

MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

(E.—2, Appendix C.)

The steady extension of instruction in some form of handwork, for the most part closely correlated with the ordinary subjects of the syllabus, leads to the conclusion that the meaning and value of the concrete method is now more fully appreciated by the teachers of the Dominion. The number of public schools making provision for this form of instruction in 1917 stood at 2,011; for the year under review capitation was paid in respect of 2,135 schools, an increase of 124; and, as facilities were provided for other branches of manual training in 1,532 schools, it may be said that few children of school age are now deprived of some form of hand-and-eye training. Development has, however, been retarded in certain directions by the abnormal rise in the cost of stationery and material for handwork, and the difficulty of obtaining supplies. Notwithstanding these difficulties, some sound constructive work in paper and cardboard modelling, &c., in the lower standards, and wherever possible in metal-work, woodwork, cookery, laundry-work, and dress-making, and various branches of elementary science, elementary agriculture, and dairy-work in the higher standards, has been the basis of training which not only links together education and life, but at the same time provides opportunities for a most valuable form of both mental and physical training. It has been well said, "handwork has for its fundamental principles mainly two complementary attributes—viz., (1) progressive activity for developmental functioning, and (2) the acquisition of skill in the use of tools, instruments, and material in order to foster adaptability and resource"; and it may be added that under wise guidance the training assists in the development of initiative and independence of judgment.

The special subjects of manual training are taught at over one hundred more or less well equipped centres, and while this system cannot be regarded as ideal, until conditions permit of the provision of a "handicraft-room" in every school wherein all suitable forms of handicraft can be practised, the present arrangement may be regarded as satisfactory. The special subject for boys is invariably woodwork, and if taught with intelligence and skill excellent results may be attained. Few boys, unfortunately, are in a position to continue the lessons in their spare time, the cost of tools, bench, and material preventing, and it is hoped that facilities for giving instruction in elementary metal-work will be largely increased in the near future. This subject appears to make greater mental demands on the pupils, the equipment of a centre costs less than for woodwork, and in the opinion of many competent authorities metal-work has higher educative value than woodwork. Further, a very limited kit of metal-work tools will prove an endless source of utility and interest to lads having mechanical aptitude, and will provide wide scope for the exercise of ingenuity and the application of varied constructive principles. The value of the instruction of girls in subjects relating to the home was abundantly proved during the epidemic; at many of the centres instructors and pupils undertook the preparation, cooking, and delivery of special meals, and in many ways displayed skill and resourcefulness. One of the lessons learned at that time was that in the interests of the home and of the State it was expedient to give more, rather than less, time to the education of girls in domestic subjects, and instead of the instruction being confined to plain cookery, needlework and laundry-work, elementary first aid, and the elements of home nursing, should, wherever possible, become part of the school course of every girl.

During the year additional centres were authorized or completed, and while the continued curtailment of the train service affected the attendances at some centres, the average attendance in all subjects shows an increase over that of 1917.

Instruction in woodwork and metal-work for boys is provided at 494 schools, and facilities for the instruction of girls in subjects relating to the home exist at 500 schools, there being indications that these numbers will be largely increased within the next year or two.

At 1,390 schools instruction more or less related to agriculture, and supervised by qualified itinerant instructors, was given throughout the year. Probably it is a misnomer to connect this instruction with agriculture as generally understood, as it has little relation to farm-work and the primary products, but is directed solely to the creation of the pupils' "interest in the soil and in the things of the soil," and the importation of very elementary knowledge through the garden and