

PUBLIC-SCHOOL BUILDINGS.

During the year ending 31st December, 1917, applications were received by the Department from Education Boards for grants for new public-school buildings, additions, residences, sites, &c., to a total amount of £116,000. This is apart from schools established in buildings for which no grant is made except by way of rent. The departmental expenditure for the year was £50,000, and at the end of the year the commitments totalled £68,000. More than forty new schools of varying sizes were erected, and upwards of fifty were enlarged. A considerable number of works for which grants had been authorized were delayed owing to the difficulty of procuring the necessary labour and, in some cases, the necessary materials. The accumulation consequent on deferred action must necessitate a much increased expenditure when the restricting conditions are removed.

With each application for a grant the Board is required to submit plans of the proposed building, and such other information as will enable the Department to arrive at a decision regarding the necessities of the case, and also that it may scrutinize in more or less detail the contemplated accommodation. This course has been found desirable, and indeed necessary, to ensure that the erection of the building is warranted, and that it is designed in accordance with modern and accepted principles of school-construction, and also—what is of considerable importance having regard to the judicious expenditure of public moneys—that it can be economically enlarged when the necessity arises.

With respect to the accommodation regarded necessary in reasonably comparable cases, very divergent views are held by the several Boards, and the amounts applied for, particularly with respect to small schools, differ very substantially. Leaving out of consideration the cost of the site, fencing, clearing, sanitary provision, &c., which must obviously vary widely according to circumstances, it has been found that where one Board has applied for £186 for a building to accommodate a small number of pupils, another Board has applied for £490. Again, for the accommodation of a somewhat larger number of pupils one Board has applied for £295, another for £380, and another for £528. These differences are not to be accounted for by the remoteness of the school affecting the cost of materials, or other special conditions, but by the very divergent views held by those responsible as to the character of the accommodation required to meet the case.

In connection with larger buildings the amounts applied for vary also according to the views held by a Board or its architect with respect to the accessory accommodation—*i.e.*, space allotted for cloaks, corridors, teachers' rooms, &c. Thus, taking 12 square feet of class-room space per pupil as determining the accommodation in a new school, it is found that with respect to five schools proposed in brick recently, each in a different district, the cost of the building alone (without furniture, out-offices, &c.) worked out at, per unit of accommodation, £16, £17, £17, £22, and one went as high as £35. In the last-mentioned case a large shelter-shed was provided for under the main roof in space that should have been utilized for class accommodation, and a hall of 2,000 square feet was proposed. The school would have been extended later and the cost per unit of accommodation consequently reduced, yet, after all due allowance is made for this, the proposals must be considered altogether too extravagant. It is therefore obvious that the Department must exercise a very close scrutiny over the applications that come before it, as the responsibility for the expenditure falls not upon the Boards, but upon the State. What has been stated above clearly indicates also that the question of standardizing schools is one that should receive immediate attention.

As was pointed out last year, many older schools are undoubtedly defective in important features such as shape, size, ventilation, lighting, &c. This is due in some measure to the higher standards that now exist with respect to these important matters, and also, in some measure, to the striking advance made within recent years in the accepted standards in methods of instruction, seating-provision, classification, and staffing. Buildings comparatively quite sound structurally have become unsuitable for modern requirements, and the cost of remodelling them would be very considerable. Indeed, so rapid is the progress of hygienic and educational development that it is a question whether school buildings outside the large centres should not be erected in the cheapest way compatible with comfort and stability instead of in brick or concrete, which are now much favoured, but do not admit of economical remodelling. On the other hand, the cost of maintenance of a brick or concrete building is considerably less than that of a wooden one, and consequently, where the initial cost of the more durable building does not