

Henry Mon Standard 27 Feb 1986, 1978

# Two views of the Government's White Paper on Education

# AT LAST OUR LEADERS ARE STARTING TO LEAD

THE Government is generally to be congratulated on its White Paper, The Development of Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education. It indicates that the Government is at last providing leadership in the development of education instead of reluctantly making concessions to educational opinion. The proposals in general represent a great improvement on those contained in the Green Paper of last November and show that the comments made on that paper have been carefully studied.

The White Paper acknowledges that the shortage of senior secondary (post-Form Three) places led to severe competition for secondary school places in the public sector, which has exerted an unhealthy influence on primary school teaching." It implies that a similar shortage of senior

secondary places would exert an unhealthy influence on junior secondary school teaching. The White Paper therefore proposes an increase in the number of subsidised full-time places at the post-Form Three level in schools and technical institutes from 22,052 last year to 59,710 in 1981-82 - that is, from 19 per cent of the 15-year-old population to 63 per cent. The number of places will increase only marginally after that, but a decrease in the 15-year-old population will bring the percentage up to 75 by 1985-86.

### PRESSURE

This increase should greatly reduce the pressure of competition and there may well be sufficient places even by 1981 for all students who wish to continue and are suitable to do so. There should certainly be enough by 1985. For those who are forced to discontinue full-time study in order to earn a living, there will be

opportunities to take part-time courses in adult education centres and technical institutes which, together, will cater for a further 12 per cent of the 15-year-olds by 1981-82 and a further 19 per cent by 1985-86. We are at last breaking away from the idea that education is only for the clever and realising that it should be made available for all who can learn and wish to do so. I am pleased also that some attention is being paid to the educational needs of the disabled.

The White Paper speaks of those who are "suitable" for further education, but suitability should not be assessed solely by examinations. Good examination results are often achieved by narrow blinkered study; other qualities and abilities should be taken into account in assessing whether or not a boy or girl is suitable for a particular course of study or career. The assessment of suitability should therefore be based not only on those abilities which are tested by

### ABOLISH

Though I do not object to the proposed raising of school fees if that means more school places, I would prefer fees to be abolished as soon as possible. Education does not benefit the individual alone but the community, and I feel the community should bear the cost. In any case, even if no fees are paid the education is not free because there are

examinations but also on the school's wider knowledge of the student. Careers guidance should play an important part in this. An effective programme of careers guidance might also help students into the technical institutes and the technical streams of our schools, overcoming the mistaken idea that technical education is for the less intelligent. In this connection it is encouraging to read of plans for a number of senior secondary streams to be started in pre-vocational schools.

considerable expenses for books, paper and so on. As long as there are insufficient places in the Government and aided schools I think we shall have to put up with floating classes, but the number of these should be reduced as soon as possible. A couple of such classes is bearable but six floating classes in a school is too many and, despite the statement in the White Paper, does interfere with the quality of education.

The decision to raise to fully-aided status those private non-profit-making schools which are suitable and willing and to establish all new schools on a fully-aided basis, will help to improve the quality of education in those schools. I support also the suggestion that some of the better private independent schools may also be included within the scheme of public-sector support, provided that they adopt non-profit-making status. At the same time, I welcome the decision to stop the buying of junior secondary places in private independent schools which do not have good facilities and standards.



by Arthur Hinton Lecturer, School of Education, Chinese University

### QUALITY

Other factors in improving the quality of education are a recognition of improvements in the training of teachers, reduction of class size, curriculum development, expansion of the advisory inspectorate and the use of a language which the students understand.

The White Paper, by summarising the prime functions of schools, does touch upon the aims of education. Though it does not discuss them in depth it recognises that education is not simply a means of preparing manpower for economic activities.

The quality of education depends more on the quality of the teacher than on any other factor, so the education of teachers is of paramount importance. The White Paper recognises this in that it proposes to establish a three-year course of training for students who enter the colleges of education with Certificate of Education qualifications, though unfortunately it suggests that two years is sufficient for certain students who have Advanced Level passes. I would prefer a basic three-year course for all, as proposed in the Green Paper.

## TEACHERS

The White Paper also links the promotion of graduate teachers in government and aided schools with their having received teacher education. While this is a step in the right direction, I feel that the Government, after discussion with the Universities, which provide teacher education for graduates, should declare a certain date after which all new graduates entering the teaching profession must be trained. Not to insist on teacher education is to deny teaching the status of a profession and to accept the fallacy that anyone who has a certain minimum of academic knowledge or practical skill can teach. Similarly I regret that no mention is made of any plans to phase out the giving of teaching permits to untrained non-graduates, though that affects primary and junior secondary education rather than senior secondary. The promise that the Government will introduce regular refresher courses for teachers is a welcome one; I hope that there will be a large number of such courses. With regard to teacher education in general, it is surely time that a committee on this subject was re-established,

composed of representatives of the institutions engaged in teacher education, heads of schools and teachers.

## CLASSES

As regards the number of students in each class, 40 is, as Mr Topley mentioned in a radio interview, bearable, especially in comparison with the Form Five English classes of over 55 which I have seen in the past year. But ultimately we should aim at reducing the number to 30, so I am not in sympathy with the statement that "it is important that available provision does not run ahead of demand." If provision does run ahead of demand on a basis of 40 per class, then that will give us the opportunity of reducing class size, thus improving the quality of education.

## REFORM

Continued and increased attention to curriculum reform is welcome and the plan to establish small groups of teachers, temporarily seconded from their normal teaching duties, to prepare model teaching programmes and supporting materials offers a chance of more effective progress in curriculum improvement. The proposal to provide practical rooms wherever possible and to establish central workshops should assist schools to offer some practical and technical subjects. It is encouraging also to read that particular importance will be attached to developing school libraries and the audio-visual facilities of the Visual Education Centre. I wonder, however, how much will be done. Will it be a token only or enough to make a real impact on the improvement of education?

The Advisory Inspectorate has a key role to play in improving the quality of education, but to play this role effectively it will need to be strengthened. In this process it is important that new inspectors should be recruited from among the most gifted and experienced teachers, not only from the very small number of government schools but from the whole field of schools and teachers in Hongkong. This should apply also to the recruitment of new lecturers for the colleges of education.

## ENGLISH

The quality of education is linked also with the medium of instruction. The vast majority of secondary school students are being taught in the medium of English, all too often by teachers whose command of that language is inadequate for teaching purposes. Many students fail to understand what is taught because English is used. The expansion of secondary education is making this problem more acute. The steps mentioned in the White Paper to try to improve English (and Chinese) standards and, in particular, the standard of

those who teach in English, are certainly to be encouraged, but I think the Government should use all its powers of persuasion to urge more schools to teach in Chinese. I am pleased to see that a few more government schools are to be built. I suggest that these new government schools should all use Chinese as the medium of instruction and should be given first-rate teachers of English so that they can show that an adequate standard of English can be reached without it being necessary to teach all subjects in that language. The Education Department should make efforts to ensure that its own schools are in the forefront of educational progress, trying out new curricula, experimenting with teaching methods and actively seeking improvement.

I welcome the appointment of a Committee on Sixth Form Education and hope that it will invite submissions from interested individuals and groups. The proposed three per cent annual growth of the undergraduate population of the universities is not, in my opinion, sufficient, especially in view of the expansion of senior secondary education, but I note that this figure will be reviewed. I am strongly in favour of the introduction of part-time degree courses and I am glad that the possibility of the Polytechnic offering degree courses is being considered. I also welcome the development of a common credit-unit system between the Technical Institutes and the Polytechnic which will facilitate the progress of technical students.

The offer of financial assistance and greater recognition to the approved post-secondary colleges is to be welcomed, though I would have preferred the colleges to offer four-year courses, rather than two-year courses leading to the Advanced Level or similar examination and then further two-year courses for those who remain, followed by additional one-year courses for a selected few.

## ADULTS

At long last more adequate attention is to be paid to adult education, not only by the expansion of government adult education courses but also by assistance to voluntary agencies, some of which have been doing sterling work in this field. There is a wide interest in study in Hongkong and it is right that the Government should encourage and aid this valuable use of leisure.

The White Paper offers the possibility of great improvements in post-Form Three education. Let us hope that the reports of the working parties on pre-primary and primary education and the review of the education system, to which the government has agreed, will lead to further much-needed improvements.