

Rocky Lauds School

By MARK WIESNER

Gov. Rockefeller, speaking yesterday at Willowbrook State School, came close to being confronted with the grand jury report on conditions in Willowbrook.

But chance, which had dictated release of the report on the day the governor visited, slipped up by just a few hours.

News men covering the governor's appearance learned of the report moments before Rockefeller was to leave and at a time when the governor had just heard of the report himself.

Rockefeller said the only news he had of the report was that it was a "vindication" and that he believed recommendations contained in it were already carried out, or being carried out.

Without seeing the report, Rockefeller said he could not comment further.

Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of mental hygiene, was in the same position — that of being asked to comment on a report that he had not seen.

"I certainly hope so," was the commissioner's reaction when asked if the recommendations were carried out.

The governor's address at Willowbrook, on the occasion of graduation ceremonies for the School for Practical Nurses, was concerned with the progress of the school and his remarks touched on some of the same areas spotlighted in the grand jury report.

For instance, Rockefeller said the administration has "embarked on a \$7-million modernization program that will put 27 existing buildings in top condition," which alleviated the grand jury's concern that equipment was out of date and there was need for a "continuing preventive maintenance program."

As to what Rockefeller referred to as "the stubborn problem of overcrowding" — which the grand jury said made training of patients "extremely dif-

(Continued on Page 2)

Rocky Lauds Progress at Willowbrook

(From Page 1)

ficult, if not impossible" — the governor maintained "real progress was made."

"The new Suffolk State School at Melville is already easing some of the pressure here at Willowbrook," he said. "We have new state schools planned for the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens which will demonstrate this administration's determination to end overcrowding entirely at all our state schools. In the past year alone, we managed to cut overcrowding by 10.4 per cent here at Willowbrook."

"We are well under way in putting up 10 prefabricated buildings that will provide additional living space. Half are ready for occupancy now — all should be completed by next month."

The governor also announced that a new \$1-million "intensive therapy center" was slated for Willowbrook and will provide "basic self-help training for 900 youngsters under age 10 who are now unable to take part in the regular education program."

This program will begin in temporary quarters "by next year," Rockefeller said.

The governor listed these areas to show efforts to aid Willowbrook:

- An eight-year rise in the school's budget of 97 per cent — from \$7.5 million in 1958 to \$14.8 million this year.

- The addition of 315 persons to the school's staff last year and 126 this year, bringing the ratio of staff to patients to "about 1 for 2.4."

- The completion within a year of the \$9-million Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation.

Rockefeller laced his comments with praise for Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook's director, and for Miller, the state agency's chief, for their role in improving the school.

To the 40 graduates, Rockefeller had compliments for their "determination" in returning to school and for "earning the right to participate in an important human service."

Expansion of the practical nurse school to more than 100 enrollees was part of the effort Rockefeller described as indicating "that this administration is deeply committed to making Willowbrook the finest facility of its kind."

Rockefeller said human skills are being provided to research "the deepest roots of this complex social challenge" toward the goal of helping "each human life entrusted to our care here to reach the fullest potential possible."

The governor, who arrived about an hour late, said he had planned to reach the school by helicopter but the rain had forced him to travel by more conventional means.

The nursing arts section of the library of the School for Practical Nursing at Willowbrook was dedicated in memory to Max Gordon, a founder and the ninth president of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, Willowbrook Chapter.

The program in the school building was attended by more than 600 persons, including GOP political figures. The governor left after a round of handshaking at the ceremony's close.