

As recommended by the 1944 Education Conference, I gave approval for the appointment to the Department of a Supervisor of Pre-school Services. Already her work is making possible the development of a more definite policy of pre-school educational services.

The number of kindergarten trainees was increased from 80 in 1945 to 100 in 1946, and the total grants to kindergartens were increased from £26,907 to £31,275. For the first time a grant was approved for the New Zealand Federation of Play Centres Associations.

Vocational Guidance

With the return of more normal conditions the Vocational Guidance Centres have been able to shed some of the special responsibilities connected with juvenile employment which they undertook as a war measure. The volume of work arising from the rehabilitation of servicemen and servicewomen from the Services has also declined during the year. It has therefore become possible for Vocational Guidance officers to concentrate on their primary function of guidance in post-primary schools, and, despite serious shortages of staff considerable progress has been made.

A special effort has been made to extend vocational guidance facilities for Maori boys and girls, and plans have been laid for further development in this direction in 1947. In response to local demand, a new vocational guidance centre was opened at Wanganui, which had previously been served from Wellington. At the request of the Health Department, work has been begun on an experimental basis with patients in certain of the main sanatoria.

Two booklets, "Careers for Boys" and "Careers for Girls," were published, giving in summarized form educational and vocational information of value to pupils, parents, and teachers. They have been distributed free to all post-primary schools.

Child Welfare

My last two reports recorded substantial decreases in the figures for children appearing for offences before the Children's Courts, and it is gratifying to note that this downward trend has been maintained during the past year. Indeed, the figures for juvenile delinquency have now dropped to a point considerably below the pre-war level. The numbers of appearances before Children's Courts for the years ending on the 31st March preceding and immediately following the outbreak of war were: 1938, 2,447; 1939, 2,248; 1940, 2,464. The peak figure of 2,493 occurred in 1944, and since then the comparable figures have been: 1945, 2,012; 1946, 1,786; and 1947, 1,568. This represents progressive decreases of 19, 11, and 12 per cent. respectively. A slightly greater percentage decrease is noted in the number of children appearing for more serious offences. The figures for these over the past four years are 1,614, 1,402, 1,243, and 1,086. The total number of children under the control and supervision of the Branch declined last year from 8,048 to 7,525.

The falling birth-rate up to the year 1935 may, of course, account for some of the gross decrease in juvenile delinquency figures during the last three years, but since the total drop in the number of births between 1928 and 1935 was less than 12 per cent., this cannot be a major factor. The return of fathers from war service must also have had some influence. One hesitates to make specific claims in a complex social situation, but I cannot feel it to be a mere coincidence that such a substantial drop in the figures followed immediately on the intensified drive made by the Child Welfare Branch in its preventive work. With new child welfare districts established and with the staffing built up to 105 field officers, generously assisted by some 230 honorary officers, it has been possible for the Branch to concentrate more effectively on the preventive work which it has for many years claimed to be its main function.