

2,000 parents still fail to send children to school

THERE are still 2,000 parents who fail to send their children, between six and 12 years of age, to schools although primary education was made compulsory and free four years ago.

However none of these parents was being prosecuted under the Education Ordinance 1971, because the Education Department is having difficulty finding them.

by
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This was disclosed by the assistant director of education (primary), Mr Lam Tat-lau when he admitted that lack of manpower stops the department enforcing its power in this aspect to the fullest extent. There are only 60 people in his staff sector to work for the estimated 690,000 primary school students.

"We hope the public will tell us if they know of any family whose children, of the age group, are still not in

schools," he said.

As attendance at primary schools became compulsory from September 1971, both the Education and the Social Welfare departments have acted on 696 cases of non-attendance.

Of these, 370 children have resumed schooling or transferred to other schools after their parents were contacted by the Education officers and welfare department caseworkers. Another 55 children resumed schooling after they were given assistance by the two departments.

However, the two departments failed to find the 183 children who were untraceable because of their removals, and similarly no help could be given to 40 children who were over the compulsory school age by the time they were located.

As to the remaining 48 cases still under investigation, the welfare department is processing public assistance to these families so that parents would not have to withhold their children from school on grounds of financial hardship.

According to Mr Lam, the large number of turnovers or drop-outs is at primary 4 to 6 years, with figures reaching some 5,000.

"I agree that most of these children, probably around 10 to 12 years old, are forced to stay behind at home and help their parents because of financial difficulties. Similarly, some of them may not be able to catch upon their school work and so decide to quit," he said.

Touching on the estimated 4,000 drop-outs at primary one and two level, Mr Lam argued that the majority of them must have transferred to other private schools or repeated themselves because these children are too small to contribute their effort to their homes.

"It's no use to keep them at home because the Government finances all their education, textbooks and stationeries," he said.

To remedy the situation, Mr Lam said that the department is paying great attention on the activity approach teaching method to arouse the interest of the students in their learning.

"The pilot scheme will be completed in 1978, and by then we hope that it can be fully enforced in all primary schools," he said.

He also agreed that with the possible abolition of the Secondary School Entrance Examination by 1979, both teachers and principals will be more willing to accept this method without the burden of examination.