

SCHOOL OF ART.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, MR. R. HERDMAN SMITH, F.S.A.M., ETC.

I have the honour to report that during the last term of 1909 414 students attended the various art classes. The programme of instruction was on the lines of that adopted during 1908.

At the beginning of 1909 I left for Europe for the purpose of making a study of the methods of instruction adopted in the principal European art schools. I visited the leading English provincial art schools, the art schools of London, and those in France, Germany, Belgium, and Holland. On my return I furnished the Board with a short report of my tour.

It might not be out of place if I mention that the most satisfactory results in connection with art-teaching I found in those English towns where schemes of correlation are in progress. In the most important centres the art work shows a sequence covering all grades of art-teaching, from kindergarten to art school.

The scheme of art work in the primary and secondary schools in Leicester, Birmingham, Bradford, and other large towns is outlined by the school of art, whose teachers supervise it in a rota of visits.

Every available use is made of the services of the art-school staff to foster and cultivate an appreciation of nature and art throughout the school life of the child, and when children showing a special aptitude for drawing during their ordinary school career arrive at the school of art they are in a position to profit by the instruction given there.

It is to be regretted that so little connection exists between the primary and secondary schools and the School of Art in relating to the teaching of art in Canterbury. It is true the pupil-teacher in the elementary school attends the School of Art for one hour or so a week, but the connection with the work in drawing in the public school ends there. The trend throughout France and Germany is towards linking up the various educational institutions whereby the pupil can automatically pass forward. In the well-organized schemes in vogue on the Continent a constant stream of pupils ascend the co-ordination ladder from the elementary schools to the school of art and the workshops, returning to the school of art for increased power.

Where such co-ordination exists, overlapping in the work of preparation is avoided, and facilities for the development of talent are given.

If such a system was adopted in Canterbury much waste of time and material would be avoided, while the instruction received under such conditions would be far more complete and effectual than at present. While something has been done by the well-conceived syllabus in drawing issued by the Education Department in New Zealand, there yet remains a great deal to do before co-ordination can be said to be a factor in our art-education system.

As I have already said, there is practically no connection between the elementary day-school and the school of art. The only way to bring this about is some scheme of supervision from the district school of art. This scheme of supervision of drawing in the elementary schools by the art master of the district school of art has proved so valuable where tested in England that it is steadily growing, and will, no doubt, in a short time be generally adopted in all countries advanced in educational matters. What is wanted is to get it generally adopted in New Zealand; it is so important to the welfare of art in this country.

The constitution of the School of Art in Christchurch, controlled as it is by the Governors of a University College, is quite in line with the leading thought as to control in Europe. The tendency all over the Old World is to place the teaching of art and artistic craft in an institution apart from the teaching of science and commerce, so that an art atmosphere can be cultivated, without which it is impossible to get really valuable work. This atmosphere cannot be cultivated in an institution where every branch of education receives attention.

It is necessary in New Zealand, as in England, that the higher branches of art-teaching be given in a school specially designed and equipped for such work. In the smaller centres in New Zealand the art-teaching could be carried on up to a certain level in the drawing classes in connection with technical schools, but the higher branches of art-study will have to be taken in the school of art, which, if real art-teaching is to be given, must be an independent institution, and not a department of a science or commercial school.

Though the school of art can do better work for the higher branches of art and craft teaching by being an independent institution, yet it should be closely connected with the drawing and art work of the primary and secondary schools of all classes. Its staff should be acquainted with the kind of work done in drawing in the schools in the district, and should be also in a position to exercise some little supervision over such work. By this means the elementary classes at the school of art would be in a position to continue the art-instruction left off at the elementary and secondary schools. Under the present conditions this is not possible.

In New Zealand, as in the smaller centres in England, it is necessary for a school of art to teach both pure and applied art. The applied art and craft teaching should be designed to help those trades and professions in the district that depend for the most part on a knowledge of form, colour, and design. In New Zealand these crafts are very limited, and comprise principally the profession of architecture and the trades of the building crafts, jewellers' work, lithographers' work, plasterers' work, cabinetwork, signwriters and painters and decorators' work, modellers and carvers' work.

It would be greatly to the advantage of those responsible for the direction of schools of art in New Zealand if the Education Department defined the scope of instruction, so that when the programme of classes are submitted, unnecessary duplication by other educational institutions could be prevented.

The scope of work in a school of art and crafts is definitely defined by the English Education Department. To give an idea of what is considered the work of an English school of arts and crafts, I might mention that the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London has an Architecture and Building Crafts Department, a Cabinetwork and Furniture Department, a Silversmiths' and Allied Crafts Department, a General Book-production Department, a Drawing, Painting, Design, and Modelling Department, a Needlework Department, a Stained Glass, Mosaic, and Signwriters and Decorators' Department.