

READING-CIRCLES AND DISCUSSION CENTRES.

As far as time has permitted the Inspectors have held informal conferences with the teachers to discuss with them methods of teaching and advances in educational science. These meetings have been productive of much good, and have led many a teacher to revise his teaching practice or to adopt some new method of instruction. It is to such thoughtful study on the part of teachers that we must look for progress, and the maintenance of interest in solving the problems of education is full of promise for the future. The head teachers of the central schools of country districts have a splendid opportunity of improving the standard of education within their sphere of influence, by acting as the agency for the exchange of new ideas and specimens of school-work, by establishing and leading discussion circles and, above all, by setting an example of efficient teaching in their own schools. Where the head teacher of a township school has thus realized his responsibilities to his younger and less experienced brethren, the effect is quickly seen in an improved standard of efficiency all round.

ENVIRONMENT.

Generally speaking, the interest taken in the school surroundings by both Committees and teachers is worthy of commendation. The education districts, however, differ very considerably in this regard. During the year many Committees took advantage of the unemployment schemes to affect improvements, and grounds that were once rough and swampy have been transformed and made into garden-plots and lawns. In some districts the award of environment certificates has had a stimulating effect, and there is evidence throughout the Dominion that the playgrounds are more attractive now than they have ever been. Beautiful grounds not only foster civic pride and the love of beauty, but also give valuable knowledge of, and practical experience in dealing with, lawns and paths, shrubs, flowers, grasses, and weeds. It is hoped that in those schools where the importance of a good environment has not yet been appreciated a change will quickly be effected.

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.

District high schools play an important part in their community in providing post-primary education for children who are unable to attend secondary and technical schools. In the past the curriculum of these schools has been too academic for many of the pupils, but during the year special attention was directed to this shortcoming, and the Inspectors, agricultural instructors, and manual-training instructors were asked to devise courses of instruction which would be more closely in touch with the needs of the district, and which would raise the efficiency of the instruction especially in agriculture, woodwork, and domestic science. The desirability of including art and music was also stressed. As a result of this conference, it is expected that in 1932 the district high schools will provide a better-balanced secondary course, partly practical, to meet the needs of those pupils who should not take up the purely academic course leading to the University Entrance Examination.

By way of criticism of teaching methods in the secondary departments, it may be said that formal class-teaching is too prominent a feature. Independent research by the pupils is often preferable, so that they will become students in the true sense of the term.

SPECIAL CLASSES.

During the year no new special classes have been opened, but those already established have carried on with enrolments varying from thirteen to twenty-two. The supply of handwork materials has been somewhat curtailed, but teachers have shown considerable ingenuity in using waste materials for this purpose. Some pupils show a degree of manual skill that seems to warrant further tuition at the technical schools, and in several centres an experiment is being carried out along these lines. While no special-class child is capable of passing the proficiency examination, some possess the manual ability and the social adaptability that should be given the opportunity for the fullest possible development, and it is for these that the co-operation of the technical schools is sought.

In addition to the special classes for backward children there are six special classes for those who are partially deaf and for children suffering from serious speech defects. The teachers of these classes conduct also evening classes for adults who wish to learn lip-reading.

Seven teachers are employed in teaching children who are spending long periods in hospitals, and in three centres there are open-air schools for delicate children whose health must be specially considered. The pupils for these schools are selected by the School Medical Officers.

EXCHANGE OF TEACHERS.

Under this scheme, which has now been in operation for over twelve years, teachers are accepted from overseas education authorities annually to exchange positions with New Zealand teachers.

In 1931 six such exchanges were arranged, five being with teachers from different parts of the British Isles and one from Natal, South Africa. Two Canadian teachers completed their year's service in New Zealand during the year and returned to Canada in August last.

It has become necessary, for the time being, to amend the conditions under which leave is granted to teachers who are selected for exchange abroad. Up to the present time teachers have received full pay both during the twelve months in which they were teaching abroad and for the time necessarily taken up in travelling. In future such teachers' leave for travelling will be without pay, except in so far as it falls within the recognized New Zealand school vacations.

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