

The Cinderella of Irish education

Secondary schools need assistance

the total number of pupils attending secondary schools in Limerick was 2,920. Just twenty-one years ago at the end of the year 1942-43, the total number was 1,260—an increase of 1,660. Yet, the accommodation available in Limerick is little changed in that period.

them would be happy to do so in the morning but the big question is—where will the money come out of? They could borrow it but they would find it next to impossible to repay it and even with an all-out effort and with full co-operation of all concerned, it would take them many years—many years of hard work and worry.

secondary and technical levels," he remarked. "Of these the secondary facilities constitute the greatest snag by reason of the fact that the Government is not contributing towards the provision of so many very urgently needed buildings. The recent concessions by way of a grant on the loan charges is nothing more than a token and will not help to solve the problem in the slightest. The plain fact of the matter . . . and one that will have to be stressed over and over again because it is not fully realised by the public is that the building of secondary schools has been financed almost entirely by voluntary subscription from the religious orders and the parents.

Increases

THE following chart shows the position in detail:

| | 1942-43 | 1962-63 |
|--|---------|---------|
| C.B.S. Sexton Street | 499 | 728 |
| Crescent College | 131 | 288 |
| High School (girls) | 45 | — |
| Laurel Hill Convent | 253 | 364 |
| Mungret College | 142 | 206 |
| Redemptorist College | 63 | 106 |
| St. Munchin's College | 103 | 295 |
| Villiers' School | 69 | 127 |
| Ard Scoil Muire | — | 358 |
| Mean Scoil Maria Auxiliatrix | — | 140 |
| Scoil na Coroineach Muire | — | 147 |
| Scoil Carmel | — | 161 |

At the end of this year, there will be a further increase in the numbers of boys and girls attending our secondary schools and still the demand for accommodation remains unsatisfied.

Private concern

STRANGE as it may seem while the secondary schools of Ireland cannot get a grant to build new schools or extend the old ones, hotels, swimming pools, roads, bridges, factories, in fact, almost everything you can name can be built with the aid of a Government grant. The secondary school is looked upon as a private concern, it is hard to see it producing large financial dividends. The truth of the matter is that even with the Capitation Grants, the fees and the fact that the Department of Education pays the teachers' salaries, our secondary schools are barely making ends meet and have no hope of building without Government aid.

Of course, it has been said before and it may well be said again any project that is likely to produce pounds, shillings and pence will get preference to that which can enrich the brain-power of the country which is, in fact, the basis of the nation's true wealth. The Manager of one of our secondary schools in Limerick told me that the onus was very much on the management and it was excessive in the extreme. It was absolutely true to say that there would be hundreds of boys unable to gain a secondary education this coming year and for many years to come. This would be serious for many of them and especially for those who might wish to avail of the apprenticeship schemes which require an Inter-Cert. standard. Unless there would be an immediate review of the situation in general by the Department of Education, there would be little or no prospects of overcoming the problem.

Greatest snag

WHAT is the solution? This is the question I put to many of those faced with the problem and all were unanimous in pointing out that if there was to be any worthwhile increase in the accommodation available in their secondary schools, they would need State grants to enable them to build . . . More and more buildings were needed, not just in Limerick but throughout the country as a whole.

Discussing the matter with Mr. Tom O'Donnell, T.D., a former Secondary Teacher, he made it quite clear that one of the greatest problems facing this country at present was the lack of adequate educational facilities at all levels. "Perhaps, the most serious deficiency is in the

Better aid needed

"IN this year of 1964, it is ridiculous to find that our secondary schools have still to be provided and financed through raffles, sweeps, jumble sales, concerts and so forth. It is quite obvious that if we are to put our secondary school facilities into line with other European nations that much more generous and realistic aid will be given to these schools . . . and without delay."

Mr. O'Donnell further stated that if we are to survive as a nation, if and when we become members of the E.E.C., we must, as a matter of primary importance, take very definite steps to bring our educational facilities into line with those of the nations with which we will have to compete. "Never before in the history of this State has education assumed such great importance and I hope that it will be given its due recognition and appropriate assistance before it is too late.

Good investment

"VERY important studies have been undertaken into the economics of investment in education and it has been proved most conclusively that any such investment and particularly in developing countries, yielded dividends above and beyond any other form of investment." Mr. O'Donnell recently attended an International Conference of Scientists and Parliamentarians from all the O.E.C.D. countries which was held in Vienna. This dealt mainly with the science but the key role of education in the promotion and advancement of scientific subjects was also fully emphasised.

"While adequate assistance to the provision of primary, secondary, technical and university buildings and facilities must be provided to-day before to-morrow, we cannot overlook yet another important factor in our educational system—the teachers. We must ensure that not alone that we have adequate numbers of teachers but we must endeavour by all means possible to attract the best brains to the teaching profession . . . and in order to do that we must be prepared to pay them adequately and thus prevent the present brain-drain to industry and commerce."

Indeed, the view expressed by Mr. O'Donnell sums up the situation as we found it. The matter is certainly one for urgent consideration by Dail Eireann.

Educational facilities In Limerick (Two)

[By TOM TOBIN]

appropriately, the Secondary School in Ireland has been called the Cinderella of our educational facilities. It is easy to understand why when it is pointed out that apart from a Capitation Grant of £16 paid in each senior pupil, £11 for pupils not less than 12 years of age and £8 for those under 12 years (all of whom must attend school for at least 130 days in the year) the Government offers no assistance towards the building of our secondary schools. To say that an effort is to be made to offer some help at this late stage but in the opinion of those connected with the running of these schools, it is entirely inadequate. The helping hand of the Government will take the form of a grant of 60% of the charges on any loan the school raises for the purpose of erecting new buildings and expanding the existing ones . . . And this applies to schools with an enrolment of not less than 150 students. In other instances the school authorities wishing to expand to cater for the increasing demand for secondary education will have to find the full cost of the building through their own means are available—a major task for any school in this age of soaring costs. The Government's accepted policy to borrow the money in the form of a loan and to hope to pay it back through the revenue gained from the Capitation Grant aided by the usual means appeals to the general public, raffles, jumble sales, and the latest reliable—Bingo. The Department of Education will tell you that they have been in agreeing to pay off the loan charges to the school at 60%. Certainly, it is a help on its face value but do not forget that this Department will demand from the school concerned that the new building be vested in the Department for Education until such time as the debt is cleared. . . And just for the record, if a school avails of this concession, it will suffer a reduction in its Capitation Grant of from five to ten per cent.

change

ess, it must be added that the Minister also proposes to increase the Capitation Grant but from what has been given to understand there will be an important proviso attached. This will mean, in effect, that to qualify, the school must be in operation for a certain number of years. This extension of the school year could cost the authorities concerned far more than they would gain from this applies in particular to the boarding schools. The extension would cost one of our well known boarding schools over £1,000 a week . . . and the increase in the Capitation Grant would fall very much below that figure. However, let us take a closer look at the position of the Secondary School and in particular where Limerick is concerned. At the end of the school-year 1962-63,

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