

tion with which action had necessarily been deferred as a war measure, but also for the adoption of a general scheme of reconstruction of such of the older schools as, gauged by modern standards, are defective in essential features. Such a comprehensive school-building programme was rendered possible by the passing of the Education Purposes Loans Act, 1919, which empowered the Minister of Finance to borrow during four years moneys to the amount of £3,500,000 for the purpose of the erection, structural alteration, and improvement of educational buildings and for the acquisition of the necessary sites. This with £450,000 additional available from unexpended appropriations on the Public Works Fund authorizes the provision of a total of approximately £4,000,000 for all classes of educational buildings and sites.

The large sum thus made available for the erection of educational buildings has resulted in a very great increase in the amounts applied for by the several Education Boards for buildings and sites, while the grants authorized have increased correspondingly. During the last six financial years the amounts authorized for public schools alone were—1914–15, £54,895 ; 1915–16, £34,412 ; 1916–17, £36,973 ; 1917–18, £66,750 ; 1918–19, £124,162 ; 1919–20, £319,225.

The increased cost in the erection of school buildings is a very serious problem with which the Department is faced, for schools are now costing at least twice as much as they did under pre-war conditions. Education Boards, particularly in the North Island, are moreover experiencing the greatest difficulty in carrying out authorized works. Sometimes no tenders at all are received in response to advertisements, sometimes only one or two are received. Almost invariably the Department is asked to approve additional grants—often for substantial sums, representing a very large percentage of increase on the estimated cost. Prices are still rising, and though little rebuilding or remodelling has so far been undertaken, except in connection with schools where increased accommodation is necessary, the large sums that are being even now spent on school buildings are undoubtedly tending to inflate building-prices, particularly in districts where the school population is rapidly increasing. It is indeed a matter of great concern whether the State is getting the best value for the expenditure at the present time, and it may be temporarily found necessary to impose restrictions with respect to the accommodation that is to be regarded as absolutely essential.

As indicated above, a comprehensive scheme of rebuilding and remodelling older schools has not yet been undertaken. Education Boards have been requested to submit schedules of their proposals in the order of their urgency ; but as these have been received by the Department in one or two cases only, grants cannot be allocated with due regard to the necessities of the cases within any district and also to the relative needs of one district as compared with those of another.

ROLL NUMBER.

(Tables B1 and B2.)

The number of children in attendance at public schools in 1919, as shown by the mean of the average weekly roll for the four quarters of the year, was 193,655, which exceeds the figure for the previous year by 1·2 per cent. The following figures give in detail the average weekly roll and the roll number at the end of 1919 :—

	Mean of Average Weekly Roll.		Roll Number at end of Year.	
	Including Second-ary Departments of District High Schools.	Excluding Second-ary Departments of District High Schools.	Including Second-ary Departments of District High Schools.	Excluding Second-ary Departments of District High Schools.
Year 1919	193,655	191,153	196,059	193,900
Year 1918	191,382	188,932	194,934	192,680
Increase in 1919 ..	2,273	2,221	1,125	1,220
Increase per cent. in 1919	1·2	1·2	0·6	0·6

The percentage increase in the average weekly roll has been declining during recent years, the figures for the last six years being as follows : 1914, 3·6 per cent. ; 1915, 3·2 per cent. ; 1916, 1·6 per cent. ; 1917, 2·1 per cent. ; 1918, 1·8 per cent. ; 1919, 1·2 per cent. It is in the schools of the South Island that the falling-off in the increase is most marked, the percentage increase in 1919 being only 0·6, while in the North Island (including Marlborough) the figure was 1·6. The falling-off in the