvious vocational utility, but whether it has purpose and value as a part of a sound secondary education conducted on practical lines.

The Place of "Agriculture" in a Rural Course.—It has already been pointed out that even in the interests of the future farmer too much stress should not be laid on the purely vocational aspect of the work. A ruralized school should not attempt to give formal instruction in "agriculture" as a separate subject. Technical matters of purely professional interest to the farmer should, as a rule, be omitted from the course. This does not exclude the possibility of a good deal of incidental reference to agricultural subjects. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between science and its applications; and a teacher of rural science should be as free to deal with matters of agricultural interest as the teacher of physics should be to deal with matters which interest the engineer. In a school a large proportion of whose pupils will gain their livelihoods as farmers or in other occupations connected with the land, it would be natural and not improper to give a certain vocational trend to the instruction provided; but careful discrimination will always be necessary in regard to what should be included, and, in particular, care must be taken to ensure that the work shall not be unprofitable to pupils who will not enter rural industries.

The course would provide for a far better educational training for a country boy who wishes to take up a town occupation than does the present academic pre-university course.

Responsibility.

The extension of facilities for free secondary education seems to demand that all who accept these privileges shall make adequate use of them. Secondary education costs the State about three times as much per head as does primary education, yet attendance at the secondary school may be spasmodic and broken off at will. It seems only just that when a pupil accepts a free place he should come under some effective obligation to make a proper use of the opportunities offered him and remain in attendance sufficiently long to derive substantial profit from the instruction. How this may best be done will be a matter for further consideration. It may be that the best solution of the whole problem is to be found in the extension of the compulsory provisions of the Education Act to an age-limit of sixteen or seventeen years.

The question has been raised whether, in lieu of scholarships, which are often won by those who do not need them, provision might more profitably be made for conveying to or boarding at secondary schools those country pupils who at present are out of reach of suitable secondary education, thus overcoming the distance difficulty and putting all pupils on a more equal footing. This will also require further consideration.

Technical Education.

Considerable changes seem to be necessary if we are to secure that the large sum spent on technical education is really invested in the improvement and efficiency of our industries and occupations. The only direct technical education we have at present is provided by the evening or other classes attended by persons whose trade or occupation is fixed. This should be developed, especially by trade continuation classes for all apprentices and those who go direct from the primary school to a definite occupation.

Technical high schools can scarcely claim to have an appreciable effect on our industries, except that they provide a more rational, practical, and modern form of secondary education than in the conservative high schools. If the latter were reformed in the manner suggested above, the general secondary-education course therein outlined could be as well provided for in a modernized secondary school as in what is known as a technical high school. The latter is at present a protest to the existing secondary education, and, like all protests, tends to overemphasize the point of distinction. Such a school should only be broadly vocational in the sense of being related to the activities of life and of lifting work and industrial interests into the interests of education. There would not need to be a great variety of practical work in a well-balanced technical high school. Until an occupation has been selected the same broad, practical work-classes would, in the main, serve for all pupils. Work would be dignified, shown to be scientific, and worthy of the highest skill and intelligence.

The greatest service that all secondary schools, apart from their special university classes, can render is to break down the present absurd preference for clerkships and so-called genteel occupations. These have come to be regarded as "genteel" because formerly they were the only occupations for genteel and educated people. The far more skilful, scientific, manual and trade occupations of modern times would soon be equally "genteel," if that be worth anything, if our secondary pupils saw the wisdom of investing their education and intelligence in our skilled occupations, trades, and industries, where ample scope worthy of their advanced education would be found—nay, where it is demanded—if we are to make progress in industry and commerce.

The main functions of a modern, practical education, primary or secondary, is to foster a taste for some form of definite work, for some definite trade or skilled occupation, and to gain the boy's interest through practical activity while actually at school. It gives him the taste for a trade: it does not teach him a trade. It does not specialize for a trade, which is often the mistaken ideal of a school. It gives him a general, practical, and technical foundation which will be of service to him in any trade he may chance to follow. This is really the same principle as that set out when dealing with the rural secondary course.

The general vocational classes should awaken an inclination for skilled trades, for it is a well-known experience that boys who have received good and comprehensive instruction, even in drawing and general handwork, or in subjects related to practical affairs, do not readily take up an unskilled occupation, or even prefer

clerkships to constructive work. They would thus be led away from those "blind alley" occupations which constantly recruit the ranks of the future unemployed and unemployable.

Not only would such modernized courses as are here suggested help to remove the undeserved stigma often placed upon manual labour, but they would enable our schools to meet the universal demand, "Wanted, an intelligent boy."

The returns for 1915 show that of 423 secondary-school science classes receiving manual grants, 237 classes were for science of an academic type, very little connected with practical life. Of those 423 manual classes only 70 were related to domestic training. In technical high schools, only 16·7 per cent. of the girls in attendance (over 900) took the domestic course. Of 18,247 non-technical high-school students attending technical classes 12,069 were following domestic, professional, or clerical pursuits or were students; that is, about 66 per cent. were not connected with any trade or industry. In technical high schools, out of 1,955 pupils, 1,021, or over 50 per cent., took commercial and general subjects, while only 490, or about 25 per cent., took industrial courses.

As stated above, it is not desirable to make technical high schools anything but generally vocational, but the above figures show that much clearer definition of aim is required. In many of the technical and art classes, apart from the organized technical classes, the work simply provides for the teaching of accomplishments which, under present conditions, we cannot afford to pay for.

Arrangements have been made for special opportunities being provided for returned soldiers to receive technical instruction in cases where a change of work has been rendered necessary. In addition, the training colleges are arranging to receive discharged soldiers who have sufficient education, and to give them the necessary training to take up the work of teaching.

Our Girls.

However we may recognize the need for training girls to fill such positions as that of teacher, clerk, dressmaker, assistant, or factory girl, we know that in the great majority of cases such occupations are merely temporary, and that nearly all of the girls soon become wives and mothers. This must be so if our nation is to stand in its present high position, which is due in the greatest measure to the influence of devoted mothers in our British homes.

Let us give our girls a good education, even a temporary occupation in the business or industrial world, but let us act so that we and they may realize that not even the lawyer, doctor, statesman, or merchant has a calling so richly fruitful of all that is highest and noblest in national life as the mother of a good home.

To this end we must see that every girl, both in her secondary and primary education, shall have such training in domestic affairs as will render her great future work a source of interest and pleasure, and will enable her to meet its demands with the confidence and success that a good training can give.

The need of the State to secure the health and physical efficiency of our girls was never greater, more imperative, or more urgent than now, and we must see that they are given an all-round practical education. The vital worth of child-life to the well being of the State is being revealed in no uncertain manner by present circumstances. To save child-life is an axiom of State preservation; to remedy defect is an axiom of State economy.

Medical and Dental Inspection.

The work of medical inspection carried out during the past three years has more than justified the policy established. Serious handicaps, however, especially in the way of shortage of staff, have been placed on this work during the war, but plans for fuller development have been made pending the return of favourable conditions. Special attention has lately been given, in accordance with my instruction, to the remedial or corrective classes carried out by the medical inspectors and physical instructors. Reports now received show that many pupils have derived substantial benefit from the corrective exercises thus given.

In certain remote localities in the Dominion, owing to the pupils being beyond the reach of treatment by ordinary methods, it has been recognized as almost futile to diagnose defects without providing for remedial measures. I would like to

introduce some method of reform in this direction, but at the present juncture I am reluctantly unable so to do. I hope that ultimately it will be possible to institute a travelling school hospital on similar lines to that in existence in New South Wales, where it is staffed by two doctors, one nurse, and one dentist, and follows the Medical Inspector of Schools in isolated districts.

The need for the introduction of dental inspection in schools has been brought prominently under my notice, and reports received from members of the medical and dental professions show an appalling condition of the state of the teeth of many pupils which should not be allowed to continue. I hope the time is not far distant when it will be possible for the Department to establish dental clinics in various parts of the Dominion so as to make some provision for the free treatment of school-children. Something more than mere inspection in this connection is required. The health of children being largely dependent on good teeth, treatment of dental caries must be undertaken. Some Hospital Boards have already given free dental treatment to school-children, and I hope to see their example widely followed. When such free treatment is provided for, parents should be compelled, where necessary, to see that their children receive the benefits of the facilities offered."

Had there been a complete school medical and dental system in operation in years gone by, it is certain that there would not have been the large number of military rejects on account of bodily defects, bad teeth, defective eyesight, &c., which the military medical examinations have recently revealed. Medical inspectors have been instructed not only to inspect the children, but wherever possible to give lectures or lessons to parents or children on proper diet, care of the teeth, brush drill, and on general hygiene.

Open-air Schools.

In view of the benefits derived, especially by weakly children, from open-air schools, I have made wide investigations concerning the various ways of working the system.

In several districts in New Zealand teachers have this year made more frequent use of playgrounds and sheltered open spaces for the purposes of class teaching. In addition, we have in Wellington an open-air-school building which has been in use for some time. Reports just to hand show very striking improvements in the health, height, and weight of the children taught in the open air as compared with those taught inside. Teachers and scholars alike express a distinct preference for the open-air section of the school. I hope to arrange for further extensions of this type of school.

If more money is made available, I hope to arrange for a more complete staff of medical inspectors and also to secure the services of school nurses, who could follow up the work of the school doctors so as to ensure that proper remedial or preventive measures are taken on the basis of the medical report. They would thus form the link between the school and the home.

Country Schools.

It is a source of continual regret that to the hardships and disabilities of the country settler, who is developing our richest natural resources, there is added the lack of proper facilities for the education of his children. There seems to be only one solution for many of the difficulties surrounding the country-school problem. We need to group small schools wherever possible. Instead of setting up small, ineffective schools generally under untrained, uncertificated teachers, we could have central schools well equipped and staffed, where Inspectors could give more than double the time they now find possible. Though conveyance of the children has, in the past, presented difficulties, the matter would be much simplified if the whole of the children at a small school had to be conveyed. Numbers would make the system payable.

If only one Board would make one experiment in this direction, its success, guaranteed by the experience of Canada and other countries, would be sufficient to cause a widespread adoption of the system. The children would benefit, not only educationally but physically, owing to the method of travelling in covered conveyances in bad weather. I have indicated in a previous paragraph my views on the subject of agricultural education.

Grading of Teachers.

As marking a proper emphasis of the growing recognition of the importance of primary education, I appreciate the Public Service Commissioner's action, after consultation with me, in appointing to the responsible office of Assistant Director of Education a primary-school headmaster whose widely known experience and judgment in educational matters is a guarantee of a due recognition of the possibilities of our schools in general, but of the primary schools in particular.

One of the first duties allotted to the Assistant Director was the initiation and administration of a Dominion grading scheme for teachers. This most important national reform has been carried to a highly successful issue. The work has been carried out with tact, skill, and decision. The regulations have met with widespread approval, and the first Dominion graded list of teachers is now in print. After any necessary revision as a result of criticism and experience, requisite improvements may be made, and then the graded list may be made the basis of a much improved system of appointment and promotion for the Dominion as a whole.

Such a system has been long desired, as it provides for appointment on merit, and merit only. It will also break down parochialism and give all parts of New Zealand an equal opportunity for securing the best teachers available for particular positions.

The benefit to the efficiency of the schools and to the education of the children will be very great, since it will make possible a much more rational distribution of teachers, putting the right man or woman in the right place, and stimulating and rewarding the progressive teacher.

Limitations.

Although the amount of the educational vote is large, there is not much scope for economizing in respect to the greater part of it. For instance, out of a total vote of £1,330,000 for last year no less than £1,270,000 was controlled by statute in the way of scales of salaries and schedule grants and payments. Though the vote for statutory payments increased by £63,000 as the result of natural expansion of activities, the increase in the total vote was only £12,200 in addition to the statutory increase.

Extra Responsibilities.

It should also be remembered that out of the educational vote there was paid no less a sum than £65,000 for purposes which, though of national importance (and which I am proud to direct) are not really educational work. I refer to expenditure in connection with boarding out afflicted and dependent children, special officers for benevolent agencies, such as nurses and visitors, as well as for medical expenses and maintenance over and above the expenses incurred in the actual instruction or education of the inmates of special institutions.

Economies.

Pending the more comprehensive system of organization and financial management, several matters have already been taken in hand. The purchase of supplies for all the special institutions such as industrial schools, training-farms, schools for the deaf, &c., have been put on an improved business footing, and already considerable saving has resulted.

Arrangements have also been made that some of these institutions shall produce their own supplies and, where possible, provide for other institutions out of their surplus produce. Further savings are being made as the result of—

- (a.) The plan for the gradual combination of inspection of Native and public schools :
- (b.) The more economical system of inspection of special schools :
- (c.) The method of direct negotiations for sites :
- (d.) Alterations in the system of medical and physical inspection :
- (e.) Adjustment of positions where salaries were over the scale rate.
- (f.) Considerable saving has also been effected through the more systematic method of collecting recoveries from parents of children under the charge of the Department.

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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Minister of Education.

