

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE
SCHOOLS OF
GREAT BRITAIN,
BELGIUM, AND GERMANY**

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Observations on the Schools of Great Britain, Belgium, and Germany by Committee of Pittsburgh teachers

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COMMITTEE OF PITTSBURGH TEACHERS

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ON THE SCHOOLS OF
GREAT BRITAIN, BELGIUM, AND GERMANY

—BY A—

COMMITTEE OF PITTSBURGH TEACHERS,

APPOINTED BY THE

CENTRAL BOARD OF EDUCATION,

MADE DURING A TOUR
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

THE NATIONAL CIVIC FEDERATION
OF THE UNITED STATES.

1908

*To the Central Board of Education, and Mr. Samuel Andrews,
Superintendent of Schools, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

GENTLEMEN:—

We wish to express our gratitude for the advantages of travel and education afforded us, and to our Central Board of Education, who so generously provided for our absence; to Mr. Mosely, who was the originator of the plan by which the American teachers were permitted to enjoy this extraordinary privilege; to the National Civic Federation, who so ably assisted him in his work; and to Mr. J. Bruce Ismay, President of the International Marine Company, who arranged for the voyage. Great preparations were made for our entertainment while we were in Great Britain, and every person interested in education was anxious to make our visit a success. We were, indeed, accorded an almost royal welcome. Our Ambassador, Mr. Whitelaw Reid, and Mrs. Reid, graciously received the American teachers at Dorchester House. We were entertained by Mr. Alfred Mosely and many other persons of note. The London Teachers' Association extended to us every courtesy, making us honorary members of their Association. Through the efforts of the Educational Committee of the London County Council, we were everywhere met by committees, who were delighted to receive the American teachers. We wish to express our thanks to these various committees for their untiring efforts in our behalf, which enabled us to visit the particular institutions in which we were most interested.



GREAT BRITAIN.

SCHOOL CONTROL.

1. The "Board of Education," is the central authority, entrusted by Parliament with the duty of supervising all branches of education throughout the whole of England.

2. The "London County Council" is the local authority responsible for all grades of education within the County of London. Practically the whole of the elementary education in London is under the Council's control. At the same time the Council works in close association with the Board of Education.

3. The "Education Committee" is composed of fifty members, of whom thirty-eight are members of the Council. The powers and duties of the Education Committee are distributed among eleven sub-committees. The Education Committee is open to the public and meets every Wednesday at the County Hall.

All matters relating to the exercise of the Council's powers under the Education Acts, except the power of raising taxes or borrowing money, stand referred by statute to the Education Committee; and the Council before exercising any such powers, unless in its opinion the matter is urgent, receives and considers the report of the Education Committee with respect to the matter in question. The Council may delegate to the Education Committee any of its powers under the Education Acts except its power of raising taxes or borrowing money.

In the management of its own secondary schools, training colleges, technical institutes and schools of art, the Education Committee is assisted by advisory or local sub-committees. The Council also appoints representatives to serve upon the governing bodies of all schools and institutions to which it makes grants.

The Council spends annually, in round figures, five and a half millions, sterling, on education; £4,500,000 on elementary schools, and £1,000,000 on higher schools. The receipts amount

to £1,750,000; the rest of the cost falls on the tax payer. The education tax is 19d. per pound; a penny rate produces about £185,000.

So far as the actual management of the schools is concerned, there is still a distinction between schools provided by the local education authority—in London, the County Council—and those not so provided; but the whole duty of maintaining the work of instruction in the schools, not including equipment, is laid upon the local authority, and the same scale of salaries, and in most cases the same regulations, are in force in both types of schools. The schools that were formerly known as the "voluntary" schools are now known as "non-provided" schools, since the buildings are provided by persons other than the local authority.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND ETHICS.

Religious instruction is part of the curriculum of each school. One-half hour a day is devoted to it. The Committee arranges a plan of Scripture instruction for each year of the pupils' school course. Certain parts must be memorized, and certain chapters of the Bible are read to each grade each morning. Any pupil whose parents object to his participating in this period of religious instruction may devote the time to secular subjects.

Moral instruction, or ethics, forms an important part of the curriculum of every elementary school. Such instruction is given mostly incidentally, and as fitting opportunity arises in the ordinary routine of lessons. We met but one Head Mistress who believed in the formal teaching of ethics. The instruction is especially directed to the inculcation of courage, truthfulness, cleanliness of mind, body and speech, the love of fair play, consideration and respect for others, gentleness to the weaker, kindness to animals, self-control and temperance, self-denial, love of one's country, and appreciation of nature and art. The teaching is brought home to the children by reference to their actual surroundings in town or country, and is illustrated as vividly as possible by stories, poems, quotations, proverbs, and examples drawn from history and biography. The object of this instruction is the formation of character and habits of life and thought, and an appeal is made to the feelings and the personalities of the children. The natural moral responsiveness of the

child must be stirred or else no moral instruction will be likely to be fruitful.

In non-provided schools religious instruction may be and usually is of a denominational character. In the schools provided by the Council the Bible is read, and there are given such explanations and such instruction therefrom in the principles of the Christian religion and of morality as are suited to the capacities of children, provided always that in such explanations and instruction the provisions of the Elementary Education Act relative to undenominational instruction and conscience are strictly observed, both in letter and spirit, and that no attempt is made in any such schools to attach children to any particular denomination.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASSIFICATION.

In London there are now 543 provided or London County Schools, with an accommodation for 603,952 children, and an average attendance of 505,698; and 371 non-provided schools, with accommodations for 159,623, and an average attendance of 145,163. In a city so large as London there are naturally vast divergences between the special requirements of the different districts, and the class and type of school varies accordingly. The more advanced type of instruction is provided in higher elementary and higher grade schools, which are recruited from the most competent pupils from the lower elementary schools.

The age of compulsory attendance at an elementary school is from 5 to 14, although exemption can be obtained on certain conditions after the age of 12. Children under 5, but over 3, are admitted. The enforcement of school attendance employs a large body of officers. The average attendance is, however, maintained at 88.9 per cent. of the average roll, with relatively few references to the magistrate. The 11.1 per cent. absent includes scholars absent through illness, etc.

On first attending school a child is enrolled in the infant department. About the age of 7 he is promoted to the senior department. Senior departments are organized as for boys only and for girls only, or else as mixed departments. Sometimes there is a junior mixed department, with senior departments for boys only and for girls only. As a rule a department of a school does not accommodate more than 350 children. There are, how-

ever, important exceptions. Each school is composed of three departments, Infant Department, Girls' Seniors, and Boys' Seniors. It is illegal for pupils to remain in elementary schools beyond the school year in which they attain the age of 15. In higher elementary and higher grade schools they are expected to remain until that age.

Much attention has been given to medical inspection, a comprehensive system having already been established before the passing of the Education Act, 1907, which imposes such inspection as a statutory duty upon local authorities.

The names of children who are not provided with shoes, or not sufficiently clothed, and who are in attendance at the schools, are included in the list of "necessitous" children, submitted to the Children's Care Committee. The Committee, if satisfied as to the circumstances of the parents, endeavors to arrange for the provision of shoes or clothing, either from articles supplied by charitable persons to the schools, or from funds supplied locally.

There is usually an independent head teacher for each department, but, as an experiment, the Council has recently founded two large mixed schools under one head master with head assistants in charge of the senior mixed, junior mixed and infant departments. The object of this type of organization is to secure greater coördination of the work of different departments.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS.

When one beholds the venerable university buildings of Oxford—"New College" is five hundred years old—one is attracted by the architectural beauty of the massive structures dating from mediaeval times. This is a striking contrast to the austere school buildings of modern England. The schools of Great Britain, particularly the elementary schools, do not occupy so prominent a place before the public as do the common schools of America. We, at times, sacrifice utility to architectural effects; yet this is preferable to the entire absence of decorative detail in most English schools, which is depressing. Frequently the site chosen is off from the main street, and one is not aware of the proximity of a school until one sees a gateway with the words "Boys"—"Girls" printed over it in large letters. In

some cases, when the street is noisy, this seclusion has its advantages.

The school building, a four story structure, is situated in the centre of a large open space. This space on each side of the building is devoted to playgrounds, one for the boys and one for the girls. These are separated by a high wooden fence. Surrounding the girls' playground are the buildings devoted to manual training and domestic science, if the school happens to be an industrial training center. At times, the cooking department is in the main building. There is an entrance at each end of the building, and also one opening into the large assembly room on the ground floor. The boys have a separate exit to their playground, also.

Stone stairways, steep and dark, with many turnings, lead to the corridors, which have no outside light. A strange arrangement is that a number of the rooms open into one another, having no direct exit to the corridors. The classrooms are usually unilaterally lighted with a sufficient number of windows, which reach to the ceiling. There is always enough space around the building to admit adequate light.

The size of rooms varies greatly, especially in the older schools, measuring at the most 25x28 feet. In the most modern buildings no room in a senior department is constructed to accommodate more than 40 children, and none in an infant department for more than 48. Classes of 50 pupils and over occupy these rooms frequently, though the legal average in an elementary school is forty-five pupils to each teacher. The average number of children per class teacher, throughout the service, has been steadily decreasing of late years, and is now 45.8 for London County Council, and 38.8 for non-provided schools. We were told that there is a movement on foot to lower the average.

We saw few wardrobes. Generally pupils' wraps were hung on racks provided for the purpose in the corridors. The sanitary arrangements are primitive and inadequate. They do not tend to promote correct hygienic conditions. The heating and ventilating system is very simple. In a few schools steam heating is used; but mostly the old fashioned stove with coal scuttle seemed to be the approved method of supplying warmth. The ventilating is done by opening the windows. Even on cold days the windows are all lowered at least six inches, so that the