

WRITING.

There is a common tendency for writing to deteriorate in secondary schools. This seems to be due to the fact that the style of writing taught in the public schools is generally of too set and laboured a type, that there is usually no provision in the secondary schools for formal instruction in the subject, and that a great deal more rapid writing is done than in the primary schools. It is noted that in some districts the Inspectors of public schools seem to be giving considerable attention to the securing of greater speed combined with legibility, that less emphasis is being laid on precise conformity to a standard pattern, and more scope being allowed to the individuality of the pupil (see annual reports). If at the same time a reasonable amount of oversight is given in the secondary schools, if less written and more oral work is taken, so that muscular fatigue may cease to be the determining factor of the writing, and if the practice in "free" penmanship, which is already in vogue in some schools, is made more common, then there is hope that the writing of secondary-school pupils may cease to be a byword and a reproach.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

Drill and Physical Exercises.—The time devoted to physical training is a modern feature of our secondary education. All boys' schools have their Cadet companies. The Director of Military Training, in his latest syllabus for Senior Cadets, has very wisely incorporated the lesson of the present war—a lesson taught long ago by Sir John Moore, at Shorncliffe, in his training of Craufurd's immortal Light Division—that formal military drill must be preceded and accompanied by a sound physical training. We find, therefore, that the Cadet syllabus now in force consists mainly of physical exercises intended to develop a strong and well-balanced muscular and nervous system. Most of the Cadet Corps are officered by masters, the training is excellently carried out, and the Senior Cadets attached to secondary schools are admittedly the *corps d'élite* of the Territorial establishment.

A very pleasing feature is the marked improvement during the last few years in physical drill for girls. In several cases a highly qualified specialist is engaged full time for this work, and in nearly all schools the instructors have been through a short course of training in departmental classes. Remedial drill for minor ailments, such as slight curvature, is given by the more skilful instructors. In the physical training of girls the following conditions should be observed:—

First: The exercises should be frequent—once a day if possible.

Second: They should be progressive. The junior pupils should not attempt difficult exercises. The enthusiasm which leads some inexperienced instructors to ask girls to try exercises for which they have not been gradually prepared is a dangerous and misguided enthusiasm.

Third: The periods should be short. There should be no fatigue. For the sake of the mental effect, the exercises should be performed with alacrity and discontinued with reluctance.

SYLLABUS.

The course of study in every secondary school is largely determined by University requirements. As long as men and women are aiming at the same University degree the curriculum of a girls' school will tend to resemble that of a boys' school. In fact, the work is almost identical except for the science and domestic training. We cannot help thinking that there is room for reform here. The whole syllabus of work is often mapped out with a view to a degree course; and so few options are permitted that there is a monotonous sameness of work throughout the school. The individuality of a Principal is restricted by a rigid syllabus to be covered in a set period; a class teacher can display originality only in method and not in subject-matter. Some of the largest schools in the Dominion are the most conservative and offer few separate courses of instruction; they propose to prepare pupils for the University, and they do this well. But is not the system carrying along in its wake great numbers of pupils who might more wisely be studying on different lines?

TONE.

A fine healthy tone prevails in the secondary schools, and this is greatly promoted by the prefect system in vogue in most of them, which, by giving a sense of responsibility to the senior pupils, tends to establish a kind of civic consciousness and dignity. This system of devolution of minor duties and responsibilities should be extended to its utmost limits, so that the democratic ideal of self-government may be approximated to in our schools. This is a fine form of preparation for full citizenship.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, we may say that throughout this report we have endeavoured to offer criticism that is not wholly destructive in character, and we wish finally to add that the staffs of secondary schools have been seriously affected by the war; that a large number of our trained secondary-school teachers are on active service, and their places have been filled by comparatively inexperienced teachers; that the staffs of many schools have been changed over and over again during the last three years, and the continuity of the work has naturally suffered; that the staffing is in many cases below scale, classes being often too large and containing pupils of very unequal attainments; and that Principals are generally teaching full time, and have little opportunity for supervision. In view of all these adverse conditions, it is indeed remarkable how little the secondary schools of the Dominion have suffered during this time of storm and stress, and this satisfactory state of affairs is directly traceable to the loyal determination of those teachers, who, through age, sex, or physical disability, are prevented from going on active military service, to keep the flag flying at home for the sake of their colleagues in the front line.

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T. R. CRESSWELL,
Senior Inspector of Secondary Schools.

The Director of Education, Wellington.