

MISS CHRISTISON

Miss Christison thanked delegates for the warmth of their welcome and said that it was always a very great pleasure to attend conference to address them. The first time she had addressed conference in New Plymouth she had been told that she would never have a friendlier audience and each year as she addressed subsequent audiences she had felt more and more at home.

She wished to make it quite clear that she had not seen the remits presented at conference. She had made a deliberate point of not looking at them. It might be that their decisions and hers were not the same, but she assured them she was not speaking to any of their remits. She was speaking of things that were the concern of associations, committee members and staff.

Miss Christison said she wished to speak firstly about donations and the use of the word 'free'. There were those who would say that the use of the word 'free' had nothing to do with money, that it simply meant that kindergarten might be attended by any child regardless of race, colour or creed. This was just not true. The use of the word 'free' simply meant that under Regulation 14 "No fee shall be payable in respect of the attendance of any child at a kindergarten."

Of course it took money to run a kindergarten and associations relied very heavily on donations from parents. Parents could be expected to give something towards the cost of running their kindergartens in cash or in kind, but donations from parents were rather like a church collection, if nothing were put into the church collection the church doors were not closed to anyone.

When parents asked how much they were required to give, what should they be told? They could be given a guide, but that was all. They must not be made to feel that this sum of money was expected from all parents regardless. This was a real problem, a very real problem for parents who did want to help. It was a problem for the teacher who wanted to help and for committees and associations. The only way she could think of to solve the problem was for Union representatives and departmental representatives to draft out a skeleton letter to parents, a letter acceptable to associations and the Department. Miss Christison said she would be very happy to meet members of the Executive to draft out a model letter, but she must stress that 'Free Kindergarten' meant what it said -- NO FEE WAS CHARGED.

Miss Christison said she would like to speak about pilot schemes.

Some three or four years ago the Union first put a scheme to the Department designed to enable additional children to be taken into kindergartens. It had been suggested that the scheme would apply to several kindergartens. There was a feeling that this was a breach of contract since at that time the pilot schemes were a different type of service from that normally offered.

Since the introduction of the pilot schemes the Department had received quite a number of letters from other associations asking that they be included in the schemes and suggestions from other associations for different schemes had also been received.

The first point she wished to make was were they concerned with the children who are needing pre-school experience? There were still two-thirds who do not receive any pre-school experience and thousands of parents who wanted their children to have pre-school education, but they must be equally concerned with the children who were inside the kindergartens.

Miss Christison said that pilot schemes were not new and gave information on schemes which were in operation about ten years ago.

These were evaluated and finally discontinued. She said that the Department's mind was not closed to change and other schemes had been and still could be introduced. The point she wished to make was -- do not change a scheme in the middle of the experiment because then it could not be evaluated. The Department was not accepting any new schemes until the present ones were fully evaluated in order to see the effects upon the children. Evaluation will take place this term for those that have been running for two years by associations, staff and Pre-school Advisers. When evaluated, schemes will be discussed with the Union, with the associations concerned and it will then be decided whether to continue them, to modify them, to extend them or to discontinue them altogether.

Miss Christison said that she may not be able to visit all associations operating schemes this term and she advised them to carry on as at present until discussions can be held, BUT if there are staff changes or difficulties, the Department should be contacted immediately.

Schemes should not be pushed onto staff. No scheme could hope to work where staff was reluctant to operate it.

Under the new weekly schedule the number of hours had not changed. It was only the number of sessions. People who visited kindergartens on a nation-wide basis were asked the question, was 2½ hours too long, was it the staff or the children who tire? All felt that the time was not too long for either staff or children if the programme was sufficiently varied.

To the point that teachers were doing extra work and not being paid for it, Miss Christison said that they were professional people who were paid for the job and not for the number of hours.

Time for banking of children's donations and shopping was not included in the weekly schedule.

Miss Christison spoke of staff shortages. The Department's aim was to start every year with every kindergarten fully staffed, but there were many factors which could influence the staffing situation in any one year. All this involved some working out of trends and some inspired 'guesstimates'.

The following figures were supplied:

	<u>Positions</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
1966	511	517
1967	532	519
1968	561	549
1969	588	579
1970	612	602
At present	623	601

There are 142 students to complete their training at the end of 1970. 22 will be required for replacement of untrained teachers now being employed, 40 will be required to fill positions in new kindergartens in the course of construction and the remainder will be available for vacancies which occur from the present time to February 1971.

In December 1965, when there were 245 kindergartens, 153 had Maori children on the roll, 660 Maori children out of a total roll of 19,000 attending kindergartens. In December 1969, out of 304 kindergartens, 241 had Maori children on the roll, a total of 1472 out of a complete total of 24,000.

The next item discussed was the position re students and recruitment. There had been requests that the minimum qualifications be upgraded. The Department set minimum standards but associations, if they wished, could raise these standards. If a girl was to have the necessary stickability, academic qualifications were absolutely vital, but academic qualifications were not the 'be all' and 'end all' of what a girl needed to become a kindergarten teacher. They must be the kind of person parents would like to have in charge of their children. Other things to be looked for were maturity and perseverance.

Miss Christison said that they were going to have a training service second to none and that any changes would be only an improvement in the benefits to children.