

posed under the Bill will be sufficient in number and annual value to enable a reasonable proportion of deserving school-pupils to be advanced from the primary to the secondary schools, and from the secondary schools to the university. Provision will also be made on the estimates for erection of buildings, &c. The age at which our children leave the primary school, and the age at which they are qualified to enter a university, leaves an interval of at least three years, which should be bridged, and which our present secondary-school system as administered does not provide for.

Owing to the spread of settlement in the North Island, and the necessity for increased school-accommodation in districts in the South Island where land has been acquired under the Land for Settlements Act, and the increased number of schools required in the Native districts, it has been found necessary to make provision for supplementing the amount hitherto granted for school-buildings. The grants have usually been about £50,000 per annum, but this year I am of opinion our requirements will reach at least £75,000. I therefore propose to ask for authority to raise a further sum of £25,000 for the purpose of grants in aid of school-buildings.

In order that our people may maintain their position as manufacturers and agriculturists, and that the industrial classes may be specially benefited and fitted to undertake scientific, mechanical, and mining pursuits, it is of national importance that technical education should be placed upon a more satisfactory footing. From the experience of the last two years we are able to discover wherein the Act of 1895 requires amending and enlarging. The House will be asked to pass a Bill approving of greater encouragement being given to the technical schools throughout the colony, and providing for the establishment of new schools; continuation classes will be recognised as part of the system, and secondary schools will be encouraged to work under the same Act. Power will also be given for local authorities to assist in the establishment and maintenance of technical schools, as is being done at the present time in England. It would not be fair, however, if I did not recognise how much valuable work has been done, and is being done, under the present order of things. At Wellington, Auckland, Wanganui, and Dunedin the schools have trained a very large number of pupils, whose work has been tested by examinations held upon papers supplied by the Science and Art Department, South Kensington, and the City Guilds of the London Institute. In all, certificates showing 615 passes were obtained by candidates from these different schools in the year 1896. All the assistance in the power of the Science and Art Department of South Kensington in this work is cheerfully afforded. Under the provisions of "The Manual and Technical Instruction Act, 1895," it is estimated that the average attendance at classes numbered 2,690; but the amount of technical instruction given in the colony is not confined to that given under the Act. Our schools of mines, the students of which numbered 229 in the year 1896, afford a most valuable technical education for specific objects. The Department of Agriculture is also assisting technical education by the instruction given at the agricultural experimental stations, fruit-farms, and dairy schools. The Canterbury Agricultural College had 43 students in 1896, and a school of engineering and technical science—a department of Canterbury College—had 87. I trust, however, that the further proposals to be submitted to the House this year will result in greater advances being made in this necessary branch, and that it will take a more important place in the whole of our education system. At all events, Government feel that the principal drawback in the past which has operated detrimentally to the establishment of technical schools in the colony has been the absence of funds sufficient to provide and equip the necessary buildings. The House will be invited to make provision for this purpose to the extent of £25,000.

CONFERENCE OF PREMIERS AT HOBART.

Honourable members will no doubt expect that reference will be made in this Statement to the Conferences held at Hobart and London, and to the