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CABINET

VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS: INCREASED AIDMemorandum by the Minister of Education*"Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" (Virgil, Aeneid I, 11)*Introduction

In the White Paper on Secondary Education, Cmnd. 604, we undertook to consider the possibility of giving more help to the churches. I have now had talks with representatives of the churches and other interests concerned as well as with leaders of the Opposition and I should like to tell my colleagues what I think we should do next.

2. It will be remembered that the Church of England have asked that the existing grants should be increased from their present maximum of 50 per cent to 75 per cent and that in addition the Roman Catholics (and the Jews) have asked that grant should be paid on new schools needed to extend their school systems. The Roman Catholics are oppressed by the size of their financial burden which is likely to be increased by the growth of their school population. They expect the number of Roman Catholic children of school age to increase from 865,000 to over 1,200,000 by 1970.

Increase in the rate of grant

3. It is generally accepted that some increase in the rate of grant is inevitable, though some sections of educational opinion consider that an increase to 75 per cent would be excessive.

4. There is no doubt, however, that the churches would not be able to meet even their existing commitments without a substantial increase in the existing grants and our proposals for the development of secondary education will be seriously impeded if we do not give it to them. The Free Churches have told me that, though for reasons of principle they cannot support, they would not violently oppose the Church of England's request and it would, I think, be a difficult operation politically for front bench spokesmen on either side of the House, once the principle of an increase has been accepted, to justify to back bench supporters of the church schools a decision to increase the grant to say 65 per cent but not to 75 per cent.

5. In all the circumstances, I propose that the maximum rate of grant on work at present eligible for grant should be increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. I estimate that this would cost the Exchequer on the average about £1.25 millions a year for the next twenty years.

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The extension of grant

6. When my colleagues last considered the matter they were agreed that it was out of the question to pay grant on all new schools but that I might explore the possibility of extending grant to the provision of new secondary schools needed to match aided primary schools of the same denomination which exist at present. On the basis of a 75 per cent grant, the extra cost of this would average about £650,000 a year for twenty years.

7. The Church of England, who have openly rejected any idea of asking for grant for new schools, because it would be a substantial change in the settlement of 1944, are uneasy about this proposal. The Free Churches also are opposed to it, partly for reasons of principle but, more fundamentally, because they are fearful of the growing number and influence of the adherents of the Church of Rome and of the long-term consequences for our way of life which they apprehend from that growth.

8. At the same time this proposal, which is conceived in the spirit of the Education Act, 1936, would not involve any serious change in the settlement of 1944 and it has definite educational advantages, not the least of which is that it would enable me to pay grant on the provision of new Roman Catholic grammar and technical schools. This is particularly important in the context of our proposals for developing secondary education. The educational organisations are not unanimous but some of them recognise the advantages of this proposal. The Church of England might, I believe, be persuaded to see the unwisdom of appearing to stand in the way of educational progress and it is possible that the opposition of the Free Churches could at least be contained.

9. The Roman Catholics, too, acknowledge that this proposal would be a real help to them. It is, of course, very far from meeting their full demands which they will, therefore, renew sooner or later, especially for help with the provision of new primary schools in new towns and other developing areas. But in my judgment a future Minister of Education will be better able to deal with their demands if we have put the Roman Catholics in a position where they will be able to play their part in the educational advance which we are now making. If we do not, I think that there is a serious risk that their secondary schools will lag badly behind.

Conclusion

10. Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to agree that we should give more help to the churches and that this help should take the form of an increase in the rate of grant to 75 per cent and of a limited extension of grant to certain new secondary schools. I should propose then to have a further round of talks with representatives of the churches and to report again to my colleagues when I have done so.

G.L.

Ministry of Education, W.1.

6th February, 1959