

## Amann, after tour, says:

# Willowbrook 'depressing'

"If you think you've got problems, take a ride out to Willowbrook and you'll feel a lot better. The place is that depressing."

That was the reaction of Assemblyman Edward J. Amann, who toured the institution in a surprise inspection Thanksgiving eve.

Last Friday, following a series of articles in the Advance describing conditions at Willow-

brook, Amann asked the State Mental Hygiene Department for an investigation that could lead to additional funds for the institution.

That investigation, Amann said yesterday, is supposed to begin "immediately," according to mental hygiene officials.

Yet, the facility is so overcrowded, he added, the state only has to check the admissions records to realize the need for additional money.

During his own inspection, Amann visited a children's ward where five workers care for "200 spastic kids" and another ward of 160 teen-agers with a staff of 10.

"Obviously, there isn't enough help," he said. "But even doubling it (the staff) wouldn't do any good."

An inherent problem at Willowbrook, he thinks, is that

"it's just that kind of place. Some of the patients aren't toilet trained. In one ward, one person changes and feeds the children, strips the 40 beds, then lifts kids into wheelchairs — all during the morning shift."

The patients are spoon-fed, he said, and sometimes spit out more than they swallow. Staff shortages dictate a "feeding time" of from three to five minutes per patient.

Amann thinks that for the present emphasis should be placed on patient care for bed-ridden cases rather than education for those showing potential.

Put simply, he said, "You have to turn them over or they get bed sores."

The staff, which he described as "extremely dedicated," is working overlapping shifts, he said, so more personnel will be present during feeding and

changing hours.

"Willowbrook has lost several hundred of its staff in the last few months, and we've got to get more people there. Yet, if you double the staff, there are still problems."

One problem is the lack of room for additional patients.

Said Amann, "The beds are so close together already. But if you can't take them in, what do you do with them?"