

SOUTHLAND.

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF MANUAL AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

Elementary Handwork.—In practically all the schools of the district some form of handwork was taught during the year, plasticine-modelling and paper-folding being the branches most commonly taken in the lower classes, and cardboard-modelling in the upper. Requisites for many forms of handwork have been almost or entirely unobtainable, and, as regards such supplies as were obtainable, the chief source of anxiety was due to the fact that though in every case prices had advanced—in some materials over 100 per cent.—yet there has not been any corresponding increase in the capitation wherewith to replenish stocks. Of necessity, therefore, the supplies available to teachers had to be somewhat curtailed. That the work should suffer such restriction is to be regretted, the more so in view of the general recognition by educationists of the fact that in these manipulative exercises, judiciously co-ordinated with other subjects of the syllabus, lies one of the most potent factors in a child's educational development. It cannot be said, however, that in every school this aspect of the work is fully appreciated; in some it is to be feared these subjects are regarded as but useful media for lending variety to the day's work and keeping little hands pleasantly employed with the exercise of a minimum of disciplinary control. As regards colour work, the use of pastels in the lower classes as a means to enable a child to give concrete expression to ideas of form and colour has considerably increased, and some very interesting work from even the youngest pupils has been seen. For the upper classes brushwork is still largely taken, but it is noted that there is a gradual falling-off in the number of schools where this form of drawing receives attention. In all schools beyond a reasonable distance from a manual-training centre cardboard-work has been taken in the upper standards, and where it was impossible for children to receive instruction in woodwork and cookery no better handwork subject could be selected. Apart from its value as a means of cultivating manual dexterity, this subject, in the hands of the intelligent teacher, can be made one of the best media for giving concrete illustration to various lessons in arithmetic and instrumental drawing. During the year a booklet on cardboard-modelling was issued by the instructor for the teachers' Saturday classes, and, recognizing its usefulness for school purposes, the Board decided to purchase the available supply and resell to teachers at half-price. It is satisfactory to record that practically every copy has been disposed of.

Woodwork and Cookery.—The number of schools that received instruction in these subjects shows a slight increase over the figures for last year, the numbers for each centre being as follows: Invercargill, 36; Gore, 22; Riverton, 14. In addition two classes in each subject from the High School received instruction at Gore, and for one day per week the instructors in the Invercargill No. 1 centre had charge of classes from the Technical High School. The number of primary-school children in attendance at the various centres was as follows: Invercargill, 639 boys, 556 girls; Gore, 364 boys, 314 girls; Riverton, 127 boys, 123 girls. Altogether, therefore, 1,130 boys and 993 girls received a course of instruction at one or other of the manual-training centres. A new building for the No. 2 cookery centre was commenced during the year, and the rooms, it is hoped, will shortly be ready for occupation.

Towards the close of the year the annual exhibition of work done in the cookery and woodwork classes was held in the Museum Hall, and, as usual, attracted considerable attention. In addition to this, however, an innovation was made at the Winter Show of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association by provision being made for competitions in cookery and woodwork as well as for school-garden products. The display made in all branches received unstinted praise, and it was generally recognized that the exhibits of school-work formed one of the most attractive features of the show, and demonstrated very plainly the value of the instruction being imparted.

Elementary Agriculture.—Work in this subject was carried on during the year in 109 schools, an increase of five over the figures of the previous year. The reports of the agricultural instructor indicate that an ever-increasing interest is being taken in school-garden work, the majority of teachers realizing some, at any rate, of the possibilities of this subject in the way of stimulating the intellectual development of their charges through the facilities afforded for accurate observation and sound reasoning. It cannot be said, however, that in all schools the subject received that intelligent treatment that is essential where the educative value of the work is properly appreciated. In too many cases still the untidy and neglected appearance of the plots tells its own tale. It is unfortunate that just at the period when the garden requires constant attention the continuity of the work should be broken by the summer vacation, but it should surely be possible to arrange with some of the pupils living in the immediate vicinity to devote a little time occasionally to the keeping of the plots in moderately good order. In a number of the schools the work carried on during the year was really excellent, and the fact that the children of their own accord spent a good deal of their spare time in keeping everything in first-class order bears testimony to the deep interest the teachers had been able to arouse in the work. During the year the Board decided to offer prizes for the best-kept school-gardens, the schools for this purpose being grouped in classes according to grades. With a view at the same time to improving the appearance of the grounds generally it was stipulated that in making the awards due consideration would be given to any efforts made to increase the general attractiveness of the school surroundings. It is pleasing to note that in an increasing number of schools Committees and teachers are beginning to recognize their responsibilities in this direction, the tastefully laid out and neatly kept grounds surrounding some schools being most creditable. Taking advantage of the assistance granted by the Department to schools raising money for improvement purposes fourteen schools forwarded applications amounting to £64 9s. 3d. for subsidies on voluntary contributions in aid of school gardens and grounds. To the local mercantile firms the Board was this year again indebted for donations of manure amounting in all to a value of £13 5s. 6d.