

The conditions of admission are the following: State-school pupil-teachers who obtain a good place in the entrance examination are allowed board and tuition free, on condition that they remain with the Education Department for four years after leaving the College, and that they repay to the Department the sum of £12 for each college year. The ordinary course of the College is a two-years course. Last year the Victorian Parliament voted a sum of money so as to enable each student to obtain £12 per year for pocket-money. If students are non-resident—that is, are living with their families or friends—they receive free tuition and an allowance of £18 per year, as well as the £12 pocket-money that was voted last year. Candidates for admission who have not been State-school pupil-teachers may compete in the examinations, and the five highest in the examinations are allowed the same privileges as State-school pupil-teachers who get a good place in the entrance examination. The College allows other students to attend lectures on payment of £12 per year for the ordinary course, or on payment of £6 per year for the kindergarten course only. The staff of the College includes the Principal and three permanent lecturers. There are also visiting teachers of nature-study, music, elocution, and gymnastics. The three permanent lecturers assist the Principal in the training of the students. This includes criticism lessons, observation lessons, and one week's actual teaching in each month. The whole time of the permanent lecturers is occupied in the College work. The Principal, in addition to looking after the College and administering it, delivers lectures in the University on education. There are three College courses—(1) the kindergarten course, (2) the primary-school course, and (3) the diploma course. It is only the students who are studying for the diploma course that attend the University. The best students for the second year are allowed to attend the University, which grants a diploma in education. But there is no provision at present for what the New Zealand University grants—namely, a degree in education. The diploma course, which is the highest course in the College, is not equal to the course which our students have to complete before obtaining the degree of education of our University.

The great drawback, to my mind, of education in Victoria is that the secondary schools are out of touch with the education system of the State. The secondary schools are either schools connected with the churches or private schools. There are no public secondary schools in the sense of our public secondary schools. There is therefore a want of gradation from the primary schools to the University, and the State concerns itself almost entirely with primary-school education, and the training of teachers to that need. Fortunately for us, our system is not so restricted. We, by our training colleges, train teachers suitable for our secondary as well as for our primary schools. The teaching profession by our system will be placed on a higher level than that of Victoria. In order, however, to compensate in some degree for the lack of secondary schools, a continuation school has been opened in Melbourne. The course there is a two-years course, and it has room for about four hundred pupils. At the conclusion of the course the students will be fit for the matriculation standard. These pupils are then sent to ordinary schools as junior teachers for two years. The best of them at the end of that term it is understood will compete for places in the Training College. I learn from the Principal of the College that it is hoped that similar continuation schools will be established in Bendigo and Ballarat, and perhaps in other centres of population. Perhaps, also, schools such as our district high schools may be established in populous centres.

I am of opinion that New Zealand has nothing to learn from the Victorian method of preparing students for the teaching profession. If our present system is continued and developed, and the ideal of a university degree in arts or education kept before our teachers as a necessary equipment for the profession, they will be better trained than those in Victoria. I am strongly of opinion that, especially in the small schools in the country and in the inaccessible districts, the teachers should be highly qualified men and women. I should like to see in every country school a teacher well acquainted with modern literature, and well equipped in, at all events, the sciences of botany and chemistry. If we could get teachers of this class the influence on the country settlers would be great. If the senior pupils were taught chemistry and botany they would be well equipped for a country life, and this teaching would soon have its effect in marked improvements in the methods of practical agriculture. And if the teacher was thoroughly acquainted with modern literature he would be a centre of culture for his district, and life in the country would be relieved of much of the monotony of which many settlers complain. Our country settlers should not only be equipped for the industrial life in which they are engaged, but they should also have the amenities of life that are open to dwellers in cities. It is, in my opinion, of more importance to have country teachers highly educated men and women than even to have highly qualified teachers in the cities.

The system that has been adopted of having training colleges in the four centres is, I believe, a wise one, and if the colleges are kept in touch with the University, and if attention is paid to the “new knowledge”—to science—we may with every reason expect to have our education system developed and improved so as to be second to none in any country.

I may add that I learn from Mr. Fleming, one of our Inspectors, that he was much pleased with the development of nature-study in the primary schools of Victoria. I had not, unfortunately, time to visit any of the primary schools. From what I learn, however, they are well officered, and the State of Victoria is fortunate in having such an able Director of Education as Mr. Tait. In New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, the people are becoming alive to the need of further educational development; and from what I heard at the Conference of University delegates held in Melbourne, there seems to be a greater desire to perfect the educational institutions than existed some years ago. In fact, the educational spirit that is abroad in Europe and America has also found a home in Australasia, and they are realising that no country can be expected to succeed in the competition of nation with nation in industries, or in anything else, unless its people are thoroughly and systematically trained and educated.

I have, &c.,

The Right Hon. the Minister of Education, Wellington.

ROBERT STOUT.

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