

City teacher hopes to give Hong Kong a new science system

By Max Whatman

IF THERE is to be a new approach to teaching science in Hong Kong secondary schools, the credit must belong in large measure to a young New Zealander who for four or five years was a science master at Burnside High School.

Rex Heyworth, son of Mr and Mrs W. Heyworth, 34 Gramams Road, went to Hong Kong to teach for a two-year term. He is now in his third year and is likely to stay for a fourth.

One reason for prolonging his stay is a natural desire to see the launching of a new science programme, based on a series of three textbooks of which he is the author and which have been approved by the Hong Kong Government.

These books seek to correct the present system, which fails to emphasise the experimental approach to science and does not encourage students to think for themselves.

Mr Heyworth teaches at Ming Yin College, in Kowloon, where his head master is Rex King, another Christchurch man, ex-Christchurch Boys' High School master and housemaster at Adams House. The school is under the Church of Christ in China, which has an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand.

SPEAKS CHINESE

Mr King, who controls a school with a roll of more than nine hundred, has learnt Chinese in order to carry out his job with maximum efficiency.

Mr Heyworth is Gisborne-born. He went to school there, taking his Master of Science degree at Victoria University and completing his Diploma of Education at the University of Canterbury.

These two dedicated New Zealand teachers are at a Government-subsidised school, and they told me they would like to see the day when there will be subsidised secondary education for all, instead of 70 per cent as at present.

Education is not free or compulsory in Hong Kong but, under a means test carried out by teachers, the amount of family contribution is assessed and may even be waived in cases of poverty. This means that nobody is deprived of the opportunity to go to school for lack of money, said Mr King.

There seemed to me to be many children of school age playing in the streets and the estimate of primary children not receiving any education has been placed as high as 150,000.

As Mr King pointed out, the Government seems content to leave a large part of education to aided and private schools. But what is really

needed is a thoroughly comprehensive system with a much greater emphasis on technical education.

According to the Year Book, there are 1,133,000 children at school. The Government runs 133 schools; there are 649 grant-aided or subsidised, and 1787 private schools.

In the absence of an adequate number of State schools, Government aid is at a figure of almost 100 per cent in Hong Kong. The Government pays all teachers' salaries and 80 per cent of other outgoings.

But technical education is essential and this must be a Government responsibility. As Richard Hughes says in his book on Hong Kong, "there is a shortage of skilled labour, combined with a shortage of technically qualified staff.

"According to the 1966 census, of the labour force of 30,500 in engineering, professional technologists totalled only 610; of the labour force of 140,000 in textiles, there were—incredibly—only 510 qualified technicians; of 129,000 in other branches of manufacturing, only 400; of 283,400 in manufacturing in what is called the traditional sector (as opposed to factories in the properly equipped modern sector) there is not a single professional or qualified technologist."

'BRAIN DRAIN'

Hong Kong also suffers from a "brain drain." Rex King told me that more than half of the Form VI leavers go to universities overseas—mostly Canada and the United States—rather than to the two local universities.



Mr Heyworth

And of those who graduate from the Hong Kong universities, one third seek employment overseas.

There are grave deficiencies in Hong Kong's education system, but many of them spring from a failure to move with the times.

Accent is still on learning by rote.

Textbooks are out of date and a former Christchurch man with two children at a private school told me his daughters were still learning to calculate in pounds, shillings and pence—heaven alone knows why, seeing that Hong Kong has never used that coinage and it is even on the way out in Britain.