

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

REPORT BY H. M. INSPECTORS ON

Wheatley County Secondary School,
Oxfordshire

INSPECTED ON 28th, 29th and 30th JUNE, 1955

NOTES

THIS REPORT is confidential and may not be published save by the express direction of the competent authority of the School. If published it must be published in its entirety.

The copyright of the Report is vested in the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. The Controller has no objection to the reproduction of the Report provided that it is clearly understood by all concerned in the reproduction that the copyright is vested in him.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CURZON ST., W.1.

S.M. 143/55

Nature and Scope

This school was opened in September 1950 with the intention that it should ultimately become a three-form-entry school. It has hitherto provided for children of secondary age from the areas served by the Primary Schools at Sandhills (on the outskirts of Oxford), Beckley, Stanton St. John and Wheatley itself. With the exception of Beckley these schools were all-age schools up to

1950. In September 1954 first-year entrants were also admitted from Horspath, Garsington and Cuddesdon, villages which previously contributed to the Northfield Secondary School at Littlemore. It is expected that pupils from Sandhills School will go on to the new secondary school in Marston when this is built, and that seniors from the present all-age school at Great Haseley will eventually come to Wheatley.

From 1950 until the current year the roll at the beginning of school year has remained steadily between 280 and 300, with an annual entry of between 70 and 80 pupils. This year the admission of children from three additional villages, together with an exceptionally big entry from Sandhills, the largest contributory school, raised the first year group to 130 and the total roll to 348; It is clear that with the alteration of the catchment area an entry of at least three forms and possibly four must be expected in future.

At the end of their second year in this school pupils may sit for the entrance examination to the County's Secondary Technical Schools for boys and girls at Rycotewood, Thame, and at Gillotts House, Henley respectively, or for the Oxford School of Technology. From 8 to 10 pupils annually gain places at one or other of these schools and the third and fourth year forms at Wheatley are to that extent impoverished. Records for the last three years of the 50 to 60 boys and girls who have left the school each year on reaching the age of 15 show that a considerable number of the boys enter skilled trades, often as apprentices, but that only 2 or 3 each year go to work on farms. Among the girls there has been a marked trend during the last year away from shops and into clerical work in various firms and factories in Oxford.

Governing Body

The Instrument of Government provides that the Governing Body shall consist of eleven Representative Governors and one Co-optative Governor who shall be nominated by the Parents' Association, when one exists, or otherwise shall be a parent of a pupil attending the school. Seven of the Representative Governors are appointed by the Oxfordshire Education Committee, one by the Bullingdon Rural District Council and the other three by the Parish Councils of Wheatley, Forest Hill with Shotover, and Stanton St. John respectively. The Governors are keenly interested in the welfare of the school.

Buildings and Equipment

The building was planned as a first instalment of a three-form-entry school and it was originally intended that the second instalment should follow closely on the first, but building restrictions and the prior claims of other projects have so far made this impossible. Hitherto the building, in spite of two important omissions, has provided reasonably well for the needs of what has been in effect

large two-form-entry school. But now that the size of the entry has been increased pressure on accommodation is beginning to be felt and will become increasingly acute. The school contains eight classrooms, two of them large rooms equipped for Art and Needlework, a Science laboratory, two practical rooms (for Housecraft and Handicraft), a large, fine hall with a stage and dressing rooms, a kitchen capable of providing 400 meals, and a dining room. There are at present 11 classes and next year there will be at least 12 and possibly 13. Already one class is accommodated in the dining room, to the great detriment of the service of meals, and two others in small quite unsuitable rooms never intended for teaching purposes. Three additional classrooms have been sanctioned, but even when these are completed they will do little more than give relief to present over-crowding and will not really provide adequately either for the extra large numbers which must be expected for the next three or four years or for the twelve or thirteen classes which will presumably be the school's normal complement.

Apart from these problems of overcrowding the two major deficiencies in the present accommodation are the absence of a gymnasium, with appropriate changing accommodation, and the lack of a full-sized, properly equipped Library. The educational disadvantages of these omissions are elaborated in later sections. It is enough to say here that while the Headmaster and his staff have done much, by skilful organisation on the one hand and by a good deal of 'self-help' in raising money for books and shelving on the other, to mitigate these disadvantages, they will be increasingly felt as the school grows in size, and the absence of a Library in particular is bound to have a limiting effect on classroom work. It is clearly desirable that both deficiencies should be made good as soon as possible and the need for a suitable room for the teaching of Music ought not to be overlooked when new building is done.

Sanitary offices and cloakroom accommodation on the girls' side only just suffice for present numbers and additional provision will be needed if numbers increase. The staff common room too, originally planned only as an auxiliary staff room, is not very large. It is comfortably furnished with arm chairs but requires more writing tables and shelving for those who work here in their free periods.

The buildings themselves are dignified and attractive and their good state of maintenance is an indication of the appreciation felt for them by those who work in them. Outside unfortunately the tale is rather different. The site is a large one and, apart from the playing fields proper, 'there is a considerable amount of spare land around the school, some of which will no doubt later be needed for building. Nearly all the work of getting the grounds into order after the builders had left has been undertaken by the boys and their Gardening master, and their achievement in laying out lawns and flower beds as well as preparing the school garden proper, is most creditable. But there remain stretches of ground which they have not been able to tackle, both close to the school and at the far end of the site, and these present an untidy appearance quite at variance with standards elsewhere on the premises. The unsatisfactory state of the playing fields is described in the section on Physical Education. Their condition is attributable partly to the difficult nature of the soil but mainly to serious mistakes in the initial preparation which have rendered a large part of this generous site ineffective for purposes of games. Improvements are likely to be costly but it is much to be hoped that something can be done, and in particular that some of the derelict space near the school can be used to provide additional tennis courts, so that this game at least can play a part in class instruction.

The needs of the Library are discussed in the section which follows. In most other respects the school is quite well equipped, but it does not possess enough textbooks for each pupil to keep in his own possession those which he is using for the current term and most sets have to be gathered up between lessons and carried from one class to another. It is understood that the school received no

capital grant for equipment when it was first opened. Some such grant now would make it possible to bring the supply of books up to the standard usually thought desirable in secondary schools.

Library

A Library was not included in the first instalment of the school. A pleasant room, of less than classroom size, situated over the main entrance, was scheduled as a staff common room, but from the outset it was taken into use as a reading room. Within the last two years this room has been attractively furnished with tables and chairs and a small amount of shelving, and, partly from its own funds, partly from extra grants from the Authority, the school has gathered together a small nucleus of books, about 1100 in all, half fiction and half reference. This in itself is no slight achievement and great efforts are made to get the books well used. Every pupil is expected to have one book from the fiction section in his or her desk for private reading, and such books may, with permission be taken home; about 100 books from the County Library are also available for borrowing. In addition each form has a weekly period in the Library with the librarian, during which the reference section is used, and an elaborate scheme has been drawn up, by a librarian who has now left, as to how these periods should be employed.

In fact neither the room nor the collection of reference books is really large enough for the sort of work that most classes are being expected to do in the library periods; nor are most of the children capable of profitably using books 'for information' without more detailed guidance than one teacher, taking them once a week, in isolation, is likely to be able to provide.

Ways and means were discussed during the inspection of making these library periods more effective. The essential is that more of the staff should be concerned with the work done in them, and that this should often arise from, or be related to, classroom work in one or other of the ordinary school subjects. Rather less rigidity in requiring written and illustrated records in every case might also further the main aim of such periods which must be, first and foremost, to stimulate reading. More space and more books are of course prime needs. But some improvements in these respects could be effected even before it becomes possible to build a proper library, if grants could be substantially increased and if an adjacent room - possibly the so-called projection room opposite - could be used as an 'overflow' reading room.

Staff

The Headmaster, who was for fifteen years in charge of a small secondary school in the south of the County was appointed to this school when it opened. He has given it from the beginning a positive

leadership, inspired by high standards and a strong sense of purpose, which has done more than any other one thing to weld the school into a community. He takes a regular share in the teaching at all stages and makes it his business to get to know all the children individually; with the minimum parade of direction his influence is felt in every part of the school's life.

His 14 assistants (one of whom only gives half-time service) are all comparatively young; seven are under 30 and all the rest are under 40; only seven have been with the school since it opened and one of those is leaving this term; five were appointed during the current school year and there have also been a good number of intermediate changes. This instability is attributed to housing difficulties which are acute in this area and which have undoubtedly narrowed the field of recruitment; it is no doubt also partly due to the low average age of the staff which is bound to entail a certain amount of movement. Qualifications are in general suitable and adequate, but there is at present no member of the staff with any special interest in Religious instruction, and Science and Mathematics are also rather short of teaching power. A Mistress has however just joined the staff who followed a degree course in Mathematics and who might well take a lead in this department. Numerically the staff is barely adequate; one additional appointment has been sanctioned for September and the rising numbers would justify a second addition. It will be important in making future appointments to look carefully at the special training and interests of applicants, so that weak subjects may be strengthened and the best possible use made of the teaching power available. In spite of the many changes and of their relative youth and inexperience the staff work well together as a team and respond generously to the Headmaster's leadership.

The present Senior Mistress, who is only in her sixth year of teaching, succeeded to the post at the beginning of the current term when her predecessor, who was equally young, resigned. She is still, naturally, feeling her way but she takes a serious and sensible view of her responsibilities and as she gains in confidence she should be able to make a most valuable contribution to the life of the whole school as well as, more specifically, to the welfare of the girls. It is desirable that everything possible should be done to establish the importance of her office in the eyes of children, staff and parents.

Organisation, Curriculum and Standards of Work

Although in theory this was a two-form-entry school until this year, the size of the entry - nearer 80 than 70 - has always been so large that it was found desirable almost from the beginning to organise each of the first two years of the course in three classes, an A and a B form list each year and two small 'retarded' classes known as 1R and 2R. The present 2R contains five third year pupils and the present 1R a very backward boy, transferred from a Special School, who will be 15 next term. The slight reduction in numbers in the third year, owing to the exodus to Secondary Technical Schools, has made it possible for the third and fourth year pupils to be grouped in two large forms in each year. The abnormally large entry this year necessitated four first year forms, 1a, 1b, 1c and 1R.

The range of ability among the pupils is wide; perhaps more than usually so here because of the wide differences in home environment, from the suburban estates on the edge of Oxford to the small, isolated villages where communications with larger centres are still relatively difficult; and it is good to find the organisation taking account of these differences. Nevertheless H.M. Inspectors were not wholly convinced that the present form divisions are the most satisfactory that could be devised.

The two retarded classes, because of their small size, are housed in two very small rooms which are not suitable as classrooms. The Mistress who took most of their work in English subjects left at Easter and at the time of the inspection no one teacher was properly in charge of the work in either class. With the

exception of a small number of children of obviously low Intelligence, It did not seem to the Inspectors that most of the members of these classes were markedly Inferior In ability or attainments to their contemporaries In the lower ranges of the B forms. This may be a tribute to the sound remedial work done earlier in the year, but it prompts a doubt as to whether these small classes, taught under rather unsatisfactory conditions, are really Justified either in the Interests of the backward children themselves, some of whom seemed to be marking time, or for the main body of pupils who at present have to be taught In groups which considerably exceed the regulation maximum of 30. A *more* satisfactory arrangement might be to create a small retarded class for remedial purposes In the first year only, such a class could cater also for really dull children In the second year and It ought to be put In the charge of a sympathetic form teacher for nearly all Its work. In subsequent years the pupils could be allotted to form units of more even size, and perhaps regrouped In 'sets' for English and Mathematics. If it were possible to make four 'sets' out of three forms these two Important subjects could be taught to relatively small groups.

A second point discussed with the Headmaster concerned the division of the school day. A change has recently been made to an eight-period day, not by any lengthening of the total time, but by reducing the length of the afternoon periods from 45 and 40 minutes to 35 or 30 minutes each. The change was designed to shift the balance of time In favour of both English and practical work at the expense of other subjects In the curriculum, notably Physical Education. Whatever the advantages of this redistribution may be, experience has shown that on the whole periods of less than 40 minutes are too short to be satisfactory In a secondary school; it would probably be wiser to keep to seven periods of at least 40 minutes' duration each day and to examine very critically the use that Is made of the 35 periods then available during the week.

Mathematics, for example, gets generous time, but many of those who teach It have no great Interest in or gift for the subject. If, as is suggested later, the teaching were concentrated in fewer hands, It would probably be found possible to achieve the same, or even better, results with rather fewer teaching periods. Similarly certain modifications In the organisation of Science which are discussed in the section on that subject might incidentally lead to some economy of time; and so too would the Incorporation of 'Current Events' Into History and Geography and the abolition of the corporate hymn practice.

One further matter of organisation merits attention In future planning: namely the provision of one or two alternative courses In the third or fourth years so that boys and girls may have some

opportunity to follow Individual tastes and aptitudes in, for example, Science or English or the Arts.

Standards of work are in general satisfactory. The presentation of written work in particular is, in all subjects, much above average in neatness and care. The Headmaster's desire to secure full x measure of work from his pupils has led him to institute a short period of Homework, about half an hour a night, for all forms, during the two winter terms. The system seems to be successful and may well have contributed to the good attitude to work and to the sense of continuity of study which was observable all through the school. Sound work is being done in practical subjects too-, particularly in Needlework, and Physical Education reaches a good standard in spite of the limited facilities.

Subjects of Teaching

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Two periods a week are allotted to Religious Instruction in all forms and at the time of this visit seven members of staff were sharing in the teaching. Though all are interested and conscientious none has so far made any special study or

done much background reading in this subject. The school has drawn up its own selection of topics from the West Riding Agreed Syllabus which has been adopted in the County. The two weekly lessons are regularly divided between Old and New Testament and in some forms they are taken by different teachers. For administrative reasons unconnected with the subject itself boys and girls are sometimes taught separately and when this happens there is a wide range of ability in the classes, which must to some extent limit what can be attempted in written expression.

It is suggested that some reconsideration should be given to the organisation of this subject within the school. It might be found desirable to concentrate the teaching in fewer hands but in any case no form should have its work divided between two teachers. If it proves impossible to appoint a teacher with any special qualifications, or knowledge, one or two members of the present staff might be prepared to undertake some extra study and reading such as would enable them to act as leaders of a team and advisers to the Headmaster. If the scheme of work were made more flexible it would not be necessary always to teach Old and New Testament simultaneously and it would be easier to maintain interest if one topic could be pursued continuously over a consecutive series of lessons.

In the lessons themselves more might perhaps be done to develop links with other subjects in the curriculum such as History, Geography and Art, and to make use of freely written English for recording; and, finally, the importance of regular testing to ensure that some factual knowledge has been assimilated should not be overlooked.

ENGLISH

An experienced Master who holds an external London degree in French and who is particularly interested in dramatic work is in general charge of English. He takes all the work of the third and fourth years and of 2A and teaches Drama throughout the school. The two retarded classes were being taken temporarily this term by a newly appointed Mistress whose main interest is in Mathematics and the rest of the first and second year work was shared among three other Mistresses.

From 6 to 8 periods are at present given to English by all classes; these include one Drama lesson, which takes place whenever possible in the Hall, and one period in the Library taken by the librarian. Many of the periods are only of half an hour's duration.

A sensible well balanced scheme of work has been drawn up. Particularly good features are the serious attention given to free composition and the provision of regular opportunities for the class study and discussion of selected books and extracts. The lessons of this latter kind which were observed were well conducted and it was suggested that even more time might be found for this valuable form of work - perhaps at the expense of other sections of the syllabus - and that experiment should be made in broadening the range and improving the literary quality of the books read. Poetry, too, ought to find a more important niche than it does at present in the literature course.

The quality of the work done in written composition is unusually high, particularly in the classes taken by the Master, not only in the standard of presentation, but in correctness and fluency of expression. Perhaps partly owing to the judicious selection of subjects many of the children have come to be keenly interested in writing and take great pains over their compositions, which are usually prepared at home. Even in the B forms, where writing is naturally found harder, the standard is quite a good one.

There was some discussion during the inspection of the amount and kind

of formal written exercises which are desirable. The Master on the whole uses composition manuals' with discrimination and concentrates mainly on 'comprehension' exercises of a profitable kind, which are discussed orally before being written; but some of his less experienced colleagues spend time on exercises of a rather trivial character which are not likely to enlarge their pupils' powers.

The work of the retarded classes has already been referred to; so far as English is concerned it was seen at an inconvenient transitional moment under a newly appointed teacher. Apart from four or five very backward children in the first year, reading difficulties seemed to have been very successfully mastered and a number of the children, especially those in 2R, can achieve quite a measure of written expression.

A regular, graded course in Drama on sound lines is given to all classes. It includes mime and improvisation as well as play reading, and provides the background to the large-scale school productions which are undertaken each year. It was not possible to see much of this work on this visit, but on an earlier occasion it was very fully discussed, and one or two suggestions were offered. If the quality of speech can be improved and some more definite training given in movement these drama lessons should make a valuable contribution to the children's whole education.

In general it can be said that the work in English is in a very healthy state and on certain sides it reaches a standard much above what is usually found in schools of this kind.

HISTORY

The teaching of History is shared between the Senior Mistress, who took History as an advanced subject in her Training College course and a young graduate in her first year of teaching who holds a second class honours degree in History of London and who did a year's professional training at Cambridge. Both were appointed at the beginning of the current school year and at the time of the inspection the Senior Mistress was teaching all forms in the second, third and fourth years, except 2R, and her colleague was responsible for the remainder of the work, most of which she had taken over since Easter from a Mistress who left then. When the time-table is remade next year it will no doubt be possible to arrange a more even distribution of the work.

The existing syllabus has wisely been accepted as it stood but the Senior Mistress proposes to make substantial modifications next year. It is certainly at present too long and too full for more than a very superficial treatment to be possible of all the topics included in it. Some pruning of its contents seems desirable, and in particular some reconsideration of the fourth year course, where the study of parliamentary institutions and of the history of education, and the tracing of 'lines of development' in housing, transport and the like have not proved very successful.

Commendation is due to the well kept written records. Dictated notes have gradually given way to carefully guided 'free' notes, which may perhaps in future be more often expanded into a slightly longer free narrative; sensible use is also made in the notebooks of maps and diagrams. Except in the fourth year the classes seen appeared to be interested in their history lessons and to have retained a fair amount of what they had recently been taught. As the two Mistresses get to know their pupils better they will become increasingly aware of the difficulties which their subject presents, and even more alive than they are at present to the need to use every device to give life and vividness to the historical story and to employ frequent revision in order to correct misunderstanding and ensure that a minimum of significant fact is remembered.

GEOGRAPHY

Each class has two geography lessons a week. The four first year forms are taught by a young graduate Mistress and all the other forms by the Senior Master. Both teachers succeed in arousing their pupils' interest and in securing a good standard of performance from their classes. The Master gives opportunities for boys and girls in the upper forms to make special individual studies of general topics of their own choice, with most encouraging results. This method of teaching might well be adopted occasionally with the younger forms also when there are sufficient suitable books in the Library to allow it.

The stated aim of the syllabus is "to train children to realise how the conditions under which men live have helped to mould their lives and activities". The emphasis therefore is upon human and regional geography, though physical geography is not entirely neglected. Some rearrangement of the syllabus so that the heavy load of physical geography now included in the work of the first year was spread more evenly through the course would be profitable. Physical geography could then be related more effectively to the work in Science and Mathematics and time made available in the early stages when they are most appropriate for simple exercises in map making and map reading and for other local geography. It might also be useful to reconsider whether it is better to cover the whole world superficially as is done at present or to make a closer study of a few selected regions.

On the whole the textbooks are suitable and well used, as are also the few reference books in the Library. There is a need for more atlases and wall maps, and for illustrative material generally, but probably more reference books is the most urgent need. The pupils work well; their written work is good and they clearly enjoy and gain much from their geography lessons.

MATHEMATICS

The Senior Master and a newly appointed Mistress share the teaching of the Second, Third and Fourth Forms while four other teachers, not necessarily the form teachers, take the work in the first year and the retarded forms. The Headmaster teaches surveying to the boys in their fourth year, and takes the First Forms for one period each week. The boys also have lessons in technical drawing associated with their Handicraft course.

The teaching varies considerably in its effectiveness; nowhere is it particularly outstanding or enterprising, though in general it is careful and thorough. The work included in the syllabus for the first year is largely diagnostic and remedial; suggestions are also made for the standardisation of methods and the eradication of weaknesses. There is a danger, however, that concentration upon the consolidation of the ground covered in the primary schools to the exclusion of new and more exhilarating work may lead to a loss of momentum in the subject. For this reason it is suggested that the teaching should be in the hands of fewer teachers, though there is much to be said for the retarded forms being taught by their form teachers, and that a broader view should be taken of Mathematics from the earliest stages. Thus, the arithmetical examples might more often be based upon material in everyday use, such as ready reckoners, bus and railway time-tables, and almanacs, the work on graphical representation might be extended beyond simple graphs, and more general use might be made of algebraic and geometrical methods where they are appropriate.

The syllabus provides for pupils of different abilities and also makes some valuable suggestions for practical work, though these tend to become overlooked in the translation of the syllabus into practice because of an over-emphasis upon drill and mechanical mastery of processes.

The exercise books are exceptionally neat and the exercises are carefully corrected. Greater insistence upon written statements to explain the working on paper and more varied oral work would help the pupils to approach unfamiliar mathematical situations more confidently and more surely than they do at

present.

SCIENCE AND GARDENING

Although facilities for the teaching of Science are quite good the work suffers from a fundamental weakness. In the organisation of the teaching which prevents a satisfactory, unified course being followed by both boys and girls. In the first and second years, biology is taught to full classes by the Mistress responsible for Physical Education, or in the case of Form 1R, by the Domestic Subjects Mistress. In addition, the boys receive three or four periods a week of Science and Gardening from the specialist Master. In the third and fourth years the girls have two periods a week of biology while the boys do surveying or practical drawing, and the boys have three or four periods of Science and Gardening while the girls do Needlework. These arrangements make it impossible to relate the Science sufficiently to the Gardening without introducing inappropriate material for the girls who do no gardening, and virtually impossible to provide for the girls a suitable general course which includes elementary chemistry and physics as well as biology. Possible solutions to this problem would be either to separate boys and girls for all their Science lessons, or to provide a general course common to all boys and girls, with or without Gardening as a separate subject for boys only. As the site includes five acres of land suitable for development as a small holding and the school hopes to develop a rural bias at some time in the future, there are obvious attractions in the idea of a rural science course open to both boys and girls, possibly as an alternative to some other course of studies.

There is a good laboratory though it is not very generously equipped with apparatus. Because of the division of classes into two for Science many Science lessons have to be taken in ordinary classrooms and some classes never have the opportunity to handle apparatus; this is all the more regrettable because, when the boys are actually working in the garden, the laboratory, for which their lesson is time-tabled, lies empty. About an acre of garden and flower borders round the school buildings is under cultivation. The boys have undertaken large scale construction work as part of their Handicraft and Gardening lessons and the whole lay-out of the grounds is an attractive one. Another acre of land was at one time under arable cultivation but this has now been abandoned pending a decision on the introduction of an agricultural course with the opening up of the extra five acres now under grass and the provision of the necessary machinery. The Master in charge of the Science and Gardening is leaving at the end of this term and, as the amount of maintenance work in the garden is already as much as his successor is likely to be able to cope with at the beginning. It would be unwise to launch out on any large scale schemes until the new Master has had time to settle down.

There is a small flock of poultry and a few stocks of bees which together form the basis of a small course in Rural Work taken by the Headmaster with boys of the Third Forms.

In spite of the unsatisfactory nature of the course some quite good work is being done both in the biology and in Science and Gardening lessons. The lessons heard during the inspection were well prepared and the pupils took an active and appropriate part.

NEEDLECRAFT AND HOUSECRAFT

A part-time experienced Mistress is in charge of this subject, and she and another Mistress share the teaching of Needlecraft throughout the school. The allocation and arrangement of time for each form is satisfactory, and the classes are held in a form room which is suitably furnished with tables and chairs, and well equipped for Needlecraft.

The general approach to the work, has been adapted to the current interests of the girls in the craft as a whole, and a good deal of interest has been revived

In embroidery, quilting and patchwork. In the scheme of work there is an emphasis on simple dressmaking, and opportunities are provided for making clothes and personal possessions to suit the individual. The patterns are simple and good and the girls work with interest and achieve very creditable results. There is a good supply of reference books and every opportunity is given to the girls to use these and to widen their interest in needlecraft.

Housecraft is taught throughout the school by a fully qualified mistress who has been here for five years. A very pleasant room has been well equipped for this subject, and is maintained at a high standard. The scheme has been carefully planned and the girls learn to think and act for themselves. There is a reasonable supply of both text and reference books. Some good practical work was done by the girls during the inspection, and they showed great interest in this craft.

HANDICRAFT AND TECHNICAL DRAWING

A spacious workshop which is generously equipped for a major course in woodwork and for a considerable range of metalworking processes and which is presided over by a keen specialist teacher, provides excellent facilities for a liberal course in handicraft for all boys in the school. Early attention to basic skills lays the foundation for subsequent individual work which reaches satisfactory standards and in which boys are able to carry out jobs planned to meet their personal needs or to provide amenities of one sort or another in the school. Fittings and equipment made for the stage, for the library and for the school garden all bear witness to the lively part which the workshop and its occupants play in the life of the school. Various details in connection with the development of the middle stages of the course to bring greater understanding of typical constructional units and of planning and setting-out were discussed with the master during the inspection.

Such drawing as is considered necessary is done in the workshop as part of the handicraft course although the fourth year boys have, since Easter, been given additional time for technical drawing. The aims of this branch of the work are generally sound and the boys are acquiring a fair knowledge of draughtsmanship and of the conventions used in graphical representation. Certain modifications of the course, aimed in particular at complementary development in work on the drawing board and at the bench, would add to its value.

The handicraft workshop, already a lively place, can be expected to play an increasingly valuable part in the education of the boys- and of the less able boys in particular.

ART AND CRAFT

All children in the school have a weekly art lesson of two or three periods. The room in which they are taught is light and spacious, with excellent display space on one wall. There are several useful easels, but the tables now in use are heavy and cumbersome and, when the opportunity occurs, might well be replaced by lighter furniture which can be moved more easily.

The present art master has been teaching at the school for less than one term, after several years' experience of teaching much younger children. It is too early, as yet, to judge the results of his work, but he has brought to his new task unbounded enthusiasm and interest, and has produced a comprehensive and ambitious scheme of work which he has already begun to put into practice. The children paint happily in his classes, and though the pictures they produce are not in any way distinguished, the interest which has been aroused should in time produce fruitful results.

Pottery has recently been introduced, and useful experiments in primitive

methods have been made; little development can take place In this craft, however, until the school has been equipped with a kiln, and If possible at least one wheel. Weaving, book-binding, lino-cutting and fabric printing are also being attempted, though after such a short time It is not possible for any of them to have been carried very far. In teaching older children It is desirable to aim at a fairly high standard of craftsmanship, and the Master would be well advised to restrict himself to teaching such crafts as he can deal with most effectively until he has had time to establish himself in the school. In order to enable children to spend time on work which they most enjoy, several alternative occupations are usually offered to them In their Art lessons. This Is very good, providing it does not compel the Master to dissipate his energies and - In the large classes he has to teach - reduce the amount of help he can give. With such enthusiastic handling, however, the future of Art teaching in the school Is very promising.

MUSIC

All the Music Is taught by a Master who was appointed In 1951. He is passionately Interested in Music, has gained his L.R.A.M. since coming here and Is now working for a musical degree. He would welcome the opportunity of attending a course, whether short or long, on the teaching of Music In schools.

All forms get two weekly periods of Music and the whole school Is taken together once a week to practise the singing of hymns. It Is doubtful whether this period really Justifies Itself either as musical or religious Instruction and both Master and pupils could probably make better use of It in other ways. In the third and fourth years boys and girls are taught separately. Recorder playing has recently been Introduced for the boys in these two years and a visiting Mistress comes once a fortnight to teach both boys and Master.

The Master has gained much experience since he came to the school of the needs and capacities of the children he has to teach and has become increasingly successful in securing their co-operation. But his syllabus Is still perhaps rather over-ambitious In some respects and he would be the first to admit that many of Its objectives have as yet only been partially achieved. Sight reading and part singing for example do not yet seem to be approached with any great confidence even at the end of the course. He would probably find it helpful to set down in rather greater detail the content of the work proposed for each year; he has already begun to consider whether steady progress is not being hindered rather than helped by strenuous preparation throughout one of the three terms each year both for a school 'show' and for an outside music festival. Preparation of this sort should, It is suggested, normally be Incidental rather than central, if it Is not to distort the teaching unduly.

The recorder playing has proved popular with the older boys and quite good progress has been made in the time available; but obviously more ambitious results still would be achieved if teaching could be given at an earlier stage in the course. It may well be that as the school curriculum becomes more flexible in its later stages Music is one of the subjects which should become optional in the third or at least the fourth year so that those who have made little progress can concentrate on other interests and those boys and girls who have real taste and ability can go further under their Master's well qualified guidance. The formation of a voluntary choir on a permanent basis, which could meet regularly outside classroom time, would be a great stimulus to musical interest and would solve some of the difficulties at present experienced in preparing for concerts and festivals.

The work is much hampered at present by being taken under very cramped, uncomfortable conditions in the dining room. This is preferable in many ways to an ordinary classroom or to the hall, but it is much to be hoped that a special room in the new classroom block will be set aside and specially equipped for Music. If the recorder playing continues either music stands or wooden holders to stand on the top of desks or tables ought to be provided. The school will gain greatly when it has built up its own stock of sheet music and no longer has to depend exclusively on loans from the County Music Committee. The Master sets himself high standards of quality in his choice of music but he is not yet always sufficiently critical of its suitability for the ages and capacities of the children who are to perform it.

Nevertheless, though much remains to be done, much progress has been made and the school is fortunate in having the services of such a single-minded musician who cannot fail to kindle in at least some of his pupils something of his own great love and enthusiasm for his art.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Conditions for Physical Education in this new school are not good. No gymnasium was allowed in the first instalment, there are no changing rooms or stores, - and the only set of shower baths is in a small compartment opening from the boys' cloakroom and cannot therefore be used by the girls. The playing fields, though pleasantly situated, are unsatisfactorily drained and maintained in spite of recent efforts; they are reported to be waterlogged for the greater part of the winter and they are unsuitable for cricket. Although their improvement may present a difficult problem it is important that more and better pitches should be prepared. The paved area has sensibly been converted into three tennis courts, but more are needed so that classes of thirty pupils can be accommodated. An attempt by the school to clear and prepare grass courts proved too heavy a task and some help in this direction would be an appropriate reward for the initiative and self-help already shown by the school in many directions. Climbing ropes and a tubular climbing frame have recently been erected close to the playground, but the facilities for Physical Education are deficient by modern standards and the instalment of some fixed apparatus in the hall and some shower baths for the girls might be considered as an urgent measure. If the school is to become a three-form-entry school a gymnasium will be a statutory requirement. Satisfactory arrangements have been made for all first year pupils to be conveyed to the open air baths in

Oxford during the summer, and the carefully planned organisation reflects the great interest of the Headmaster in this subject.

Girls. A young Mistress who took an advanced course in this subject during her college training is responsible for the teaching of all the girls. Her technical knowledge is sound and her observation is quick. With a genial contact well established, she would find it easy to obtain an even higher level of performance if she demanded this of the girls, particularly if she included only simple work until this was well performed. The girls work with great interest and vigour however and the lessons are carefully planned. Unfortunately it was

not possible to see any games, and dance is not, as yet, included as a course in the curriculum. The girls might, well be expected to make a complete change of clothing for these lessons and to work in bare feet.

Boys. The Master responsible for the boys work was appointed at the beginning of the present term after several years' experience. He took a main course in Physical Education during his training and is at present devoting about half his teaching time to the subject. He succeeded a Master who had established a very keen attitude to physical activities and had built up good standards of performance in several directions. The new Master has settled down quickly, is making easy contact with the boys and is purposeful and clear in his work. Although it is too early to see the results of his teaching, there is every indication that the subject will continue to make a valuable contribution to the boys' education.

Soccer is the main winter game, although it is often replaced by cross country running when the ground is unfit, and athletics is the main activity in summer. In these three sports the school has a very successful tradition in inter-school competition. Some cricket is included but it is severely limited by the state of the field and matches are only played away from home. Rugger, lawn tennis and boxing are also included as out-of-school activities. Good habits of changing and bathing have been established.

Corporate Life

On three days in the week the school day opens with an assembly for prayers. It was suggested to the Headmaster that this ought to be a daily event.

About 250 children stay to dinner, which is served in two shifts in the rather short dinner hour of one hour and twenty minutes. At present the dining room is encumbered with the desks of the class which has its headquarters there so that it is impossible to arrange the tables and benches attractively or to organise the meal as a pleasant social occasion. Catering arrangements do not seem wholly satisfactory. Menus are limited and dull and on at least one day of the Inspection the nutritional value of the meal provided was low. When proper space becomes available again in the dining room there will be a great opportunity for all concerned to make this midday meal an enjoyable and educative part of the school's corporate life.

In spite of the limitations imposed by the times of 'buses the school contrives to arrange quite a number of activities outside the classroom. Its vigorous 'self-help' in the preparation of grounds and garden and in the purchase of library books and equipment of various sorts has already been referred to. Money for these efforts

has been raised by the children themselves and their friends and by the Parent-Teacher Association which gives a strong support to the school.

Drama is a keen interest and there is an annual production which involves a large number of performers and auxiliaries; expeditions are frequently made to performances of plays, ballet and opera in Oxford, and also to concerts.

Both last year and this year a party of about 40, drawn from all parts of the school, spent a week in North Wales, in charge of members of staff, making expeditions and visits to mountains and factories, which were designed to illumine and bring to life classroom studies, particularly in Geography. Both journeys appear to have been successful and enjoyable essays in corporate life.

The boys and girls themselves make a very pleasant impression both by their appearance and by their orderly and courteous behaviour.

Conclusion

At the time of this Inspection the school had barely been in existence five years, but it has already acquired a distinctive character and tradition. High standards of achievement have been established and it is clearly understood that hard work and good behaviour are expected from all. Yet the quite exacting demands which are made by the Headmaster and his staff in no way impair the happy and friendly relationships which exist in this school, and which are themselves the outcome of the right kind of mutual respect between teachers and pupils.

Appendix

NUMBERS AND AGES OF PUPILS IN FORMS

<i>Number of Pupils in the School on 30th April, 1956, whose ages were:</i>								
<i>Porn</i>	<i>Total Ho. of Pupils</i>	<i>Average Age r. N.</i>		<i>11 and under 12</i>	<i>12 and under 13</i>	<i>13 and under 14</i>	<i>14 and under 15</i>	<i>15 and under 16</i>
1 A	35	12	1	B. 9	12	-	-	-
IB	36	12	1	0. 3	11	-	-	—
10		12	2	B. (1. 8	14	-	-	-
IB	20	12	1	B. 8	16	-	-	-
2A	35	13	3	B. (J. 3	4 5	-	1	-
2B	35	13	1	B. —	3	15	-	-
2R	15	13	3	0. 3	4	14	-	-
3A	34	14	2	0. 4	4	17	*"	-
3B	33	14	-	0. 1	6	10	-	-
4A	13	14	9	B. G. 6	1	2	2	-
4B	15	14	10	B. -	X.	3	15	-
				0. 8	■ ■	5	11	-
				0. 9	-	8	9	-
				B. G. 8	-	-	3	-
				B. -	-	-	5	1
				G. 9	-	-	9	-
Totals	303	-	-	B. G. 30 18	54 41	45 42	33 37	2 1