

numbers in 1926 were 713 and 76. The number of lower leaving-certificates issued also fell from 110 to 54. Considering the little real use to which the lower certificates can at present be put, the latter set of figures is not at all surprising.

The situation with regard to staffing problems has been easier than for many years past. The improvement is due partly to the steady increase in the number of young teachers offering for secondary work, and partly to the comparatively small increase in the roll numbers of secondary schools in 1927—a reflex, no doubt, of the financial depression in several districts. Whilst the aggregate roll number of secondary pupils increased by approximately 1,700 in 1926, it rose only by 450 in 1927. In several schools, as a matter of fact, the roll actually fell, and it became necessary in a few instances to dispense with the services of a teacher. It was only natural that in these somewhat abnormal circumstances even the remote schools were able to fill vacancies satisfactorily.

Though a majority of the teachers entering the Service last year had passed through a training college, there is undoubtedly still much room for improvement so far as the technical equipment of our young entrants is concerned. Nearly 20 per cent. of them have had no previous training or classroom experience whatsoever. It is gratifying to note, however, that an increasing number of secondary schools have afforded opportunities to senior training-college students for observation and practice. From personal observation one can testify to the excellent work being accomplished in some of the schools under this system, and it is confidently expected that its utility will ensure its continuance until a more comprehensive scheme for the training of secondary-school teachers is evolved.

The position with regard to school curricula remains much as formerly. Apart from those schools to which junior high schools are attached, only a few have had an opportunity within the past year of broadening their curricula in the direction of giving more prominence to the manual arts and crafts on the one hand, and to the more æsthetic but less utilitarian subjects on the other. It is not to be inferred that Principals or Boards are, as a rule, reluctant to organize courses on the lines suggested; but the need for comparatively costly equipment and the difficulty of obtaining properly qualified instructors who are capable of assisting with the ordinary secondary subjects present very real obstacles. It may be noted, however, that, out of the twenty-seven boys' or mixed secondary schools, seventeen of them were last year teaching woodwork and eight of them metalwork also. In some of these it must be admitted that only a limited amount was taught. So far as the æsthetic side is concerned, more definite, though slow, progress has been made, especially in the girls' schools; the subject of drawing, for example, is now being given greater prominence on the time-table in many schools. Five boys' schools, three mixed, and one girls' school now have full-time art teachers on their staffs, whilst in two other instances two schools share full-time teachers between them. At least two other girls' schools were to appoint full-time art and handcraft specialists at the commencement of 1928.

So far as the actual teaching of the usual class-room subjects is concerned, it may confidently be claimed that our secondary-school teachers continue to improve both in equipment and technique. In French, for example, it is now quite exceptional to find a novice who has not been trained in pronunciation, and who has not some idea at least of beginning the subject on modern lines. Some teachers, however, do not yet realize the necessity of thorough and accurate knowledge being acquired by the pupils in the early stages, and there is still a certain proportion of pupils who appear to be gaining no fresh ground in their second year. With regard to a certain number of these a grave question arises as to their aptitude for any foreign language. Though the percentage of pupils learning Latin and French has continued to fall slowly but steadily in the past few years—by 5 per cent. in the case of Latin and by 3 per cent. in the case of French in eight years—yet there is undoubtedly need for some system of testing out and discovering those who will never make anything of such studies.

In connection with French also it may be pointed out that our present system of postponing the commencement of post-primary studies to a comparatively late age places our pupils at a certain disadvantage with regard to text-books. Almost all those written on the most modern lines are designed for pupils beginning the language between eight and ten years of age, and consequently appear childish to our secondary pupils of thirteen or fourteen. This is admittedly a minor point, but to the less-skilled teachers at least the assistance of a suitable text-book is a matter of considerable importance.

Continued attention is being given in all secondary schools to the teaching of English literature, and the old-fashioned formal study of a poem or play has almost entirely disappeared. Need, however, still exists for development of expression on the part of the pupils, and especially in oral expression; in connected and reasoned speech; in expressive and interpretative reading; and, on occasions, in drama. In the more formal aspects of English there is a general recognition among secondary teachers that the grammar taught should be of the universal kind underlying the expression of thought in all language, and not the collection of elaborate definitions and logical puzzles so dear to the old pedantic type of teacher. The "Memorandum on the Teaching of English," recently republished by the Cambridge University Press, has been welcomed by many of our teachers as an inspiring commendation of the methods they themselves have been following more or less closely in the past few years. To those teachers who are unacquainted with the booklet its perusal is unreservedly recommended.

It is not proposed to discuss in detail the standard of teaching in each of the subjects, nor the efficacy or suitability of the methods employed in the various schools. Suffice it to say that the Inspectors have again found, as in the past, that both Principals and assistants are, in the vast majority of cases, alive to modern tendencies and anxious to investigate the possibilities of better methods and better programmes.

In conclusion, I have again to express my appreciation of the loyal and zealous co-operation of my colleagues.

I have, &c.,

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The Director of Education.