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EDUCATION COMES CLOSER TO LIFE

The New Deal In The Post- Primary Schools

BASED on recommendations made two years ago by a special committee appointed by the Minister of Education, regulations which will produce fundamental changes in our post-primary educational system were gazetted the other day. Taking effect from 1946, the new curriculum aims at avoiding the weaknesses both of the traditional academic system and of the narrower "vocational" school course by providing for all pupils a sound general education, related to the world in which they live and the problems they will find there. Already a good deal of preparatory work has been done by school principals and, in Auckland at least, *The Listener* found that most third form pupils had already completed a year's work along the lines suggested by the 1943 report, and now embodied in the regulations.

For most secondary schools, the changes implicit in the new methods of teaching were such that reorganisation could not be done overnight, nor even in the spell afforded by the summer vacation, but fortunately enough was known from the report and from drafts of the proposed new "prescriptions" to allow a gradual approach. Since the old curriculum has remained in force for the School Certificate during the current year, the change-over was confined to third-form pupils during 1945, but next year, third, fourth, and fifth forms will all feel the impact of the new system.

Auckland was the centre in which there was most vocal opposition to the committee's recommendations, but criticism came mostly from the University level, from those who feared, for example, that the relegation of the classics to the role of options and the simpler prescriptions suggested for those subjects, implied a lowering of educational standards. This view, however, does not seem to be generally shared by school principals.

Not Without Difficulties

Difficulties have been familiar enough to most principals and teachers during the past five or six years and those which have been met during the past year were for the most part only what might be expected during any transitional period, said the Auckland Grammar School headmaster (C. M. Littlejohn).

"There is still a staffing problem," he explained, "though I hope we will be back to normal in another year. One man came back the other day on the Andes. He will be here next year; then there's one in the Air Force and another still in the Middle East." Some expansion could be foreseen on the physical education side — the report suggested three 40-minute periods a week in the first, second and subsequent years—and more staff could easily be used there.

New emphasis on the teaching of arts and handicrafts, the difficulty of getting equipment and the expense when it was obtainable were other hurdles which had not yet been surmounted. Third form boys have had to be confined this year to woodwork or elementary book-binding as handicraft subjects, because there were not the tools to finish any other kind of job.

"And the book-binding had to be fairly elementary because we were restricted to work that could be done at a desk. The boys start off by making envelopes and folders and go on to this kind of thing."

From his desk he picked up a loose-leaf notebook and a book fully bound in board and cloth back. Both were neatly finished and the loose-leaf was pleasantly titled on the outside of the front cover.

"As time goes on we naturally hope to go much further in the craft line. The making of electrical apparatus, for example, is something we have in mind, but it is difficult just now to get equipment. But we are not so badly off as some. I heard of one school where the inspectors found boys doing knitting as a craft subject. There the difficulty again was no doubt that equipment for more suitable work was not to be had. But I don't think that kind of work would commend itself much to most boys. I can hardly imagine ours taking to it."

At Auckland Grammar School, room-space is just now as great a problem

(continued on next page)



"Much more outdoor work, which they enjoy": An Auckland schoolboy paints intently in the open air.