

Among the secondary schools there was a wider revision. The program, and therefore the student body, was divided into units -- Junior and Senior -- rather than years. State aid was administered through a capitation grant (on the basis of the number of pupils enrolled and eligible) rather than on a results grant.

Eligibility of the pupil was based on failure or success in an examination given before enrollment. (This capitation grant is still based on the pupil's passing of the Primary Certification Test or an acceptable equivalent.) A bonus was awarded to all Irish language schools.

For teachers, a salary scale with annual increments was introduced, and each school was required to employ a number of registered teachers in proportion to the number of pupils enrolled.

Primary Level

At the present time, all national (primary) schools are managed by local managers, in most instances the parish priest. It is still the local area's responsibility to maintain the school, or, if a new building is to be erected, to provide part of the necessary capital. (The remainder is supplied by the Department.)

In 1961-62, there were 500,794 pupils attending the national schools. In urban areas, classrooms are extremely crowded; there are often 60 children per room. In country areas, the teacher-pupil ratio is not so unsatisfactory, but the demands on the individual teachers are often impossible. Those 60 children in a Dublin classroom are at least all at the same level. In a one-teacher school - the number of teachers is determined by the number of pupils, roughly one trained teacher for every 25 pupils - an ordinary human with two years of training may be required to teach eight levels. The manager appoints his teachers, subject to Department approval; teachers are paid entirely by the Department.

The children range in age from 4 to 14, the school-leaving age set by law. The infant grades are from 4 to 7, primary from 7 to 9, and the "grammar" grades from 9 to 14. In sixth standard, the pupil may take the Primary School Certificate Examination, necessary for entry to secondary school (mainly because government grants to secondary schools are awarded on the number of students who have the Primary Certificate). This examination is given in only three subjects: Irish, English and Arithmetic. This fact leads, in the last year or two of primary schooling, to an emphasis on these three areas. The passing mark in each subject is 40, with one exception: Gaeltacht students who receive 30 in English have passed.

The training of teachers is conducted in three institutions. Girls may attend two (in Limerick and Blackrock) run by the Sisters of Mercy; boys may go on to St. Patrick's in Dublin. Minimum requirement for entry is the achievement of honors in two subjects of the Leaving Certificate Examination. Practically, entry is much more difficult; over a two year period, the total accommodation for all three schools is 742. Competition is intense, because some places are reserved for students who have attended special preparatory schools.

Teacher candidates study for two years, in a concentrated program, all the subjects they will be called upon to teach -- and I often wonder if those subjects are only studied at the level at which they will be taught.

One of the problems in the primary field at the moment is the distribution of pupils. Many country schools have "averages" (number of pupils needed to employ a teacher) which are dropping, whereas the urban areas are becoming crowded. The erection of a large school to accommodate pupils from several parishes seems plausible, and bus transportation would be an improvement for those who now walk several miles. In the past decade, however, a building program which seems to be based on only immediate needs has been carried out. In 1961-62 grants were approved for the erection of 104 new schools, many of which will probably be obsolete by 1981.