

THE AUSTRALIAN Journal of Education

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

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The New Syllabus.

The Syllabus of Instruction recently issued with very full annotations and carefully thought-out suggestive notes, is by far the most important and far-reaching public document that has been issued within recent years from any of our government departments. It gives reasonable definiteness to the curriculum which has been in force for the past twelve months, and makes clear to both teachers and the public the aim of every branch of instruction comprised in our public school curriculum.

Even a cursory examination of last year's syllabus, of which the document before us is an enlarged and skilfully annotated second edition, is sufficient to bring home to us that the old educational order of things under which the work of the schoolmaster—hampered as he was by a relentless examination system—consisted far too largely in the imparting of facts, has passed away, while its place is taken by a system under which the building of character, the training of children to habits of independent thought and the development of strength—mental, moral, and physical—through self-activity receive the fullest prominence.

As Mr. Board indicates in the opening paragraph of the Syllabus: "The school aims at giving to its pupils the moral and physical training, and the mental equipment by which they may qualify themselves to meet the demands of adult life with respect to themselves, the family, society and the State. By its influence upon character it should cultivate habits of thought and action that will contribute both to successful work and to upright conduct, and by the kind of instruction it imparts, it should prepare the pupils for taking up the practical duties of life, and give them tastes and interests that will lead to activities beneficial both to themselves and to the community." This paragraph furnishes, practically, the key to the whole Syllabus.

A wholesome piece of advice is further supplied by the Director, when he says that "the character of the teacher's lessons is determined not by the quantity of the subject matter that enters into his teaching but by the fitness of the subject matter for the powers and needs of the pupil, and the selection of it is regulated, not by what it

is possible for the child to learn, but by what he most needs to know."

The suggested courses of study in the several departments of the curriculum are thoughtfully drawn up, and should prove of considerable assistance to teachers in their endeavour to avoid un-educative methods. We are pleased to note further that in almost every case the lines of study indicated are to be taken as suggestive rather than mandatory. They thus supply the necessary instruction to teachers who are in need of it, and at the same time leave practically a free hand to resourceful teachers, to develop their own ideas and impress their own individuality on their schools. Under this order of things we may reasonably hope for improved efficiency in school work generally, and to an increased interest in their professional work among all ranks of teachers throughout the State.

It would, of course, be absurd for us to claim that the Syllabus is perfect in every particular—for in matters educational, the whole world over, what is suitable to-day is but fit for the scrap heap to-morrow. Where it needs emendation and improvement will become apparent to teachers as they proceed with their task of endeavouring to give effect to its letter and spirit; but we can safely say that, in our view, it is a document that has been carefully drafted on sound pedagogic lines, and is altogether a credit to the gentleman into whose hands the direction of our educational affairs has so recently been entrusted.

Notwithstanding the undoubted merits of the Syllabus, we cannot refrain in conclusion from expressing our firm conviction that in order that the public may reap the best results from its operation, four matters call for the earliest possible attention. These are (i.) the abolition of the Pupil Teacher System, (ii.) the bringing of all our untrained teachers as soon as possible under the stimulating influence of a remodelled training system, (iii.) the more liberal staffing of schools, and (iv.) the issue of a series of departmental "Circulars of Information"—similar to those supplied to teachers in Victoria—setting forth desirable schemes of work, and reasonably full illustrative details as to mode of treatment, apparatus, etc., in connection especially with the Science and Nature Study sections of the Syllabus. And with regard to the Science section we would point out that in consequence of the large amount of attention devoted to the Syllabus to one branch of Physics—and that by no means the most interesting—there may arise among teachers a tendency to devote undue attention to mere rigid weighing and measuring. We need hardly warn teachers that such a course, except in really skilful hands, is likely to make Science work repulsive to children, and may tend to defeat one of the greatest ends of the curriculum, viz., the development in children of an intelligent interest in the nature and operation of the physical forces around them, and a fairly good working knowledge of the build of the universe in which they live and move and have their being.

Public School Teachers' Conference.

Every Conference has its own peculiarities, and conveys its own special lessons to the profession, and also to the public.

The Conference of last month showed in a most marked manner that the P. S. Teachers' Association is gaining more recognition at the hands of the Educational authorities, for not only was it called upon to give a verdict on a proposition emanating from the University, but its deliberations were followed closely by many of the inspectors who have been foremost in their efforts to inculcate the spirit of the "New Syllabus" among their teachers. Moreover, one of the principal speeches was made by the Director of Education, who freely expressed his pleasure at seeing so much self-sacrificing earnestness on the part of the teachers to bring themselves into line with the best thought and practice of the world. Nor was the political element lacking, for not only was the present Minister there to add his quota to the proceedings, but three ex-Ministers, Mr. Perry, Mr. Fegan, and Mr. Garrard, showed by their presence and speeches that their interest in the cause of education did not vanish when they relinquished the emoluments of office. A considerable number of the general public also attended, many of them following every item of the debates with the keenest interest. All this must be extremely gratifying to the ladies and gentlemen who for years have striven, loyally and persistently, to interest the public in the work of the schools, and to improve the methods practised by themselves and their confreres.

The subject matter of the addresses and debates during the two days of the conference sat, bears unmistakable testimony to the fact that the Public School Teachers' horizon is widening so as to embrace everything that tends to the full and perfect education of our youth. This, no doubt, is due in a great measure to the fact that certain percentages of marks for results are no longer demanded, but in their place humane and rational methods, which tend to entice, rather than compel, the pupils in the paths of learning.

Under former conditions, teachers of necessity rather dreaded an influx of the lower class of intellects of which the great mass of non-attenders, poor attenders, and truants is composed, but now the compulsion to obtain "marks" under any circumstances is removed, their human sympathies and patriotic desire for the advancement of all lead them to follow with intense interest such speeches as Dr. Mackellar's on behalf of the State children and Mr. Callaghan's appeal on behalf of the truants.

The discussion on Mr. Swann's proposal to abolish Home Lessons was also instructive in the highest degree. We are not at present concerned with the virtues or vices of the home lesson system, but we are concerned with the attitude of the teachers towards the subject, for here again we see evidence of the beneficent influence of the discontinuance of the "marks" style of