

APPENDIX C.

MANUAL INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

No. 1. REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR OF MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

SIR,—

Education Department, 31st May, 1916.

Except in small country schools, a weekly period for some form of handwork is found on the time-table of the schools throughout the Dominion, and it is pleasing to note that, for the most part, elementary handwork is more often treated as an aid to teaching some other subject of the syllabus, rather than as an isolated subject to which the scheduled time is given each week, without reference to any other subject-matter of the curriculum. Paper-work, modelling, carton and cardboard work are, speaking generally, found by thoughtful teachers to be most useful forms of handwork for primary pupils. In some districts brush drawing also is popular, and in the hands of a teacher possessing the artistic temperament, skill in the use of the brush, and aptitude in teaching, this subject may prove in many directions a valuable aid to expression. It is, however, worthy of note that no subject of handwork more readily yields itself to perfunctory methods. The lesson can be so treated as to require little or no preparation, and a modicum of attention during its progress. The teacher distributes the drawing-books, colours, and brushes, places the copy on the board, tells the children to copy what is before them, and then proceeds to utilize the period for the correction of other class exercises. If paper or cardboard work or modelling are to be taught intelligently and educationally there must be previous preparation, and it would almost appear that some teachers are disinclined to devote time to this preparation, with the result that brush drawing or brushwork, which is too often regarded as an easy subject to teach, is selected in preference to one requiring study and preparation before an effective lesson can be given. It is not intended in the foregoing remarks to decry brush drawing, but the hint is given that, except under special conditions, the subject is limited in educational value and in application; however, given the conditions, there is no reason why it should not become an interesting and useful means of aesthetic training.

The attention given to elementary handwork in the training colleges should ensure a supply of trained teachers having a good practical knowledge of the most up-to-date educational uses of the several branches, and it is to be hoped that full use will be made by these teachers of the knowledge acquired while in training.

Steady progress has been made in the direction of bringing the teaching of the more specialized forms of handwork into line with modern educational ideals. Both the drawing and benchwork at the majority of the woodwork classes are treated in a manner which, while increasing manual dexterity and disseminating useful special knowledge, broadens the boys' outlook and experiences, and develops latent capabilities. The closer connection of the course in woodwork with the subjects of the school syllabus which is noticeable at so many of the manual training centres must, it is considered, react favourably on the school-work generally. Suggestions have previously been made as to the desirability of securing the co-operation of the older lads in designing suitable models, or in increasing the utility or improving the shape of existing models. The suggestions have received practical and sympathetic recognition in some quarters, and have led in not a few instances to the discovering of both ingenuity and skill in some of the pupils.

Another marked feature is the steady elimination from the course of models which after the expenditure of time and energy upon them are consigned to the waste-heap, as they serve no useful purpose other than providing practice in the use of tools. There appears to be no reasonable objection to a course in elementary woodwork which includes at all stages models of utility provided that each of the first-year exercises is arranged to illustrate a method or a joint and its application. The keen interest taken by lads in what may be regarded as a "utility course," and the resulting accurate and carefully finished work, appear to justify the desire to see a more general adoption of this course. It has often been found that by the addition of some simple constructive or decorative metal-work a model may either be improved or its usefulness extended, and, given an instructor having the knowledge of elementary metal-work, the provision of the necessary facilities for simple exercises in metal appears to be a desirable extension of the lessons in woodwork. A few extra simple tools and bench appliances are all that would be needed to extend the course in the direction indicated.

It is gratifying to report that progress has been made in the teaching of subjects related to home life and work. At most of the centres the course is arranged to include instruction in cookery, hygiene, and housecraft, and while for obvious reasons the instruction in the latter subject is limited to matters that can be dealt with in the cookery-room, good, sound, practical lessons of lifelong value are given with satisfactory results. The simpler and elementary principles underlying kitchen-craft are receiving increased attention, and instruction in such matters as relative food-values and related subjects is for the most part suited to the age and ability of the children.