

measure now. There are the same ill-lighted rooms, the same ill-designed and comfortless seats and desks, the same absence of class-rooms for infant departments, the same sacrifice of utility and internal neatness to exterior architectural effect, the same distractions from the teaching of three or four classes in one long room, the same insanitary method of disposing the hats and cloaks along the back wall of the schoolroom, the same narrow dismal lobbies, the same unkempt school-grounds, and a more inadequate staffing, pupil-teachers and monitors greatly exceeding in number the adult members of the staff in every large school I visited.

The first condition of success is an adequate staff of well-educated and well-trained teachers, and the next is well-designed and well-equipped schoolrooms; and, in my opinion, these conditions are not satisfied in Victoria, for the rooms and their equipment are for the most part precisely what they ought not to be, and far too much of the teaching falls upon imperfectly educated youth. The blame for the first defect lies with those who designed the buildings and their equipment, and the blame for the second with those whose business it was to provide money for the payment of competent teachers. The money put into the buildings and furniture ought to have made them what they ought to be; but the amount spent in the payment of teachers and Inspectors has for many years been and still is greatly below what is necessary to produce a high level of intellectual work in the schools. In the educational as in the commercial world, if you want a good thing you must pay for it; and inferiority in education is infinitely more harmful to a nation than is inferiority in articles of commerce. We cannot educate without competent educators, and it is idle to pretend that monitors and pupil-teachers are competent educators. In my opinion, the Victorian Department employs nearly twice as many of these teachers as it should do. Its practice is the abuse, not the use, of the pupil-teacher system, and this opinion is shared by its expert officers. Parliament, not they, is responsible for the defect I am pointing out, and to Parliament Victorians should look for means to supply the remedy.

Having condemned the Department's abuse of a system that has its uses, I hasten to add that in the majority of schools in which I observed their work the pupil-teachers controlled their classes well, and showed good training in the mechanical methods induced by the "result system" so long in vogue in Victoria—a system that has done great harm to real education in the State, and that has again and again been condemned by the experts of the Department as well as by the educated laity of the community. That it should have survived so long the strenuous intelligent criticism that has been levelled against it is proof of the difficulty of moving a great Department and of the unwisdom of centralising in one city the entire management of a nation's education. And mere inertia is not the only evil of centralisation; another is its blighting influence on local interest. In New Zealand everybody is interested in education, because everybody shares in its management. Every school has its Committee elected by the householders of the district; every member of a Committee has a vote for the members of the Education Board of the Education District; and, subject to the general regulations of the Department of Education, the Education Board controls the educational affairs of the district. The cycle is thus complete, and local interest is a living part of the system. There is nothing like it in Australia. In Victoria and the other Australian States there are no School Committees and no Education Boards, for the Boards of Advice answer to neither, and, so far as I could gather, have not a whit of influence, whether for good or for evil. The Department is everything and its influence everywhere, and every school is regarded not as a local institution in which every resident has a living interest, but as part and parcel of a huge machine controlled from the capital city. For more than a quarter of a century the people have had little or no part in the government of their schools, and naturally they have in great measure ceased to take an active interest in either their intellectual or their material welfare. That, at any rate, is how it struck me, and I do not hesitate to say that, in my judgment, the Australian Departments of Education are pursuing a policy that is highly detrimental to the intellectual life of the States. A policy that strangles local interest, whether in educational or other affairs, is doomed to failure. To this the Victorian authorities are now, I am glad to say, fully alive; and Mr. Tate, the recently appointed Director of Education, who is brimful of ideas and enthusiasm, and a man of great ability and personal magnetism, has already set about rousing the people from the indifference into which they have drifted in educational affairs, and in this he is ably assisted by a staff of capable Inspectors, a staff, however, altogether too small for the efficient performance of the work they have for many years been called upon to do.

Much of what I have said about the buildings of Victoria applies to those of South Australia and New South Wales: many of them are too long and badly lighted, the light being insufficient in quantity, admitted from wrong directions, and not properly diffused. Some of the Sydney schools are, from the point of view of lighting, among the worst I saw. In answer to this it may be urged that, in determining the area of glass-surface necessary for the illumination of the school-rooms, the authorities were guided by the circumstance that during a large part of the year the Australian light is very strong, and that in view of this fact they limited the illuminating-surface to a small area. To this I reply that the area of clear-glass surface necessary for the adequate illumination of a room is properly determined not by the area required on bright sunny days, but by that required on overcast and rainy days. If during such days the light admitted to any part of a room is less than fifty candle metres (the light afforded by fifty standard candles placed at the distance of one metre from the child) the light is, according to the authorities, insufficient, and the pupil's eyes are subject to undue strain. Good eyesight is a most precious thing, and provision for its preservation should be the first consideration with those whose duty it is to design the rooms in which we compel the children to work. Is a State justified in compelling children to attend schools the hygienic conditions of which are detrimental to their health?

A schoolroom that does not satisfy the following conditions is more or less faultily constructed:—

1. It must admit abundance of light from the left or back and left.
2. The light from the back must not overpower that from the side.