A Class in a South London School

From Mr. H. R. Henry, an assistant master in an L.C.C. Jun. Mixed School, we have received an interesting account of the methods used in the Backward Class of which he is in charge, from which the following extracts are taken:—

The children for the class are selected from classes 2, 3 and 5, their ages ranging from approximately 9 to 11. All are suffering from retardation, in some form or other. On the roll of the class there are 35 children, though it is realised that 25 would be a more satisfactory number.

Practical methods of teaching are used wherever possible, and handwork is used both as a subject and a method. To help the children in Arithmetic, the class room—which is abnormally large—contains a shop, stocked with dummies and equipped with counter, till, show-cards, etc. For teaching “long measure” distances are marked on walls and floor, desks, tables, etc., whilst liquid measure is taught by means of an improvised dairy.

History and Geography are taken on project lines (e.g. London and the River Thames). Science deals with the objects with which the child is familiar, such as the Thermos Flask, electric torch, water tap, telephone, etc. The amount of time given to written composition is reduced, but the children practise the writing of short notes to tradesmen, letters of thanks, etc. They are encouraged to relate experiences, describe how they made an article and why, etc., even to the whole school assembled in the Hall. One period a week they spend in the School Library selecting their own books.

A strong point is made of Physical Training which definitely gives confidence to the nervous and backward child. During Health Talks the children are taught what to do in case of common emergencies and are encouraged to take a pride in their personal appearance.

The time-table is left quite fluid and contains two or three long optional periods. The children are required to enter up very briefly in a note book how they have occupied each of these periods. These are found to be of particular value.

The children work in Groups, owing to their varying standards of attainment, and in co-operative effort, gain some idea of working for the common good. Freedom of movement is allowed and as much variety as possible is introduced into all subjects and methods. Responsibility is also inculcated by giving the children definite jobs, such as Milk Monitor, Blackboard and Cupboard Monitor, etc.

It is as yet too early to assess results, but so far the general response aroused in the children, has been encouraging. The Class is regarded as an integral part of the School, and the children share the Art and Singing lessons given by Specialist Teachers, and take part with the others in the Friday afternoon “Hobbies.” They have no idea that they are regarded as “backward” but are under the impression that they are merely being taught by new methods to see what progress they make. The Head Teacher takes a very real interest in the Class and give it his whole hearted co-operation.
A Class in a Bradford School

Miss M. Murgatroyd, a Bradford teacher, contributes another interesting account of a “Practical Class” formed two years ago in one of the Bradford Elementary Schools.

At the outset, roughly 7 to 8 per cent. of the children in the school were selected for the new Class, the total number on the toll being 20 plus and the age range being from 6 to 11. The children were originally selected as being “dull and backward” but it was quickly found that the group also included many “problem” children.

There is no fixed syllabus or time-table, each child setting its own pace and working along individual lines, taking also its share in certain group activities to which it contributes. Children showing special aptitude in any subject rejoin the ordinary classes for these periods.

Many “methods” are used, though the approach is chiefly on perceptual levels. All sorts of new ways of presentation of a subject are tried, and the “Project Method” has been found to be particularly stimulating, especially in the three R’s. Art has proved a good medium for children who cannot express themselves in written or spoken English and through it, a child’s real interests are often revealed.

The children are free to move about and to converse with each other, to work in groups or to study alone. They have the full use of apparatus but are responsible for its good condition and for repairs. Each child has some weekly or daily task for which it is made responsible.

Since the formation of the class, some children have been transferred to the Modern School, some to the Open-Air School and others back to normal classes. Records are carefully kept showing not only educational progress but all-round development of personality, the gradual disappearance of delinquent tendencies, changes in moral and social behaviour, etc.

News and Notes

Advisory Committee on Scientific and Ancillary Mental Health Services

The Board of Control, with the approval of the Minister of Health, have appointed the following to be a Committee to advise upon questions arising in connection with scientific and ancillary mental health services:

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Radnor (Chairman), Sir Laurence Brock, C.B., Sir Hubert Bond, K.B.E., D.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P., Alderman J. W. Black, J.P., Alderman W. E. Lovsey, J.P., A. A. W. Petrie, Esq., M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S.E., D.P.M., Miss Adeline Roberts, O.B.E., J.P., M.B., B.S., Alderman J. C. Grime, O.B.E., J.P., C. J. Thomas, Esq., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., D.P.M., George Somerville, Esq., M.D., Ch.B., D.P.M., H. J. Clarke (Secretary).

A Committee was appointed in 1931, but owing to the financial crisis which occurred in that year, its work remained in abeyance.

The Mental Treatment Act, 1930, empowered local authorities to provide for out-patient treatment and for the after-care of mental patients, and, subject to the approval of the Board of Control, to undertake, or contribute towards the expenses of, research in relation to mental illness.