

During the year I gave a good deal of attention to the character of the instruction in history, arithmetic, and elementary agriculture. I heard lessons in history given by students in training, and found no evidence either of lack of preparation or want of knowledge of the subject. The classes I myself tested certainly did not show an intimate knowledge of historical detail, but yet did not fail to realize the significance of the great movements and events that have affected the development of society as it is to-day. The teaching of history is not now neglected in the primary schools; nevertheless there is a good field here for model lessons by the Inspector. It is not easy to give a good history-lesson, for the teacher must be able to tell the story vividly with careful arrangement of facts, suppressing any that are not germane to his subject and bringing into prominence all that are of vital importance. It would be well for the Inspector not only to test the knowledge the pupils have of the subject, but to ask the teacher to demonstrate his method of teaching. Only thus can the cause of weakness be discovered and right remedies applied.

In arithmetic my usual experience was to find the junior pupils well prepared, but the older pupils struggling with problems most of which related to matters quite outside the range of their experience. In England the arithmetic required of the elementary school has long since been simplified, and I do not think that we in New Zealand would lose anything by making a similar modification in our syllabus. The essentials appear to me to be accuracy in mechanical operations, greater attention to practical arithmetic, and the solving of problems dealing with matters that either come within the child's own experience or admit of easy practical illustration and form part of the common stock of knowledge.

Instruction in elementary agriculture is well given in a number of schools, due regard being paid to indoor experimental work as well as to the school-gardens. In not a few schools, however, there is little of scientific value in the work done, a fault due in the main to lack of co-ordinated effort on the part of the special instructors and the Inspectors. Each district has its own scheme of instruction in science, and there is little evidence of any relation between the work done in the primary schools and that done in the secondary and technical schools. In the pupil-teachers' instruction classes it is quite the usual experience of instructors to find themselves compelled to begin the instruction in agriculture *ab initio*. I am quite sure the subject is important enough to demand the services of a supervising expert whose business it would be to arrange properly co-ordinated schemes of work.

In two other subjects, drawing and singing, there is urgent need for specialist teachers. Even in the training colleges there is considerable unevenness of attainment in both subjects. In the schools it is rare to find a clear conception of the value and purpose of these subjects in the scheme of education. England and America have for many years employed experts, and I trust it will presently be found possible in New Zealand to make similar appointments. As regards school music, I welcome the signs of a broader treatment of the subject. In several schools an attempt is being made to teach the elements of musical appreciation, and for this purpose the gramophone is used. Before we attempt to advance far in this direction, however, we should aim to improve the ordinary singing. The chief deficiencies we have to overcome are faulty tone (in scarcely any schools do the boys produce their voices correctly), choice of unsuitable songs, and inability to sing from either the old or the new notation. Visiting teachers from countries where school music has reached a high level of efficiency tell us that New Zealand children have naturally sweet-toned voices but produce them vilely, while a distinguished Edinburgh expert remarked publicly on the pleasant low-toned speaking voices he had heard in the Dominion. Our shortcomings in school singing are evidently not due to lack of suitable material, but to lack of efficient teaching.

An attempt has been made by private enterprise, with the approval of the Department, to introduce visual instruction into the larger schools. The scheme has not been an unqualified success so far, and it must be regarded only as a temporary measure in anticipation of the time when it will be possible materially to assist the schools to install moving-picture machines of their own. In the meantime the private company referred to has secured some excellent educational films, and is making every effort to establish as close a relation as possible between the ordinary school lessons and the pictures. I hope, therefore, that the scheme will, under the improved management, meet with the support it deserves.

During the year several special classes for retarded children were established in the larger towns. In general, these classes were found to contain two types of retardates—viz., abnormally dull children, and also normally intelligent children whose school progress had been hindered by sickness, late admission to school, frequent transfer, and the like. Towards the end of the year the Department secured the services of a New Zealand lady teacher who had had the opportunity to secure training abroad both in the new methods of gauging intelligence and in the education of children of subnormal mentality. It now appears a grave mistake to form classes of the type described above. We should, in the first place, provide adequately for the education of the higher subnormals, and for the present leave the intelligent retardates to be provided for in the ordinary school classes. If the plan is adopted of classifying the pupils in each standard class according to degree of intelligence and intellectual advancement, there should be little difficulty in meeting the needs of the intelligent retarded pupil. The greatest care will, of course, have to be observed in selecting subnormal pupils for the special classes, and none should be sent there without the concurrence of the parents. As a matter of fact, however, the parents themselves realize how unsuited the ordinary methods of instruction are for their children, and welcome the opportunity to send them where there is at least some possibility of advancement. Such classes have in other countries passed far beyond the experimental stage, and it has been clearly proved that in the great majority of cases the educable subnormal child can be trained to do simple work of a useful character and can be prevented from becoming a menace to the community within which he lives.

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The Director of Education.