The curriculum has also received severe criticism. One of the most enlightening articles on this subject was "Primary Education in Context of United Europe," by Michael Jordan.* Mr. Jordan indicates that in comparison with European schools, Irish schools do little to relate the schoolboy to his environment or to provoke his curiosity about it through such subjects as geography, natural science or art. (The criticism of an --invited-- Scandinavian board of design expert that Irish children are among the most visually handicapped because of their limited exposure to artistic form and color is well known.) Mr. Jordan doesn't directly plunge into the language problem, but he does point out that a confusion of aims -- the attempt to teach written and oral fluency, aural and reading comprehension -- is quite inefficient.

Comprehensive Schools

Within the past decade, undoubtedly the most significant happening in the field was a proposal for comprehensive schools. Two years ago, the then Minister for Education, Dr. P. J. Hillery, announced a plan for structural reform of post-primary education. It was intended to counteract two great weaknesses in the present set-up: the absence in many areas of any secondary and/or vocational school, and the lack of relationship between secondary and vocational education.

The first lack, I'm sure, needs little substantiation: my cousins in Kilkenny -- those who could afford it -- boarded in the city, fourteen miles away, because there was no secondary school nearer, and no suitable bus service. They could, of course, have gone to a technical school only four miles away, for a year or two: only practical if they were going to "stay at home" afterwards. My cousins in Sligo cycle six miles (no bus), leaving home at eight and getting back about five-thirty; Saturday is half-day, so they are home a little earlier. One of my students in the West travelled eighteen miles, three by bicycle and the rest by bus. And many had to remain in town until seven every evening; the only afternoon bus left at that time.

The second defect, the absolute division of post-primary pupils into the two streams of secondary and vocational, is more serious. The student who is sent to secondary school by comparatively prosperous and hopeful parents may find that he has little aptitude for the more academic subjects; if he changes the nature of his education, there is no way in which he can gain recognition of the training he has already received. A child who chooses vocational can change to secondary, losing all and any credit: there is minimum similarity between subjects and between course content. The child who, at thirteen or fourteen, chooses a technical training, may regret it later; in this country he would have the opportunity to obtain an equivalent of an academic education -- in Ireland there is no such formal training available.

Even the choice of secondary or vocational school is peculiarly influenced. Within the system there is no provision for the administration of IQ or aptitude tests, or any professional guidance which might enlighten parents and guide the child. A national teacher may, of course, undertake the encouragement or preparation of an especially apt pupil,** but students should not have to depend

* The European Teacher, 3, 2, pp. 8-14

** In the fall of 1964, two national teachers in separate parts of northern Donegal were criticized for the many extra hours spent with bright pupils preparing for scholarship exams. They refused to alter their practice and were subsequently suspended by the INTO. Argument ranged on both sides: those defending the teachers, sentimental and individualistic; those favoring the INTO, more professional. My point is that the national schools should have been guided by a recommendation, or that the Department should have provided the machinery for such a program.