

Report of the Vernacular Education
Committee of the Central Advisory
Board of Education appointed to
consider certain questions connected
with the administration and control
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1. The above committee met at Simla on the 29th and 30th September, 1937 and was attended by the following members of the Vernacular Education Committee:

1. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.
2. Mr. H. Dippie, Director of Public Instruction, Orissa.
3. Mr. J. E. Parkinson, Educational Commissioner with the Government of India.

Mr. R. M. Statham, Director of Public Instruction, Madras, was unable to attend the meeting owing to illness. The Rt. Rev. G. D. Barne was also not present, being on leave out of India.

The following were co-opted:—

1. The Hon'ble Mr. B. G. Kher, Chief Minister, Government of Bombay (Chairman).
2. Mr. W. H. F. Armstrong, Director of Public Instruction, Punjab.
3. Mr. A. K. Chanda, M.L.A. (Representing the Government of Bengal).
4. Mr. R. S. Weir, Director of Public Instruction, United Provinces.
5. Mr. W. Grieve, Director of Public Instruction, Bombay.

2. The Central Advisory Board of Education at its last meeting held in December, 1936 decided that the question of the administration of primary education should be referred to the Vernacular Education Committee of the Board with the following suggestions:—

1. Whether the provincial ministries of education have sufficient powers of control or not in regard to primary education or whether these powers should be strengthened in any direction.
2. How the inspecting agency should be appointed and controlled.
3. Whether it is essential or desirable that compulsion should be introduced in order that provincial governments may be able to enforce efficiency through the grants.
4. Whether primary education should be controlled by a central board of education in each province, of which the Minister should be in charge.

3. The reports on education of the different provinces repeatedly state that there is need of more efficient administration and control of primary education.

Complaints come from all provinces of laxity in various details of administration and of frequent action on grounds other than educational. Teachers are transferred, dismissed or appointed for personal or communal reasons, increments are not granted, payment of salary is often in arrears, departmental advice is ignored, relations with the education departments and their officers are strained, local bodies are apathetic. These are complaints not applicable to all local bodies, some of which deserve commendation for the attention they pay to education and their keen interest in the schools. There is however sufficient evidence to show that generally the administration is lax in many ways.

4. We are aware that the policy of the Government of India is "to train the people in the management of their own local affairs and that political education of this sort must in the main take precedence of considerations of departmental efficiency" but there must be limits to the extent to which education can be allowed to form the training ground of our local administrators. Mistakes of one form or another are inevitable in all administrations; the value of such mistakes lies in the lessons they teach which should prevent a recurrence of these mistakes. But we have little evidence to show either that local bodies generally are developing a higher sense of civic responsibility in educational administration, or that provincial Governments exercise the powers they possess in cases of mal-administration of local education.

5. In most provinces under Local or Self-Government or similar Acts, District Boards or other statutory bodies exercise almost full control over vernacular education in their respective areas. These Acts have removed from the local Government and its officers many powers which they formerly exercised. In this connection some provinces have gone much further than others; the Bombay Government, for example, retains very few powers indeed, whilst the North-West Frontier Province indirectly retains control by nominating members to the District Boards, the Chairman of which is invariably the Deputy Commissioner.

6. Several suggestions have been made to improve the administration of primary schools. Some critics would go so far as again to place the whole control of primary education under Government. Another suggestion is the constitution of statutory bodies to deal only with education. Such bodies already exist in the United Provinces, Madras and Bengal. We have no evidence to show that these bodies are any more efficient than District Boards or sub-committees of these Boards and we do not feel that the constitution of such statutory bodies would necessarily tend to better administration. Indeed some provinces are already considering either the abolition or the reconstitution of such *ad hoc* bodies.

7. Nor do we feel that the delegation of all powers in regard to educational affairs by the District Board to the Government Inspector is the best solution. In the Punjab where such delegation of powers has been made in several instances, we have not found in such areas any greater advance in primary education compared with other areas, though causes of friction between the local body and the Government inspectorate in regard to location of schools, transfers and staffing have doubtless been removed.

8. We recommend that in each Province there should be constituted a Board of Vernacular Education consisting of not more than seven members of whom at least one should be a woman, with the Minister of Education as Chairman. The members of this Board should be appointed by the Ministry. All problems concerning vernacular education should come within the purview of this Board, though its functions will not primarily deal with the technique of teaching but with the wider questions of the expansion, control and administration of vernacular education, and with the financial aspect of these questions. It will have no statutory powers but will act in an advisory capacity.

9. We believe that an improved government inspectorate is at present necessary to improve the administration of primary education. Every district inspector should be a member of the Provincial Service. His academic and social status together with his experience would then give his advice a weight which it might not otherwise carry. Unless a special administrative officer is appointed, the Inspector should act as the administrative officer of the local body in all matters affecting vernacular education. All questions of transfer, appointment, dismissal and increments should be decided by him in consultation with the Divisional Inspector in the case of anglo-vernacular teachers. In all matters concerning women teachers, the district inspectress should have the same powers.

10. Some members of the Committee felt that an administrative officer should be appointed by Government to perform all these duties, whilst others felt that the Inspector, if a provincial service officer, should be competent to do this work and so the expense of administrative officers would be saved. This matter may be left to the Provincial authorities concerned for decision.

11. The inspectorate should be appointed by the Government. Training in methods of teaching young children and experience in primary schools are desirable qualifications. All are agreed that one reason of stagnation and wastage in primary schools is their dull dreariness, which is mainly the result of unsuitable teaching procedure. It is therefore suggested that in all men's training colleges there should be an optional course dealing with kindergarten and primary school methods. When sufficient women teachers are available the necessity of such a course may not be so pressing.

12. In addition, it seems desirable that at headquarters there should be a senior officer whose duties are entirely connected with the administration of primary education. He should keep in touch with both local bodies and the inspectorate and be an adviser of both. He should watch the relations of the inspector with local bodies, advise, stimulate, guide and encourage according to the circumstances and be able to reconcile conflicting opinions of Boards and Inspectors. We admit that there will be differences of opinions, that local bodies may resent or refuse advice, that inspectors may be tactless or not above suspicion themselves in communal or in other matters, but these are growing pains which should pass away or at least become less embarrassing with the passage of time. He should also act as Secretary of the proposed Board of Vernacular Educa-

13. It has been argued that universal compulsory primary education will lead not only to a rapid advance in literacy, but also to an improvement in administration because the momentum given when primary education is universal will compel attention to the need of efficient administration and make control more effective on account of the statutory penalties. Whilst we agree that compulsory primary education should be regarded not merely as an ideal impossible of fulfilment except in the distant future but as a goal the attainment of which is urgent and immediate, yet we feel that at the present time the passage of a law making primary education universal and compulsory would create more difficulties than it would solve.

14. The cost of compulsory primary education has been worked out by several provinces, by different bodies and persons, and although the figures vary, yet even the lowest estimate is appallingly high. The question of finance, however, should not act as a deterrent, nor need it be a deterrent provided the lamentable wastage at present existing in all provinces can be checked. Calculations show that only about 25 per cent. of the children who are admitted into the lowest class of a primary school complete the four years' course, when children may be assumed to have become literate though the figure varies from province to province. Thus about 75 per cent. of the money now spent on primary education may be regarded as sheer waste. If this waste could be prevented, the funds at present available would obviously suffice for a great extension. Some members of the committee feel that efforts should be made to enlist voluntary workers and that in vernacular middle classes at least, handicrafts should form the centre of instruction. The produce made by the boys should be sold and the income used for the upkeep of the school. These proposals require further examination.

15. The mere passing of a Compulsory Education Act even in those areas where compulsion is considered desirable will not in itself either bring children to school or keep them there. The effective administration of the Act is necessary. We have been informed of difficulties that arise in the administration which tend to make the Act inoperative. The lack of attendance officers, the difficulty of deciding who is to prosecute, in many cases the indifference of magistrates, the law's long delays, the absence of up-to-date local census records are given as instances of weaknesses in the administration of Compulsory Education Acts. We feel, however, that these difficulties are surmountable and we emphasize the need of enforcing the provisions of the Act in those places where the Act is operative.

16. We are of opinion that a much more rapid advance in compulsory primary education is possible in many provinces and that the best lines of advance are similar to those of the Punjab (and other provinces) where compulsion is applied not to the province as a whole perhaps not even to municipalities, but to village areas where the majority of the children already attend school and to selected wards of a municipality. As we have said, the question of cost should not be a deterrent for the present funds available will go much further if they are more wisely expended and if waste is checked. We should like to see all provinces make a survey of the existing schools as has been or is being carried out by

the United Provinces and Madras with a view to the wiser location of schools, the improvement of inefficient schools, the closure of unnecessary ones and the amalgamation of others. It should not then be difficult after a survey and study of different districts to formulate a programme spread over a number of years, which should aim not only at the development of primary education in those districts, but also to the extension of compulsion. Such a survey should be carried out by the Government inspectors in consultation with the local education authority. The driving power should come from the local Government through the Ministry of Education, which is after all responsible for the provision of the whole or the greater part of the cost.

B. G. KHER.

POONA

The 13th October, 1937.

NOTE OF DISSENT BY MR. H. DIPPIC.

I do not agree with the decision of the Sub-Committee to recommend that all powers in the matter of the appointment, dismissal, transfer and punishment of male teachers should be taken from local bodies and retransferred to Government officers. I do this for two reasons:—

I. The power enjoyed by the executives of local bodies with regard to teachers is perhaps the most highly prized of their powers. That it has been abused is beyond question. That the teachers and therefore the children, should suffer for the faults of controlling bodies is lamentable but signs are not wanting of the growth amongst local administrators of a sense of greater responsibility in this and other matters connected with the control of education. To withdraw this power in the wholesale fashion now proposed will be to throw away the results of fifteen years of growth and experience. There will be little interest left in local administration and when the time comes for this again to be fostered the whole painful process will have to be gone through again.

II. My second reason is that I do not believe the recommendation will ever be accepted or if accepted will ever be carried out. By offering only this one solution, therefore, the Sub-Committee has missed an opportunity of suggesting alternative means of improving the situation which might be accepted and which would remove many of the disadvantages of the present system. The alternative is as follows:—

The power is now generally vested in the Chairman personally. It should be vested in the Board and the Board should be under a statutory obligation to exercise its power through an education committee. This committee should consist of the Chairman and one or two members elected by the Board, and of persons co-opted by the Board from certain categories possessing definite qualifications. Such categories may be:—

- (a) Educational officers—active or retired;
- (b) Managers of aided middle and high schools;
- (c) Members of societies which have active educational interests;

- (d) Women who are or have been definitely connected with school work;
- (e) Other members of the public who by their activities have shown an interest in the problems of primary education; and others' who may be suggested.

I would propose as a definite disqualification in all categories an active identification with politics in any shape, the sole object being to get together a body of persons interested in education who will act and give decisions on educational grounds alone.

To help further, a teachers' register should be compiled in each district and no person whose name was not on the register would be eligible for appointment as a teacher. Qualifications necessary to secure registration should be carefully defined and the keeping of the register should be in the hands of the senior District educational officer. Doubtful cases could be decided by the Educational Committee.

Further it might be provided that the initiative in all cases of transfer should lie with the technical officers.

H. DIPPIE,

Director of Public Instruction, Orissa.

CUTTACK

The 6th October, 1937.
