

The number of district high schools in operation at the end of 1902 was thirty-eight, with 1,479 pupils, of whom 1,426, having passed S6, were receiving free secondary education. The number of such schools has now (October, 1903) increased to fifty.

In country districts a very considerable part of the secondary education of the colony is carried out by means of the district high schools. I would therefore venture to repeat here, as it appears still to be necessary, some of the remarks and warnings given in last year's report on the subject of district high schools :—

It seems to be necessary to utter a note of warning with regard to the syllabus of work that is being taken up in the district high schools. It may be safely laid down that the secondary instruction given in these schools should have a bearing on the future life of the pupils. It is now tolerably well recognised that it is no reason in favour of choosing a subject for the school curriculum to say that it has no practical or utilitarian value, but rather the contrary; "bread-and-butter studies," as they have been called, are not necessarily to be condemned because the knowledge gained is afterwards useful, but are rather to be preferred if they are pursued in such a way as to train the intelligence of the pupil, and to lead him to think about those things that he will have to handle in the future. There is too much tendency at present in the district high schools to give the secondary pupils a little Latin or French and a little elementary algebra or Euclid, and to avoid science and manual and commercial training. The aim in view in establishing district high schools will probably be gained if these schools give the pupils a good taste for standard English literature, a thorough training in ordinary English composition and in arithmetic and mensuration, and such knowledge of history and geography as will enable them to understand better their duties as citizens of the Empire; adding thereto a course in elementary science in which the observations and experiments are carried out by every pupil for himself, and a suitable course of manual work or of commercial work where local conditions demand it. These essentials being secured, other subjects may be taken up if room can be found for them; and if among these subjects a foreign language is included, by all means let it be a modern one, and let it be studied so far thoroughly that some real knowledge of the language, not merely of its grammatical forms, is acquired. The grants for manual instruction (including practical science) under the Manual and Technical Instruction Act are payable to school classes in addition to the special district high school grant, so that there is no excuse on the ground of expense for the comparative neglect of these subjects. There is no reason why any of our district high schools, or, indeed, any of our secondary schools, should take as their model the lower forms of an old English grammar-school. It is true that the newer subjects require greater skill and a larger amount of preparation on the part of the teacher; but it cannot be supposed that the teachers of the colony are not as skilful as those of other countries, or are less willing to devote themselves with energy to a task whose realisation may enable their pupils "to travel throughout life by day instead of by night."

Scholarships and Free Secondary Education.

Some reference should be made to the regulations for free secondary education that came into force at the end of last year (1902).

The acceptance of the scheme was optional with the governing bodies of secondary schools. Every school that accepted the scheme had first to provide a free place or scholarship for each £50 of its net annual income derived from endowments; and, secondly, to give free secondary education to those who had gained a certificate of proficiency under the Public School syllabus, and were not over fourteen years of age on the 31st December preceding their admission to the school; for each of these latter free places a grant of £6 per annum was paid to the secondary school. Some of the schools, for financial and other reasons, have so far (October, 1903) not seen their way to adopt the scheme; but it has been taken up by 15 out of the 23 schools that might come under it, and the number of pupils admitted in accordance with it is, up to the present date, 781, for 584 of whom grants are being paid.

As a consequence of the policy of granting free secondary education to qualified pupils, the scholarships given by Education Boards may now be more and more devoted to the maintenance of scholars from country schools who have to board away from home in order to obtain secondary education. Such scholarships will be supplemented by the institution of the proposed "National Scholarships," and in eight districts of the colony by the Queen's Scholarships already established.

Again, the new syllabus for S7 provides some degree of instruction in secondary subjects in town schools and country schools for those not proceeding to a secondary school.

Finally, continuation classes will afford to those who leave school early some opportunity of gaining secondary education, including technical education, and the best of them will be able to do so without payment of fees, as the junior and senior technical scholarships are open, without reference to age, to all who gain a certificate of proficiency.

Mention should be made of the Rhodes Scholarships, which almost complete, so to speak, the edifice whose lower stories consist of Board scholarships, free places at secondary schools, Queen's Scholarships, National Scholarships, senior and junior technical scholarships, University junior and senior scholarships, and the like. They will give each year an opportunity for one of the best of our students to go to reside for three years at the University of Oxford. It is hoped that arrangements may be completed in time to admit of the election of the first New Zealand Rhodes Scholar next year (1904).

From what has been said, it will be seen that the several changes that have recently been introduced are not unconnected, but are parts of a general scheme that is gradually approaching that degree of co-ordination at which it can claim to be called a national system of education.

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