

As a relief to the severer school studies, vocal music is highly esteemed, doing for the ear what studies in form and colour do for the eye. This subject gains ground in the district as regards both the number of schools taking it up and the heartiness that characterizes it in schools in which it has always held a place.

Physical education cannot be said to occupy a prominent place in our schools, but the bone and muscle of our young people are so well developed by nature and by the avidity with which they enter into outdoor sports that we need not be too solicitous on that score. The disciplinary exercises and drill subserve the purposes of deportment rather than of physical development, and they are further valuable for their indirect influence on school discipline; indeed, having seen pupils at drill in the playground, one could, with a near approach to certainty, surmise their conduct in the class. The girls, having nothing to correspond to football and outdoor sports engaged in by the boys, need special attention even in the matter of deportment. This difficulty has been recognised and is being met in several of our schools by a new and happy departure in the way of Indian-club exercises—a departure well worthy of imitation.

Though for the most part indirect, moral training in our schools counts for more than some people care to believe. The pupils work in an atmosphere of self-restraint; they are brought face to face with the operation of the law of consequences; and they are taught, when occasion arises, to love the good and true, and despise the bad and false. Thus teachers lead their pupils to a knowledge of personal responsibility; and the moral tone of those schools is ever highest in which teachers, with some breach of good conduct as their text, bring the majority into sympathy with the right by contrasting it with the wrong. Moreover, from selections of poetry, general literature, speeches, and biography in their reading books, pupils learn lessons of high moral excellence, though the books have yet to be compiled from which they could drink in from wells of pure Saxon the great principles of right that have permanently enlarged and enriched the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The branch of education vaguely known as technical is supposed by some to be entitled to a place in the common school course. But it is hard to see how any substantial gain can result from loading the already overburdened teacher with a subject extraneous to his proper function. The purpose of the primary school is to train pupils on general principles so that when the time of leaving comes they may be able to take an intelligent interest in the trade which circumstances or natural aptitudes may have induced them to adopt. If by technical education we mean the training of the powers of observation and the acquirement of handiness, then there is an important place for it in the primary school. A large part of the time of young pupils should be given to the training of the senses and to the acquisition of manual dexterity. These exercises cultivate accurate observation and correct expression; they quicken the powers of perception and combination, and so form a broad and stable basis which may be successfully built on. Could the Board see its way to provide all its schools with the apparatus necessary for such training, the money would be well spent. As to technical education properly so called, that might be carried on as in Dunedin by a Technical Classes Association, or, as in England, by continuation schools. From every point of view it is desirable that such a school should be established in Invercargill as in other industrial and commercial centres. Such schools would in all probability tend to produce skilled artisans, to perfect business aptitudes, and to raise the moral tone as well as increase the mental power of our youth.

We suggest a few reasons for the fact that failure in the work of education so constantly dogs success. Among others we may mention the following: teachers are prone to subordinate the methods of securing progress to the examination as a test of progress, forgetting that each of the means is in itself an end. Some teachers are undoubtedly apathetic in working out and adopting new methods; such teachers work, year by year, according to a stereotyped programme, sinking easily down into what Matthew Arnold calls a drowsy and impotent routine: others, again, do not sufficiently sift the mass of details by which pupils are confronted in some subjects, and are thus unable to select and present clearly broad principles under which details may be successfully grouped; by attempting everything they succeed in next to nothing. Once more, there are adverse circumstances which the teacher is powerless to control, such as flagrant unpunctuality, indifferent attendance, and the want of moral support on the part of parents. Finally, nature prescribes certain limits to the efficacy of the teacher: he can develop, but not create; he can strengthen and upbuild what nature gives, but he cannot give what she withholds; and though the methods of instruction suited for both mature and immature minds are essentially the same, they should be applied in widely different ways, the only successful way in the case of children being a rigorous adherence to the facts of their experience, childish though these may sometimes be.

With respect to the training of infants, we may say that there is a distinct improvement all along the line. Should country teachers wish to look a little more minutely into this branch of their work, they could not do better than spend a few hours in the infant departments of the South and Middle schools; in the former they will see excellent Kindergarten work done, and in the latter they will learn how much can be done in the way of music and exercises.

As a supplement to these comments we would respectfully submit to the Board the following suggestions, which embody some of the main impressions produced on our minds by a general review of the educational influences at work in this district:—

1. That the scholarship and pupil-teacher regulations be amended so as to bring them into conformity with the revised syllabus, and, if need be, in other directions also.

2. That, in view of the evils consequent on percentage-worship, the Board cease the publication of the examination-results of each school.

3. That the Board should favourably view and actively support a Technical Classes Association if such were established in Invercargill.

4. That, with a view of securing solidarity of interest in educational matters, there should be held in Invercargill a quinquennial conference, to which would be invited members of Education Boards, members of School Committees, the teaching profession, and all persons interested in education; and that, at the time of the conference, there should be held exhibitions of work in operation, of completed work, of school apparatus and furnishings, and further that there should be competitions in recitation, vocal music, and drill.

We are, &c.,

JAMES HENDRY,  
GEO. D. BRAIK.

The Secretary of the Education Board, Invercargill.

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