

CATHOLIC DEPUTATION TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Plea for retention of temporary schools

THE serious view taken by Willesden and Kilburn Catholics of the school accommodation available for their children was stressed by a six-man deputation to Willesden Education Committee last Thursday.

The six, led by Mr. R. J. Cleaver, represented the parishes of St. Mary Magdalen, Our Lady of Willesden and The Sacred Heart. They presented a petition signed by a large number of Catholics, requesting the council "to grant us the continued use of the temporary accommodation in use in our schools until suitable alternative accommodation is available."

After hearing the deputation's case, the committee decided to instruct the borough education officer to prepare a report for consideration at the next meeting of the general purposes education sub-committee in June.

The temporary accommodation referred to is in the Gladstone and Roundwood Social Centres and the Mazenod Hall. In the education committee's opinion, it is "far below the required standard" for school purposes and its use in the past has only been sanctioned because of the lack of alternative accommodation.

"PERTURBED"

Mr. Cleaver mentioned in his prepared statement that lay people of the three parishes were "very perturbed" at the prospect of losing the accommodation.

He went on: "The bulge which is now beginning to flatten out in the county schools has not yet reached its peak in the Catholic schools of this borough. This is borne out by the number of baptisms recorded by the three parishes, the annual figures of which are showing a very distinct upward trend."

Children baptised in 1952 numbered 399. In succeeding years they numbered 433, 475, 491, 622, reaching 647 last year. The 1958 figure was expected to top 700.

Mr. Cleaver continued: "From these figures it will be seen that a most serious position will arise from 1960 onwards. If we go back to the figures for 1952, it will be seen that with three schools having a one-form entry in each year, the position with the accommodation that we already have is acute."

"There is need to-day for a three-form entry in each parish and this is causing great concern amongst those parents who wish to exercise their right to a choice of school. The Catholic atmosphere in our schools is an inherent part of character training and we do not wish our children to miss this great asset."

RE-ORGANISATION

Mr. Cleaver suggested that, as county school rolls were falling, a re-organisation of catchment areas would free some of these schools for the use of Catholic children.

If this were not possible, Catholics wanted to retain the use of temporary accommodation, even though this was insufficient.

Mr. Cleaver added: "No one could foresee in 1945 when the development plan was drawn up, the great influx into our parishes and the consequent increase in the demand for school places. We are, however, prepared to make any reasonable alterations to our present accommodation so that this can be kept in use."

The Catholic community, he said, could not agree to suffer "an increased lack of educational facilities" and would watch with great interest to see that their rights incorporated in the Education Act were respected.

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