

2. REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION.

The DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION to the Hon. J. A. HANAN, Minister of Education.

SIR,—

Education Department, Wellington, 13th September, 1915.

I have the honour to present the second annual report on the progress of the physical-education scheme for the year ending 31st March, 1915.

The system adopted is that laid down in the "Syllabus of Physical Exercises for Schools" as prescribed by the Board of Education, London, the syllabus being based on the Swedish system of physical training.

The following are some extracts from a prefatory memorandum issued with the syllabus by the Board of Education in emphasizing their sense of the importance of this branch of education:—

"The exercises in the syllabus have been selected and arranged in proper progression, with a view to the promotion of the harmonious development of all parts of the body. They have been chosen as suitable for children of school age, and may be effectively carried out without the use of special apparatus. Exercises likely to prove injurious to children of weak physique have been excluded, and some of the ordinary Swedish exercises, or combinations of movements, though well designed for average use, have been omitted or modified in order to avoid risk of straining children below the average either in vigour or physical capacity. Such modifications account for the fact that some of the exercises in the syllabus have not in practice been pressed to their ultimate, or even their usual, extent, and will thus be found to differ somewhat from those included in many of the existing manuals.

"The object of every system of education worthy of that name will be the concurrent development of a sound character, an active intelligence, and a healthy physique. These qualities are to a great degree mutually dependent. It is undeniable that healthy physical conditions assist the development of the moral and mental faculties, and that adverse physical conditions may vitiate the otherwise well-directed efforts of the teacher. Physical education is thus essential to a sound intellectual training, and may be said to be fundamental in its effects on the individual.

"In the case of all school-children, therefore, physical exercises should be employed, but their use should always be carefully adapted to the needs and capacities of the children; there should, in short, be a direct relation between the three factors of nutrition, general health, and physical training.

"The exercises should be thoroughly enjoyed by the children. Indeed, freedom of movement and a certain degree of exhilaration are essentials of all true physical education. Hence it has been thought well not only to modify some of the usual Swedish combinations in order to make the work less exacting, but to introduce games and dancing-steps into many of the lessons. If appropriately taught, many of the free movements accompanying games and dancing-steps cannot but have good results, as indeed experience has shown where such exercises have been introduced.

"The development of the physique of the children is a matter of national importance. It is not intended that the mere adoption of the syllabus will prove an effective remedy for all the physical defects which at present afflict so many children, but the principles on which the syllabus is based are sound, and its general adoption and right interpretation and teaching will be fruitful in practical benefits."

It will be the object of the Department to see that the scheme, as outlined in the above extracts, with any modifications that may from time to time be determined on, is as far as practicable carried out by the teachers of the public schools.

In association with the scheme the question of prescribing and giving special physical exercises for the improvement or alleviation of particular defects and ailments discerned in pupils is receiving attention, and physical instructors are to be informed that it is the Minister's special desire that any aid they can give in this way should everywhere be afforded. Where children are found to have physical defects or ailments such as weak lungs, spinal curvature, stomach troubles, &c., it will be the duty of the instructor to advise the teacher as to the form of exercise which will be beneficial, and the advice thus given might well be communicated to parents to enable the exercises to be continued at home.

As stated in last year's report, courses had been and were being arranged for the instruction of the teachers in the exercises. These courses were completed in all the education districts at the beginning of June last. An opportunity has thus been given to all the public (elementary) school teachers to gain such practical knowledge of the system as should enable them to conduct the exercises with the children in an efficient manner and with an intelligent appreciation of the special object in each case.

The total number of teachers who have attended these training classes is 4,831 (1,677 men and 3,154 women). In addition 136 teachers (seventeen men and 119 women) of private schools subject to inspection also attended the classes.

The following table shows in detail the number of teachers who have attended the classes held in the several education districts:—