

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

SIR,—

We have the honour to make the following report on the state and progress of manual and technical instruction in the Dominion during the year ending 31st December, 1909.

A. MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

Instruction in one or more branches of handwork was given in 1,240 primary schools during the year, an increase of 40. As regards the more elementary forms of handwork, paper-work, modelling, brush drawing, and free-arm and blackboard drawing in the lower classes, and brush drawing and cardboard-work in the upper classes, continue to receive most attention. The value of handwork as an aid to teaching other subjects of the syllabus is being recognized more widely every year, and we hope that in the near future elementary handwork will cease altogether to be regarded as a separate subject of instruction. We desire again to emphasize the value of a course of instruction in cardboard-work, especially in schools where it is impracticable at present to provide facilities for instruction in woodwork. Apart from its value in connection with the training of the hand and eye, a course of instruction on right lines will be found of considerable assistance in the teaching of arithmetic and instrumental drawing.

A word of warning regarding the attitude of many teachers towards brush drawing may not here be out of place. While it may be conceded that instruction in the use of the brush should form part of the course in drawing in every school, and, further, that brush drawing is a valuable aid in awakening the artistic instinct and stimulating the appreciation of beauty, it appears questionable whether the educational value of the work has not been largely overestimated, and whether the value of a course of brush drawing on the lines usually adopted is commensurate with the time given to the work. To isolate brush drawing from the ordinary instruction in drawing seems unnatural, and, moreover, tends to give it an importance it does not deserve. In this connection the following note on brush drawing, included in a memorandum on the teaching of drawing recently issued by the Scotch Education Department, is worthy of earnest consideration: "Skill in the use of the brush should be acquired, as in the case of the pencil, by employing it in a rational manner as a drawing-instrument from the beginning. No preliminary course of brush-marks should be indulged in, nor should the brush ever be treated in any special or exceptional way as a thing apart from the regular drawing lesson. Whether exercises in the use of the brush are included in the syllabus of manual occupations or not, the whole of this work should be carried on as an integral part of the general drawing scheme, and strictly in accordance with its principles. The substitution of a series of mechanically produced brush-markings for the study and representation of the natural forms they may appear to more or less resemble is a singularly perverted and uneducational method of instruction, however showy the immediate results may be."

Good work, generally, both theoretical and practical, continues to be done in the more specialized forms of handwork, such as drawing in light and shade, elementary design, woodwork, cookery, physical measurements, agriculture, dairying, &c., taken by pupils in the higher standards of primary schools, and in the secondary departments of district high schools.

The instruction in woodwork, generally speaking, is probably more satisfactory than that in any other subject of handwork. Most of the instructors appreciate the value of woodwork as an instrument of education, while the courses of instruction and the conduct of the majority of the classes are to be commended. Incidentally it may be pointed out that the woodwork room should be regarded as a class-room, and treated as such. Pupils should not be asked to work in an atmosphere of disorder and litter. As a general rule, the last five minutes of each practical lesson should be devoted to sweeping down benches and tool-stands and gathering up shavings and waste wood, so that the room may be left clean and tidy for the next class. This is particularly desirable where woodwork is taught on the central system. In an increasing number of cases instruction in elementary plane and solid geometry and in scale drawing is being connected with the instruction in woodwork. This is to be regarded as a step in the right direction.

It is gratifying to note that certain defects in methods of instruction in cookery referred to in previous reports are gradually disappearing, and that at most of the centres some attention is being given to instruction in principles, and some effort made to correlate the instruction with that of some other subjects. Nevertheless it cannot yet be said that principles and practice receive attention proportionate to their relative importance. Method and recipes still loom too large in the pupils' notebooks. Regular and systematic instruction on such topics as the physiology of digestion and the elementary chemistry and physics of food and culinary operations should on no account be omitted, and might with considerable advantage form the principal part of the so-called demonstration lesson. If this were done, and the practical lessons during the year confined to the preparation of a much smaller number of dishes than is usually the case, more time would be available for instruction in what may be regarded as essentials, while the expenditure on material would be considerably reduced without any sacrifice of efficiency. In some cases the records of the instruction given are not altogether satisfactorily kept. If the records are to be regarded merely as reminders for the instructors, then the briefest entries therein might suffice, but when, as is the case, they are class records kept for a specific purpose, the information furnished by them should be as complete as possible, and should show the range and character of the whole course of instruction. The pupils' notebooks in certain cases require more attention. Little use is made of the pupils' rough notes as material for exercises in composition: a valuable opportunity of correlating cookery with other subjects is thus missed.