

*Irregular Attendance.*—We would again draw attention to this matter, feeling as we do that until effective remedies are applied the success which ought to attend the efforts of our teachers cannot be fully secured. We are of opinion that a considerable number of children of school age, and living within the distance from school prescribed by law, fail to comply with the attendance clauses of the Education Act, which are most emphatic in demanding the presence of the child at school each time the school is open, unless exemption be granted for some specific reason. It is unnecessary to point out that irregular attendance is fair neither to the child concerned nor to the rest of the school community, besides being against the best interests of the State. In previous reports we gave examples of such irregularity, and do not propose to cover the same ground again, though as a further instance we may mention the case of the children of the Chairman of a School Committee, living close to the school, who failed to attend school for several weeks following a difference of opinion between Chairman and head teacher. There is little doubt that more attention is needed in regard to this important matter, and that the application of whatever efforts are deemed necessary should be extended to all private schools, both primary and secondary, if the latter include pupils of school age.

*Backward Children.*—In our report for 1915 we referred to this matter. The growing necessity for planning out some specially devised scheme of instruction for the subnormal or backward child, who, rightly or wrongly, is to be found in large numbers of our schools, is our reason for again reverting to it. The pupils to whom we refer cannot be called “defectives,” as the term is generally understood, for they are not deficient in many of the essentials that make for integrity, honesty, power of application, and a genuine desire to succeed, but merely incapable of absorbing knowledge and profiting by instruction through the ordinary school channels with the same rapidity and thoroughness as their fellows. This characteristic may be inborn or the result of neglect—physical, mental, or moral—or of illness or of lack of opportunity. Whatever be the cause, it is a serious obstacle both to the child more immediately concerned and to the class in which the child receives instruction. Such pupils cannot keep pace with their fellows, are often found in the same class for several years, and, seeing their class-mates promoted and themselves left behind, gradually lose self-reliance and self-respect, and, as confidence in their ability to succeed continues to weaken, tend to become incapable of effort requiring sustained application. In many of the English schools these children are collected and form special classes—as many as two or three such classes being formed in a school. A special programme of instruction, including a variety of manual occupations, is provided, though the ordinary subjects enter largely into the curriculum. Pupils who make sufficient progress are moved into the ordinary standard classes, and those who are unable to keep pace with the normal child are gradually promoted from the lower to the higher backward class. A most favourable opinion of the plan has already been formed and expressed by those having experience of its operation. The various standards in the school are relieved of a retarding and embarrassing element, and the pupils concerned are trained in directions conducive to their mental and moral development. Some years ago a class for backward children was established in connection with the Auckland Training College, partly with the object of enabling the authorities to gain experience in the special treatment best suited to the child in question, and partly in order to provide students with opportunity for observing approved methods in operation. The experience already gained should be of considerable value in any contemplated extension of the movement, which, we are of opinion, should be no longer delayed. We would like to see two or three classes established in or near Auckland City, one at Hamilton, and another at the Thames. Each class would serve for a group of schools and begin as a junior class. At the end of the first year it would probably be found necessary to set up other junior classes and convert the original classes into ones doing more advanced work. But experience would gradually determine the best methods of extension.

*Physical Training.*—An appreciable number of our teachers fail to recognize the importance of physical training. In many of the larger schools and in some of the smaller ones approved schemes are carefully and methodically applied, but in others, notably those in country districts, the subject fails to receive the attention it deserves. “Properly regulated exercise bears directly upon the functional systems of the body, and especially on those important structures which contain the vital organs and on whose full development the health and functional ability must greatly depend through life. Such exercise will enable a man to prolong and sustain his labours with safety to himself and increased value to his fellow-men.” Physical drill and games should form part of the curriculum in all schools, and should receive the same regular and systematic attention as that bestowed on other subjects. The proposal to report in detail on each teacher in regard to the attention given to and skill shown in directing physical exercises and games, if carried into effect, will tend to emphasize the importance of this portion of child-training. It would appear that classes for training teachers should be held at more or less frequent intervals, partly with the object of adding to the teacher’s knowledge-equipment, and partly in order to increase and sustain the interest already aroused.

*Ventilation of Class-room.*—We have frequently been obliged to draw attention to the want of care shown in respect to the proper ventilation of class-rooms. It is not an uncommon experience to find, on entering a class-room, a close, unpleasant atmosphere, which could easily have been avoided by attention on the part of the teacher to elementary and obvious principles of ventilation, the opening of windows and, if need be, of doors, and the regulation of such special ventilating-apparatus as may be provided. The occupants of a close room may be—indeed, often are—unaware of the conditions obtaining, owing to their gradual growth, so that it is quite possible for teachers and pupils to occupy a room with vitiated atmosphere for quite a long time without being aware of it. Unless a plentiful supply of pure air is available the health of all concerned must suffer and the progress of class or school must of necessity be retarded.

*The Enlargement of Playing-areas.*—One of the most gratifying signs of educational progress is the attention bestowed on the provision of suitable playing-space for school-children. The importance of games and organized activities for which liberal playground area is essential is gradually being recognized, and efforts are being made to enlarge existing playgrounds and to secure ample space when erecting new schools. Many of our schools in the larger centres, however, suffer greatly from want of playing-space, notwithstanding the efforts made of late years to improve matters. If these schools are to remain in their present positions, it will become necessary to face the large outlay necessary to provide them with extended playgrounds and so enable them to develop a highly important phase of physical, moral, and mental training.