

Slow learners at school.

Contributors

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SLOW LEARNERS



AT SCHOOL

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AT SCHOOL SLOW LEARNERS

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Past and Present

The Education Act of 1944 has already established its place in the history of English education, not least for its emphasis on the right of every child to receive an education in accordance with his 'age, ability and aptitude'. A brief glance into the past will show how far-reaching are the implications of this seemingly simple phrase, not least for the education of backward children.

Providing a suitable education for them is no new problem, but not until a universal system of compulsory education came into being was the extent of it fully revealed. Serious consideration of the needs of backward children did not therefore begin in this country until after 1870, when locally elected School Boards were required to provide elementary schools in areas where the growing demand for popular education had not been adequately met by the two existing voluntary agencies—the British and Foreign School Society and the National Society. The schools established by those two pioneering bodies had been under no compulsion to accept all applicants, and considering the conditions under which the teachers worked, with much of their income derived from 'payment by results'—results unlikely to be achieved by their dullest pupils—it is understandable that they felt the need to exercise some selection in the pupils admitted. Amongst those who had found no place in school were many children of low intelligence, the 'aggregation of difficult children', the 'exceptional' and the 'feeble-brained', as a contemporary writer called them. It fell to the newly established Board Schools to admit, amongst others, children of these categories, and as early as 1890 Dr. Warner* foresaw 'that some at least of the exceptional children should be removed from the general classes, from examinations . . . and placed under special training more suitable to their requirements'.

In schools with sixty or more children in a class it was not easy

*Warner, F.: Lectures on the growth and means of training the Mental Faculty, 1890.

to pay much attention to individual difficulties, and soon the rate of failure showed itself sufficiently high to provoke comment. In 1871 Matthew Arnold, at that time Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in the Metropolitan Division of Westminster, noted that 'in every standard the rate of failure was higher than in 1869; and the total rate of failure was 18·81 per cent against 11·31 per cent in 1869'. By the time universal compulsory education was introduced in 1880 there were numerous complaints from teachers that many of their pupils were precluded by the very nature of their intellectual powers from reaching the standards of the Board, though there were others who, incurably optimistic, believed that all backwardness was remediable, provided only that the schooling given were efficient. Controversy over the relative importance of heredity and environment has lasted long.

The number of children failing in the schools continued to be large enough to compel attention, and chiefly owing to pressure from both teachers and doctors the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act was passed in 1899. The Act distinguished two categories of children—those who were mentally defective and those who were not. 'Mental defectives' were described as those, 'who, not being imbecile, and not being merely dull or backward are, by reason of mental defect, incapable of receiving proper benefit from the instruction in the ordinary public elementary schools, but are not incapable by reason of such defect of receiving benefit from instruction in such special classes or schools as are in this Act mentioned'.

The Act was the child of its age. Not only were pupils to be classified into two sharply defined categories—mentally defective or otherwise—but the concept upon which the classification was to be made was clinical rather than educational; the wording followed was largely that recommended by the Royal College of Physicians. But more important was the fact that here, for the first time, statutory recognition was given to the view that 'special' schooling was needed for children who had failed to profit from the usual instruction.

The Act of 1899 gave school authorities the power to provide special schools or classes for children in the defined categories, and many were established in the larger towns. The Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act, 1914, went further: it imposed a duty on local education authorities to make suitable provision in their areas for mentally defective children over the age of seven, and this requirement was extended by the Education

Act of 1921. 'A local education authority shall, with the approval of the Board of Education, make arrangements for ascertaining . . . what children in their area, not being imbecile, and not being merely dull or backward, are defective, that is to say, what children by reason of mental or physical defect are incapable of receiving proper benefit from the instruction in the ordinary public elementary schools, but are not incapable by reason of that defect of receiving benefit from instruction in such special schools or classes as under this Part of this Act may be provided for defective children'

It is significant that the education of the 'defective' was included in Part V of the Act, which dealt with 'Blind, Deaf, Defective and Epileptic Children', and not in Part III, which was concerned with elementary schools, or Part VI, with higher education. 'Defective' children were, in fact, relegated to a separate category quite distinct from ordinary children, and they had first to be 'certified' as 'feeble-minded' by a School Medical Officer before they could be sent to a special school or class, which had itself to be 'certified by the Board of Education as suitable'. The phraseology used in the Act unfortunately gave rise to much prejudice (which special schools today are only now beginning to overcome); the term 'defective' was, understandably, regarded as a stigma, and caused distress to parents and, indirectly, to the children.

Many special schools were opened between the years 1899 and 1914. The reaffirmation of the duties of local authorities in 1921 might well be expected to have led to a further increase in the number provided. In actual fact the 198 such schools in existence in 1922 seem to have been reduced to 154 by 1938, though the total number of places showed a slight increase. Some very small schools were closed, others amalgamated; the increase in the number of open-air schools may have helped to meet the needs of some very backward children; economic conditions at the end of the First World War and in the early 1930s did little to encourage the building of schools for those who seemed least likely to bring economic advantage to the country. Possibly the findings of the Wood Committee on Mental Deficiency* helped to paralyse action by its comments on the magnitude of the need.

Though the inter-war years saw little or no material advances, this was a period of consolidation during which considerable progress was being made in the study of children's development and

*Board of Education and Board of Control (1929) *Report of the Mental Deficiency Committee* (Wood Report) H.M.S.O.

in research into their intellectual growth; the work of Burt, Duncan, Schonell and others led to a new understanding of the needs of backward children. When the Second World War ended the time was ripe for a new approach to their education.

The Education Act of 1944 not only reflected a change of outlook but was sufficiently far-seeing in its provisions to intensify it. For it embodied a completely new attitude towards handicapped children. They are recognised as children with special needs, rather than as defective children lacking in normal qualities; they are to be educated as far as possible within the main stream of education, and not segregated like 'defectives' to be cared for separately. Local education authorities are enjoined, therefore, as part of their obligation to provide primary and secondary schools to meet the varying ages, abilities and aptitudes of the children in their area, to have regard 'to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who suffer from any disability of mind or body by providing, either in special schools or otherwise, special educational treatment, that is to say, education by special methods appropriate for persons suffering from that disability'. The Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service Regulations, 1945 (subsequently revised in 1953 and 1959) enumerate the various categories of handicapped pupils, among them 'educationally sub-normal pupils, that is to say, pupils who, by reason of limited ability or other conditions resulting in educational retardation, require some specialised form of education wholly or partly in substitution for the education normally given in ordinary schools'.

Implicit in these clauses is a new concept of special education. Henceforth the factor determining which children need help is to be an educational one. All children who are failing in their school work are to be given special education suited to their needs. Educational backwardness is not regarded as a single, sharply defined characteristic as was 'mental deficiency' but rather as a matter of degree and origin, and caused by a combination of circumstances. No attempt is made to define, classify or categorise backward children, nor is special education looked upon as a form of education peculiar to special schools. The Act and the Regulations are so worded to ensure that any child backward in school is given the necessary help 'in special schools or otherwise' by means of an education 'wholly or partly in substitution for the education normally given in ordinary schools'. The purpose is clear: to enable all children to receive, and to ensure that local authorities are able to provide, education appropriate to their age, ability and aptitude.

With the stimulus of the 1944 Act, but impeded frequently by post-war economic stringencies, suitable provision for backward pupils has steadily increased. By January, 1963 there were 379 special schools in England and Wales, catering for more than 37,000 educationally sub-normal boys and girls as well as a great variety of special classes and centres, to say nothing of the special arrangements made in many primary and secondary schools to help slow-learning children.

Before special attention can be given, the children needing special educational treatment have to be discovered, and local education authorities are enjoined to 'ascertain' which of them require it. Fundamentally the word 'ascertain' means no more than 'discover' or 'find out', although in course of time it has acquired in the minds of many people technical and even legal overtones. It was never intended that the formal legal procedure outlined in Section 34 of the 1944 Act should be invoked in all cases before a child is given special education; many slow-learning children are given 'special educational treatment' in ordinary schools throughout their school lives. Nor is there any statutory obligation that requires a formal decision by the authority before a severely backward child is admitted to a special school, provided his parents give their consent. Informal procedure has much to commend it, though clearly before sending a child to a special school a local education authority would wish an examination by a school medical officer and educational psychologist to discover as clearly as possible the nature of his backwardness and the best ways of helping him.

It is of the utmost importance that a backward child should receive appropriate help at the earliest possible opportunity. A few handicapped children—usually the more severe cases—become known to local authorities before they reach the age of five. Some are brought forward by their parents, others are reported by health visitors or the family doctor. But the great majority are not discovered until they begin to attend school and fail to make normal progress. Some local education authorities have their own arrangements for finding them by testing, for example, all the children in their schools towards the end of their first year as juniors. In this and other ways they get to know those who are failing and can take whatever action they think appropriate. But not all authorities do this, and in general they rely on the teacher for knowledge of children who need special help. Her responsibility is considerable. With her knowledge of how children develop and her opportunities for observing them over a period of time, the teacher is the most

likely person to notice when a child is failing to make normal progress. There are still some teachers who feel they are doing a child a disservice by bringing him forward for examination; this attitude, though well-meaning, is mistaken, for it is only by drawing attention to a child's needs that he can be given special help and avoid years of possible frustration. A mistaken notion that all children necessarily grow out of their difficulties leads other teachers to delay referring a child for examination until failure is well established. No doubt, too, some teachers are deterred by the fact that in some areas referral is always a formal matter, and they feel the need of someone who can give informal advice. Any teacher who is seriously worried by the lack of progress of any of her pupils should discuss the matter with the head teacher, so that together they may decide whether to consult the educational or medical advisers of their local authority. It is always better to bring forward too many children than too few; to bring them forward is not to recommend them for any particular form of educational treatment, but merely to inform the authority of marked backwardness that needs to be investigated.

A brief account is given in an appendix of the procedure commonly adopted for examining and testing a child who is failing at school. Such an examination is not complete in itself; rather is it an essential part of a continuing process of observation and assessment leading to arrangements which are best for a particular child. Even then, the process is by no means ended; he will still need to be kept under review to ensure that he does make progress, and this demands the continued co-operation of all who know him best.

Some Characteristics of Slow-learning Children

The wide variety of terms used to denote children who are not succeeding in their school work indicates in some measure the complexity of the problem: they are now variously known as 'educationally subnormal', 'backward', 'retarded' and, more recently 'slow learning'. The only characteristic common to all these children is that they are in some way failing in school, though their backwardness may well differ in degree and in kind. As 'educationally subnormal' has become associated with pronounced educational backwardness, so the term 'slow learning' has come to be widely applied to all children who are, to a greater or lesser degree, failing in school.

From the early days of universal education the presence of many children who were unable to learn quickly, raised controversy over the reason for their failure. The controversy over the relative importance of heredity and environment has lasted long and has, in its time, been pursued with vigour and even acrimony; recent research, however, has served to make some of the earlier arguments look artificial. Though few people would now dispute that heredity plays an important part in determining the upper limits of intellectual growth, research which has taken place during the last fifteen or twenty years and has greatly increased our knowledge of the intellectual and temperamental characteristics of backward children leads us to believe that the various influences combining to form the child's environment exercise a wider and more potent effect on his development than had once been assumed. The psychological and material conditions in which a child grows up play a very vital part in determining the equipment that he brings to learning. Only when environmental conditions are ideal will a child's hereditary endowment determine the upper limit of his development.

The importance of a mother's love, in the early years of a child's

life, for his future emotional well-being is now well-known, but its significance for his intellectual development may prove to be no less vital. Recent observations made in the course of training guide dogs for the blind may be significant. These have revealed that if they are not handled by human beings early enough to form a satisfactory attachment, their capacity for future training is so seriously impaired that they later prove unable to take responsibility or exercise judgment when confronted with unusual situations. They are, in effect, less able to learn. Of course there are obvious dangers in drawing too close an analogy between the experimental learning of animals and the far more complex learning process of young children; nevertheless an inadequate mother-child relationship may also result in impaired intellectual development in the child. Some recent researches into the intellectual growth of foundling children tend to corroborate this belief. Physical deprivation—malnutrition, poor physical care, neglect or cruelty—may also materially affect the growth of the ability to learn.

Greater insight has been gained in recent years into the connection between a child's capacity to learn and his physical maturity. Just as there must be maturation of the nerve cells and fibres before he can see and hear and move, so too must there be maturation of the neurological network of the brain before a child can effectively learn. And not only does the rate of maturation vary considerably from child to child; for full growth of his powers of mind and body he needs stimulus to use them; this is no less true of his mental than of his physical powers. The theory has recently been advanced that there is a critical period in this pattern of development when the child is best fitted to develop certain skills—the second year of his life for beginning to talk, the third and fourth for developing mature speech. It has been suggested that if the relevant skill is not learned during this critical period it is far harder to acquire later, either because the brain has developed beyond the critical point, or because the child has acquired the ability to do without the skill. Nor are the child's emotional relationships and his physical development the only important factors in intellectual growth. Some recent work has drawn attention to the importance of adequate language development if children are to profit from education. Children from homes which use a limited vocabulary and where conversation and discussion are rare are at a disadvantage in school. If the young child therefore has failed to enjoy experiences which give him opportunities to develop—interesting

things to see and touch, encouragement to talk and to listen—then his latent abilities may remain unrealised.

Investigations such as these, though still in their infancy, must make the layman more cautious in thinking of limited ability as simply innate or irremediable. Some children brought up in very adverse circumstances have shown considerable improvement in their effective ability when transferred to a stimulating and satisfying environment. Some children do in fact show significant increases in intelligence test scores as the result of special education. Some teachers are convinced that the mental development of their pupils is still incomplete when they leave school at sixteen. Though it may be fruitless for teachers to speculate on the relative effects of heredity and environment in determining a child's present ability, yet it is important to distinguish between the needs of those children who are likely to be more or less permanently backward and those whose backwardness may be remediable. The latter will include those whose backwardness has been caused by frequent short absences, or by a longer illness that may have kept them away from school just when they were ready to acquire a new skill; sometimes by changes of school, a not unusual occurrence with children whose parents' occupation involves frequent changes of home; sometimes by unsatisfactory home conditions leading to a degree of emotional disturbance, a very stubborn obstacle to learning.

Two other contributory factors to backwardness remain to be mentioned—the presence of some physical defect in the child or unsatisfactory conditions in the school itself. Even today, when tests of sight and hearing are given to most children in the course of medical examinations, a child's backwardness can be caused at least in part by his inability to see or hear clearly in class. It is, therefore, still important that teachers, especially teachers of younger children, should be alert to detect signs of such disabilities if any child is unaccountably failing in his lessons.

Shortcomings in the schools themselves can lead to backwardness, and there are many children, backward children among them, who could achieve more were conditions more favourable. Teachers, however capable, cannot give all the individual help they would wish to slow learners if their classes are large. Although efforts are made in many schools to give special help to the slowest by some form of grouping within the class or school, the pace may still be too fast for them, the matter too difficult, the lessons too abstract, and formal work introduced before they are ready for it.

Moreover backward children are more than usually vulnerable to an inexperienced or unsympathetic teacher and frequent changes of staff.

An attempt has been made, in the foregoing paragraphs, to outline some of the main factors which contribute to a child's failure to learn. One can distinguish between those children who have apparently limited potential and those who seem to have ability which they cannot use effectively. One can also distinguish between children whose difficulties appear to need long term help and those who may be expected to respond fairly quickly to remedial measures. And while it is sensible to assume that children with limited potential need prolonged help, it must be recognised that the reverse is not necessarily true, namely, that the intelligent child will always respond quickly. Children are not easily classified and an overemphasis on any single characteristic such as IQ or attainment age may result in problems being oversimplified and categories being defined too rigidly. For the purpose of this pamphlet it is proposed to use the term 'backward' or 'slow-learning' for children of any degree of ability who are unable to do work commonly done by children of their age. The word 'dull' will be used for those who have limited mental potential and the word 'retarded' for children whose poor educational achievements appear to result from factors other than limited general ability. In the context of this pamphlet 'retardation' is used to convey a general notion of underfunctioning without specifying whether such a condition is necessarily remediable or implying that an assessment of general ability is closely related to the extent and rate of progress possible in a specific field.

These distinctions are important to enable the practising teacher to adopt suitable aims and methods. For dull children there will always be limited intellectual objectives even with the most skilful teaching; for the retarded the aim will be to seek and to remove the causes of their backwardness. In Chapter 4 reference is made to remedial education, but elsewhere the emphasis is mainly on the needs of those children of limited ability found in special schools or in the lowest classes of ordinary schools.

In discussions about backwardness it sometimes happens that backward children are spoken of as if they were a special type, and even today there are some teachers who assume that every backward child is a potential candidate for a special school. In fact dull children are not in a sharply defined category, but merely form the lower end of a far larger group with limited ability. Just

as there are some who are strong and others who are weak, some tall and others short, through every gradation of strength and size, so there are the brilliant and the dull, with every imperceptible gradation in between. The brilliant merge gradually into the clever, the clever into the average, the average into the slow, and the slow into the dull. Some gifted children may, however, lack some of the talents of others less gifted; some of only average ability may have particular gifts of a specific kind; all have many fundamental needs and characteristics in common, irrespective of ability. And just as geniuses are comparatively rare, so are people with a severe mental defect; those of rather more than average ability are counterbalanced by those who have rather less. These conclusions are hypothetical, but substance is given to them not merely by common experience but by the results of research. The distinguishing feature of all backward children is that they are slow to learn, but just as they share many of the characteristics of the normal, so do they share the characteristic of differing considerably one from another. For a human being does not consist solely of an intellect: what he is and what he does depend on the interaction of many forces of which the mind is only one. Backward children differ one from another in their abilities, in outlook, in temperament, in their likes and dislikes and in their interests. If the teacher is to make a success of teaching them, it is even more important than with abler children to know as much about them as possible.

Before the end of their first year at school some children attract the teacher's attention by their lack of interest in toys or picture books or by their clumsiness in handling them, by the slow development of their power to talk and the paucity of their vocabulary, by their seeming inability to join in other children's play, or possibly by disturbing other children's work. These characteristics single out those children who may need special education; many of them may be dull. Other children may not show their limitations until more formal work is reached; unusual slowness in learning to read is a common characteristic of dull children. Inability to read may, of course, not be indicative of general backwardness, but be caused by factors other than limited intellectual powers. But a failure to acquire the rudiments of reading is often the symptom that first draws attention to dull children, and is usually accompanied by poor command of language and a poverty of vocabulary.

Dull children are unable to develop a fluent command of language. This is symptomatic of a more fundamental limitation, a difficulty

in forming clear concepts. They find it difficult to formulate the similarities and differences between objects and between situations, and to generalise from these experiences. Normal children early acquire the power to distinguish for example a ball from an orange. They learn by direct experience, by observing and handling these objects, to identify sufficient characteristics of both in order to recognise and name them. Similarly an orange is distinguished from an apple, two from three and long from short. They begin to understand words, to have an idea of their meaning. The development of language involves children in this activity to an increasing degree until they are capable of forming abstract concepts such as goodness, equality and freedom. Normal children, as Terman and Piaget have shown, develop this power from the age of eleven years onwards. Dull children developing their concepts and language in a much slower and more concrete way may never acquire many abstract ideas at all. They tend to be tied to the particular experience or familiar example. The inability of dull children to generalise from experience is evident in fields other than language development. Normal children, after some preliminary experience of pairs of objects, quickly realise that two of them put with two others make four, and from this and similar experiences derive an understanding of the concept of $2 + 2 = 4$. Once this has been understood it is a simple matter for them to realise that, conversely, if they have four and give two away, they will have two left; in fact that $4 - 2 = 2$. This concept they are able to utilise not only with the number four but with other numbers, and will later deduce the generalisation that $a + b = c$ implies $a = c - b$. They have, in fact, learned to use their experience in other situations, or to reason. Dull children will always find the process difficult; the dumbest may have to learn everything new from the beginning, while others will need far more experience on which to base their generalisations than do more gifted children. This is to say no more than that they learn slowly, and learn more readily by doing than by reasoning, by dealing with things rather than with ideas. But it would be wholly mistaken to assume that dull children cannot think and that they learn only by the thoughtless execution of manual tasks. Rather is the power to think to be developed by learning in practical situations. Every task needs to be designed to develop the intellect. The child is helped to analyse the situation and derive from it the experience which enables him to undertake a comparable task more confidently. For dull children learning that evokes no thought and develops no insight is of limited value; they need to learn intelligently, not by rote.



Spanish dance



A corner of the art studio



The approach to reading



Puppetry and toymaking

The implications of this are of the greatest importance. Backward children learn primarily by doing and need experience of actual situations before they can generalise. They therefore proceed by slower steps and need more repetition of a kind that demands new thought and arouses fresh interest. This demands from teachers patience and resourcefulness in providing repetition without boredom.

Limited ability to utilise previous experience in new situations leaves dull children far less able than others to learn spontaneously from their environment. Bright children, with their eager interest in everything around them, derive a great deal of knowledge incidentally, but the dull have to be taught much that others learn for themselves. Though it is unlikely that many of the children in special schools today have quite such a restricted experience of life as those Sir Cyril Burt investigated over 40 years ago, many dull pupils are without that knowledge of everyday things on which so much of their learning, and not least their language, will depend. The significance of much of what they see passes them by, and they remain surprisingly lacking in the kind of general knowledge that a brighter child intuitively gathers—what ordinary things cost, how costs vary with weight, the miscellaneous stock of information gained from reading notices, signs and advertisements. Many of these things will need to be taught later, and the knowledge of one fact will not, with the dull child, lead spontaneously to a perception of others directly related to it. A bright child can with little difficulty apply abstract knowledge to real-life situations, yet older backward children are found who are able to work pages of accurate calculations but cannot tell the length of the interval of time between 9.15 and 9.45 or the change from five shillings after 2/11 has been spent. Knowledge must not only be based on experience; its value is limited unless it can be readily used.

These intellectual limitations must be recognised if teaching is to be effective; it must also be remembered that each child is likely to differ from others in interests and in temperament as well as in level of ability. The backward, like any cross section of the population, contain the stolid and the fickle, the talkative and the silent, the clumsy and the dexterous; a teacher of dull children, though he needs to be aware of their limitations, is more likely to be successful if he is unfailing in his search for their many positive qualities. A curriculum based purely on seeking to remedy weaknesses is likely to be arid and unsuccessful; it needs rather to be based firmly on those things they can do best, to develop their

talents, interests and personal qualities to the fullest extent, and be associated with teaching methods that take full account of individual differences.

It is often truly asserted that dull children have poor concentration and poor memories, but the generalisation is too sweeping without modification. Children of similar ability show wide variation in their capacity to remember and to concentrate, but their powers depend very much on what they are asked to remember and on what they are asked to concentrate. Confronted with a purely academic task which seems to them meaningless and boring, their concentration may well be brief and their memory short-lived; if the task is interesting and is seen to have point and purpose, they will persist for remarkably long periods and show a surprising memory for detail. One incident at a special school serves to illustrate the point. The school includes animal husbandry in its curriculum, and two senior boys had responsibility for the care of a sow about to farrow. Throughout the night when the litter was being born they watched over her devotedly and obeyed instructions to the letter without adult supervision. Other boys showed a similar concentration and reliability over the care of newly incubated chicks. If dull children are called upon to memorise facts which, however important, do not for them have meaning and relevance, they find the task insuperably difficult; if the same facts are presented in a meaningful situation, they may well achieve success. Witness their memory for sporting details or for the events on the last school journey.

The dull, like any other children, need the security of a good home and loving parents. To be loved and wanted is necessary to any human being, old or young; the traumatic effects of early deprivation are now generally familiar. Not all dull children are deprived; many indeed come from homes where material conditions are poor, but if there is love and security they are likely to achieve as much as their limited capacities will allow. In other cases a dull child may be less acceptable to the social group in which he finds himself. His parents, especially if they are intelligent themselves, may be unable to conceal their disappointment at his inferiority, or suffer from unjustified feelings of guilt at having a child of poor capacity. His brothers and sisters, friends and playfellows may be intolerant of his clumsiness and his obvious failure to grasp things quickly. In such circumstances the dull child may rapidly lose confidence and the desire to try anything that may lead to further failure and unfavourable comparisons. He may well seek solace by withdrawing into himself or by being

defiant or mischievous to conceal feelings of inadequacy. Added failure at school can only aggravate this unhappy state of mind.

Given love, understanding and security, and enabled to achieve some measure of success, dull children have it within them to grow up happy and self-respecting. Sometimes little can be done to improve a child's relations with his parents, even though many schools are doing excellent work in helping parents to accept him and to see the good in him. What is important is that what he does in school shall give him self-confidence. It is still unfortunately true that some slow-learning children are allowed to go too long without special education and are allowed to fail until failure has eaten into their souls. 'Nothing succeeds like success' carries with it the equally valid corollary that 'Nothing fails like failure'. It is therefore important that they should be discovered and given help as early as possible, whether it be in their own schools or in a special school or class.

It is an illusion to think that the dull are unaware of their limitations. Everyday life, bringing with it encounters with others more gifted, must inevitably show that in some things they cannot hope to excel. But this is no reason to think that they must always feel inadequate and sorry for themselves. One feels a failure only when one's failings are so extensive as to undermine confidence and self respect. Everyone knows there are some things he cannot do: one man cannot paint, another has no ear for music; many people admit to being 'hopeless at mathematics'. But these deficiencies cause little anxiety in those who know that they have other positive qualities that win them respect. Dull children too can enjoy a good measure of happiness and achievement if they are first given a chance to succeed in whatever ways they can. In this way they gain confidence, feel a pride of achievement and the approval of others and so are ready for greater efforts. They come to realise that they are not total failures, but have, on the contrary, a useful contribution to make to school, home, and society. This will not be achieved if there are unhealthy or even wounding comparisons made at school. Self respect and confidence developed at school are likely to continue in later life.

There must naturally come a time when each has to face his limitations, and know clearly that there are some things he will never be able to do—when the hopes of the boy who wants to be a pilot or the girl who sets her heart on becoming a ballerina must finally be dispelled. But if confidence based on achievement of some kind has been developed, then they can be dispelled

without injury to self-respect. Indeed, the education of dull children cannot be considered complete unless they have also come to know their limitations and to bear failure. They are not necessarily any more or less sensitive than others but their limitations do increase the chance of failure. It is continuous lack of success that may lead either to anti-social behaviour or to withdrawal; both responses show that the child is protecting himself from failure.

Slower intellectual development carries with it the likelihood of slower or possibly distorted emotional growth, in fact a slower general development, notably in the earlier years. Dull children often take longer to reach the stage of playing and co-operating with their fellows, longer to become acceptable group members, and tend to be solitary unless encouraged to join in. Their physical development may proceed as fast as that of abler children, yet they are apt to feel inadequate when playing with other children of their own age, sometimes taking refuge in the company of younger children or withdrawing into themselves for protection. If the teacher can draw them into the social groupings of the classroom they enjoy sharing in the songs and rhymes and poems and the games that the rest enjoy. But they will show little imagination or leadership, usually being content to follow the example of others—a characteristic that can be a cause of danger later on, when ready suggestibility can lead a boy into mischief or a girl into being exploited. Not least among the advantages of education in a special school is that the dull can there enjoy the company of others who are at the same stage of intellectual and emotional maturity. They are more readily accepted as members of the group and less exposed to unfavourable comparisons.

If their earlier years can be passed in an emotionally satisfying atmosphere most dull children follow a fairly normal pattern of development. They can become acceptable at home, in the club or at work and show the same desire for independence and responsibility as ordinary children. But throughout their lives many remain conscious of their limitations; fear of failure frequently makes them diffident in accepting responsibility or in entering a new field of activity or a new social grouping, though once they have overcome their diffidence they may adjust happily. Many older backward boys are, for example, very shy of making new acquaintances, of joining a youth club, of entering a café or of using a telephone, but gain confidence rapidly once they have been helped to take the plunge. Sometimes they fail, and the resulting feeling of inadequacy can lead to quarrelsome behaviour or excessive timidity. The influence at this period of the school as a good society

cannot be over-emphasised; its well ordered routine, good aesthetic standards, good personal relationships and its expectation of good work, play and behaviour are of the greatest value.

In the past probably the majority of children who were dull were also subnormal in physical development, suffering more frequently than other children from malnutrition, bodily defects, and minor physical ailments. With the great improvement in conditions since the war, with better housing, higher standards of nutrition and medical care, this is no longer so evident. However, the fact remains that most of the educationally subnormal children who need education in a special school come from poorer homes, and the incidence of minor physical disabilities is higher than among children in the ordinary school. It is important that backward children receive all the benefits from the social and medical services since physical difficulties, in themselves not severe, are an added impediment to learning when they occur in conjunction with limited ability. The dull child needs every possible advantage so that his total development may not be hindered.

Backward Children in the Ordinary School

The children who are being educated in the increasing number of special schools and classes can be only a small proportion of the slow learning children who need to be provided for. By far the greater number will always be taught in ordinary primary and secondary schools. To some extent the problem of a child's backwardness is relative to the context in which he is expected to learn. Standardised tests will indicate a child's level of ability or achievements in relation to a large representative sample of the population. Such evidence is useful but it is the degree of difference between his achievements and the expected level in his own group, class or school which lead to his being considered in need of special help. For this reason it is difficult to estimate the precise number of backward children. Whatever the criterion of measurement the number will vary from school to school and neighbourhood to neighbourhood, but it is usually thought that about ten per cent of children will be found significantly backward in language and number.

Making provision for the education of backward children, therefore, does not merely consist in providing places in special schools; special education is as necessary for the considerable numbers of slow learning children in ordinary schools as it is for the more handicapped minority in special schools. To most teachers these facts are well known, though the task of providing effectively for the least able has not proved easy at a time of unusually large numbers of children and of shortage of teachers and accommodation. That so many head teachers have made determined efforts to meet the needs of the least able is a tribute to their respect for the individual. But for various reasons the majority of schools have been relatively less successful in adapting the curriculum to the needs of the least able than have special schools where they are the main concern. Conditions in ordinary schools are often less favourable—classes too large for the individual care and attention needed,

lack of adequate space and facilities for the kind of education such children require, and sometimes difficulties in securing and retaining the right staff. In too many schools the curriculum reflects the needs of the abler pupils, and even though special help may be given to the least able in reading and writing, little imagination has been shown in evolving an education suited to their needs. It can still happen, for example, in those primary schools that arrange their pupils in classes according to ability, that the children in the lowest stream are hurried through the arithmetic syllabus of the 'A' stream so as not to be at a disadvantage in the selection examination at 11 plus. Pupils in the lowest streams of unselective secondary schools are sometimes subjected to a full programme of specialist teaching and examinations despite the fact that they are only on the threshold of literacy, no single member of staff being given the responsibility of seeing to their deeper needs and of evolving a really appropriate curriculum. Fortunately it is becoming more usual to find an organisation specially designed to meet their needs, with one or more teachers responsible for planning a suitable curriculum. Yet it is perhaps inevitable that the changes introduced are often modest and that the outlook both in primary and in secondary schools is strongly influenced by their responsibilities towards those with greater ability to benefit from an education concerned largely with words and ideas. Such a curriculum is little-suited to children of average abilities, far less to really backward children, with their compelling need to keep in touch with actual things and real people. For less able children there is no place for the 'watered down' syllabus of the 'A' stream, either simplified or annotated to the effect that the duller child may go 'as far as he can'. Nor, in an attempt to provide material at the right mental level, should backward children be confronted with work normally associated with children several years younger; the theory of fitting the difficulty of the work to a child's mental level is a sound one, but its practical application needs care. At a time when the market is reasonably well supplied with books for older backward readers—simple in language but mature in content—boys of twelve or thirteen years of age or more are still found reading books designed for six or seven year olds. Children today are maturing earlier and backward pupils form no exception. There are still too many apathetic and disheartened backward children at the end of their school career eagerly awaiting the day that brings release. There is an urgent need for vigorous new thinking about the curriculum of the slowest pupils in the last few years at the secondary school.

Young dull children, provided they do not show marked anti-

social characteristics, can benefit from attending an infant school that attempts to meet the differing needs of its pupils, for there they can enjoy the social training, the companionship, the stories and the play activities of other children of their own age, though they should not be made to attempt formal work in reading and writing before they are ready for it. Experienced teachers of young children are alert to distinguish the dull child in order to postpone, not to emphasise, formal instruction. Most teachers realise the importance of readiness—that a child learns best when he has reached the stage of development at which some particular piece of learning can be successfully mastered. This does not imply that the teacher's role is a passive one; sound judgement and careful preparation are called for. For a child's readiness to undertake a piece of work or the next step forward in the mastering of a particular skill depends on other factors besides his intellectual ability. Not all slow starters are dull; many an able child has come late to reading. Progress in school work is only one aspect of a child's growing maturity, and growth-patterns show many variations. Dull children will develop best if given stimulus and encouragement without being hurried too early into activities for which they are not yet ready. Children of poor ability will have gained much if they go forward from their first school with good personal and social habits, a confidence in themselves based on some experience of success, an interest in the people and things around them, increased skill in talking and a liking for books and stories to make them look forward to the day when they too can learn to unlock such pleasures for themselves.

By the end of the infant stage many backward children are only just getting ready to read and the task of teaching them to read and write falls on the junior school. Where there are separate infant and junior schools everything possible should be done to make the change of school as smooth as possible. The backward child in particular may be affected by changes in routine and take longer to become familiar with new situations. Many schools take great trouble, by exchanging visits of children and teachers, and by passing on full records of children's progress, to see that the child in the new school is given work that suits him. It is often helpful to have a teacher with infant school experience on the staff of the junior school, so that she can work with the youngest and least able children. In recent years, with large classes and a shortage of teachers, it has not been easy to help them. Different arrangements have had varying success; yet it is in the junior schools that the educational climate usually becomes less suited to

backward children. The curriculum is coloured by the needs of the brighter children and the wish to ensure that all who could benefit from the academic education in a secondary school should be able to do so. Backward children should have the same opportunities as their brighter fellows to enjoy movement, music making and creative work, but their more limited powers call for a different approach to much of the work, particularly in reading and arithmetic, to see that they are not asked to do work that is beyond them.

In schools where the head teacher is freed from the responsibility of full time teaching she can give valuable help, often by freeing the class teacher to concentrate for a time on those children in the class who need extra help. Some head teachers take small groups of slow learners in their own rooms where the atmosphere is more relaxed. Regular short periods of help and encouragement such as these are often very effective.

Whether larger junior schools—of eight or more classes—are favourable or not to backward children depends on many factors, but above all on the attitude of head teachers, for on them depends whether a genuine attempt is made to understand the outlook and the various abilities of the pupils. If it is, all pupils, whatever their powers, will be esteemed for their value as persons, and each, in his own sphere, will be given opportunities to develop whatever abilities he may possess. Many would contend that one of the advantages of the larger schools is the opportunity they afford for grouping or streaming in order to minimise the range of ability in each class. Even then the teacher of the lowest stream will have children of a wide range of ability to provide for. Individual and group work are still extensively needed if the children are to progress satisfactorily and such classes should therefore be kept as small as possible. But perhaps the greatest advantage of the larger schools is that they permit a stimulating and realistic course to be planned expressly for backward children, based very firmly on the things that interest them and at which they are likely to succeed. Some schools have been fortunate in securing a teacher specially interested in slow-learning children, and have given him the responsibility for planning the course and co-ordinating the work. This arrangement can be of great value, not only in giving the teachers concerned a chance to discuss common problems, but also in ensuring that, by regular consultation, common aims can be clarified and the most successful methods used. Backward pupils will thus be able to progress through a series of classes which form, in a very real sense, a smaller community within the larger, where teachers specially interested in their

problems are at pains to know them personally and to see that this knowledge is passed on.

There are some schools, both junior and secondary, which are able to arrange a special class for the slowest pupils. This can be eminently successful when the climate of opinion in the school is favourable and if the right teacher can be found. The single 'backward' class can, in these circumstances, be very happy and stimulating for dull pupils, offering them a small community which they understand and to which they feel they belong, staying long enough for their strengths and weaknesses to be known, and where a specially devised curriculum and flexible time-table allow them to make progress at interesting work within their powers. But a single class of this sort has its limitations. Unless the attitude of the school as a whole is sympathetic and encouraging, the outlook for a special class can be bleak; it can become, at worst, a group of rejects from other classes taken by an unwilling and inexperienced teacher. Even in favourable circumstances the age range may be wide, and there are disadvantages in a class where some pupils may spend two, three or even four years; the stimulus of progressing from one group to another is lacking, and the class may well contain pupils who, though alike in mental level, differ widely in maturity. A common practice in junior schools is therefore to limit the class of backward pupils to the first two years, so as to give them early assistance in reading and lessen their difficulties when they later join the ordinary classes. This plan has much to commend it, though it will be evident that a single class rarely meets the needs of all the backward pupils in a school; indeed, a very successful special class can, in a large school, mask the real extent of the problem. In a junior school of some 300 pupils for example, there may be some 30 or 40 slow-learners; those who are not placed in the 'backward' (or 'remedial' or 'progress' class, whatever it may be called) may actually be at a disadvantage owing to a mistaken impression that all backward children are being dealt with in the special class. Clearly, therefore, a second such class is an advantage, since it enables more children to be cared for, lessens the age range of each class and allows for progression from one class to another. Special care is needed when children transfer from a special class; the teacher of the new class needs to know something of their achievements as well as their limitations, otherwise what has been accomplished may be quickly lost.

Transfer to a secondary school is a momentous occasion for any child—entry into a new and probably larger community composed

very largely of strangers and situated, in all likelihood, some distance from home. For a child of a nervous temperament or for a dull child who is already conscious of failure the experience can be very upsetting. It is very valuable if the staff of secondary schools can make a special effort to keep in close touch with their contributory primary schools, either by a personal visit or by inviting the children to see their new school before leaving the old. For dull children this lessens the bewilderment felt on entering a strange, new, complex organisation. The larger the school the more compelling the need to create within it smaller groupings in which a pupil can feel himself a significant member. In schools, no less than in the larger community of town or city, the individual can be so dwarfed as to stunt the growth of a sense of responsibility and good social attitudes.

While for many years primary schools have tried to make all their pupils literate before going forward to secondary education, inevitably some have been transferred, for one reason or another, with minimal attainments. The difficulties of such pupils in a secondary school are acute if special help is not quickly given, especially if they are plunged into a specialist organisation where literacy is taken for granted. For the poor reader is at a disadvantage in almost every subject where books are used, and his failures are exposed many times a day. In such a situation his self-respect is undermined and he quickly loses heart, so that the way is wide open for the development of anti-social conduct. This can happen most readily in a school where the teaching is entirely specialist, for here the needs of the least able are often overlooked, and they are simply seen as pupils who are weak at English, or arithmetic, or history, or science. The backward pupil needs the influence of a teacher who is with him long enough to see him as a whole person, to know his background, to assess his weaknesses and give him timely help and encouragement.

The number of backward pupils in the lowest streams of large secondary schools is considerable, but the resources of such schools are correspondingly greater if there is the will to use them. The most usual arrangement found is streaming, with the work in the lowest streams specially planned to meet the needs of the weakest. While backward pupils should take part as fully as possible in the life of the school and be taught by some specialist teachers such as those of physical education and music, excessive specialisation is inimical to their best interests. It confronts them with a dismembered field of learning in which their limited intellectual powers find it almost impossible to see any coherent pattern,

A much better arrangement is for one teacher to be responsible for all of the work except for subjects where the specialist gifts of other teachers are made available. Simplicity and unity of the curriculum should be the aim, with the work based on the pupils' interests, attuned to their limited powers and with a working degree of literacy as an important objective.

A teacher with special interest and experience in teaching slow children is a particularly valuable person in the secondary school, since the interests of most members of staff will probably be in their specialist subjects. Fortunately many of these schools are now able to appoint a master or mistress with special responsibility for the backward. Many of them have taken a specialist course of study in the education of backward children. Where such a teacher has been appointed, the work has often taken on a new interest and purpose, enabling the backward to achieve results of a quality previously unexpected.

At a time when boys and girls are tending to remain longer at school, the problem of planning a sound course for the least able becomes more challenging, and, is at present provoking a good deal of thought and discussion*. Formerly it has been mostly the abler pupils who have stayed on at school for extended courses usually leading to examinations of one kind or another. But today many of the less able are also staying on, and for them such examinations have little relevance; yet few secondary schools have succeeded in devising an alternative curriculum of equal incentive. The growing demand for a longer school life has strained the material resources of many schools to the limit. It would be inopportune to try to offer any final solution to this problem yet, but a few principles may perhaps be suggested. Any external examination for the least able is likely to be unsuccessful; their abilities do not enable them to amass theoretical knowledge that can be tested by written examination. Some kind of internal evaluation may be appropriate, especially if it assesses work done over a period such as practical work in garden or workshop, a sustained enquiry made over several months and appropriately recorded, services successfully rendered to school or community. The curriculum during the last year or so must recognise that these young people are on the threshold of becoming independent wage-earners with a degree of maturity and with interests which often make them intolerant of the kind of régime with which they

*See, for example, *'Half Our Future'*; A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England). H.M.S.O., 1963.

have become familiar. Those special schools and secondary schools fortunate enough to have at hand either a private house, some outbuildings or annex where less able pupils can undertake a real job of work and take more responsibility for their own conduct have discovered in them an unsuspected degree of initiative and self-control. In future the kind of accommodation needed may have to be reconsidered. Whereas classrooms and workshops have met the needs of the more gifted they have proved less suited for the backward, whose education demands that less time should be spent with pen, pencil and books than with people and things. In the years ahead we may well see special provision where young people can undertake major tasks, learn how to run a home and to entertain guests and learn, by direct experience, more about the neighbourhood in which their adult lives will be spent. For adult interests are growing in the minds of these boys and girls—the boys conscious of the fast approaching day when they will leave school for work, and the girls of their personal appearance, of the social arts which lead eventually to marriage and motherhood and to running a home. Clearly their education should not concern itself with these interests exclusively, but it must take account of them if it is to be realistic and significant; just as it must also be aware that as citizens in an increasingly technical age they will have more money to spend and increasing leisure in which to spend it. It may be that some kind of transition stage is desirable between school and work, with the greater responsibilities and reality of work combined with the continued guidance of school. No course of study in school will secure their interests and develop their powers fully unless it is closely related to the world they live in and the work they may do.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of part-time teachers available—usually married women who had previously left teaching—and these have often been used to help the slowest pupils. The usual method is for a part-time teacher to be appointed to a school to take one or more groups for additional work in reading. Ideally, such help should be given at least once a day, and be closely related to the normal work of the class; it should not cause a child to miss other enjoyable work. Sometimes the part-time teacher works in the classroom with the class teacher to give individual help where needed. If he is a gifted musician or artist, he can take the music or art and so release a class teacher for remedial work. There is no ideal arrangement; much depends on persons and circumstances.

Some local education authorities have provided peripatetic teachers

to visit schools to help with the slower pupils. Some of these teachers have had special training in the education of backward children; they sometimes work in close conjunction with educational psychologists. These teachers take children individually or in groups to give special help, and are valuable as experienced 'outside' persons with whom special problems can be discussed. But this latter rôle clearly presupposes that good personal relationships have been established, for their efforts can be largely frustrated if the school is not fully co-operative.

The classes hitherto referred to have been formed by internal arrangement within a school's own organisation. In some parts of the country local education authorities have established 'area' special classes, sometimes housed in an existing school and sometimes in separate buildings. To these classes children who are in need of special help are sent, either part-time or full-time, and many have made good progress, particularly when after failing badly in their original school they have gained new confidence and hope by being withdrawn from the scene of their failure. But area special classes raise a number of problems, the first of which concerns the children to be selected. They should not be drawn from too wide an area; the educational psychologist should be concerned with both their selection and their progress, and they should be examined by the school doctor to see that no physical disability is causing their backwardness. Are the classes to cater for dull children or for those who are educationally retarded? If they are for the dull, then the question may be raised whether, if their disability is severe, they are not more appropriately educated in a special school, or in their own school if it is not. The removal of a few backward children from a number of schools will certainly not provide for all their backward pupils, though it may well give the illusion of doing so. And on what grounds are the dull to be withdrawn from an ordinary school to a single class with its more restricted educational opportunities? There can be no compulsion on parents to accept such an arrangement, though they might be more ready to do so in the case of pupils retarded for reasons other than dullness if the aim is to permit their speedy return to their ordinary school. Selection for any area special class needs to be made with care, perhaps being confined to children likely to derive some benefit within a limited period. Even if the aim of the special class is to provide short-term help the curriculum should not be too narrowly conceived. If it is a part-time class, the child should be able to share in the wider curriculum of his own school; if the class is full-time, then the curriculum must include more than reading and writing. In this event the 'area'

special class accommodated within, and an integral part of, an existing school has much to commend it, for the children can take part in the wider life of the receiving school—its games, its assembly, its visits, excursions and parties, and perhaps some of its specialist teaching. It is reasonable in this case that the final responsibility for the class should lie with the head teacher of the receiving school, who needs to be in full sympathy with the aims and ideals of the class. But if the members of the class are eventually to return to their own school, they must retain some loyalty by keeping in touch with it.

'Area' special classes have undoubtedly helped many pupils at a time when schools are suffering from shortage of staff and accommodation. But for the very dull children the special class is no substitute for the special school: it lacks scope and progression. Those whose backwardness is caused by serious emotional disturbance are clearly best educated where that condition is the primary consideration and where they can receive psychiatric help. And although the withdrawal of a few backward children may give help where it is most needed, it has little effect on the far larger number who remain. The enterprising and enlightened work (often, it must be said, in favourable conditions) of some special classes has been notably successful, and may set a pattern to be increasingly adopted by the ordinary schools when classes diminish in size and the number of trained and interested teachers increases.

Little has so far been said about the material needs of backward children in the ordinary school. A circular* of the Ministry of Education, published in 1961, envisaged the provision of accommodation specially suited to backward classes, and recommended an additional room in new or existing schools specially designed to house a backward group. Although these practical suggestions were to point the way to improvements, the greatest requirement remains—the need for space. This might consist of a room which in part, at least resembles a workshop, with some flat working areas, sinks and mains services available, and with easy access out of doors for practical activities.

Ultimately the success of any form of education depends on human factors—the quality of the teacher and of the school as a community. Just as one manifestation of the humanity of any civilisation is the regard paid to its handicapped citizens, so is it in the smaller community of the school. There are some schools where the least able receive least consideration and seem least under-

*Circular No. 11, 1961.

stood; their shortcomings are made so unhappily plain to themselves and to their brighter schoolfellows that school life brings them little sense of achievement and a diminishing degree of self respect; where the ablest and most experienced teachers are allocated to the 'A' classes, and the lowest streams fall to the lot of a young teacher, sometimes in his first year of teaching. This is doubly unfortunate, for such a teacher both lacks the necessary knowledge and experience to deal with a difficult educational assignment, and is often deterred by this experience from taking up such work later on when his knowledge is greater and his objectives more clearly perceived. Fortunately the picture is changing, greatly helped by the increasing number of experienced teachers interested in backward children.

The task is one that calls for special qualities in the man or woman responsible, notably a genuine interest in young people as persons, for the rewards of this work will be seen more in their personal and social development than in academic achievement. Ability to arouse interest is more important than a knowledge of specific teaching methods. Any teacher who takes on such a responsibility deserves and needs the understanding and support of his colleagues and access to the specialist advice of the school medical officer and educational psychologist, whose contributions are more effective if they have become familiar figures in the school and are readily available to teachers for consultation.

With larger numbers of children in the schools and a continuing shortage of teachers it will not be easy to give special help to backward children in ordinary schools. At such times it is understandable that a teacher of small groups of such children should sometimes be withdrawn to take other work. Such an event has very unfortunate results on backward children, who, after having enjoyed a period of special help, are then dispersed to other classes to readjust themselves all over again. If a special group or class is likely to be short-lived it is perhaps better not started.

Remedial Education

The term 'remedial education' has come into common currency to describe the special education given to children whose attainments are falling markedly behind their apparent level of ability. This type of backwardness was familiar to early investigators like Sir Cyril Burt, who in his studies of children in London and elsewhere discovered 'many instances of backwardness' which 'are accompanied by, and even caused by, temperamental rather than intellectual troubles, and here readjustment of the home, of the school, and of the child's own attitude towards his problems is almost as essential as in a simple case of psychoneurosis . . . Far more could be done in the way of remedial education.'

A variety of arrangements exist for helping those who are not making the progress expected of them, the so-called 'under-functioning' children: for the very intelligent whose classroom performance is only average; for the dull who at their level are thought to be able to improve. The term 'retarded' is however most commonly applied to children believed to be of average or above average intelligence whose attainments are significantly below a reasonable level for their age, and who do not appear to be making much progress. Remedial teaching is designed to release a child's latent powers, improve his attainments and eventually enable him to take his place in an ordinary school or class.

Most schools are familiar with children who for one reason or another have fallen temporarily behind in their work. Some of them may have been absent through illness just at a time when some important skill or process was being taught; even more likely to lead to backwardness is a succession of brief absences, particularly in the infant school. Some of the most difficult problems occur with children who have moved several times from school to school for family reasons. Large classes, the lack of any specific teaching of reading after the age of eight or nine and

frequent changes of teachers have all been found to contribute to backwardness. Dealing with problems of this sort is an important part of the work of every school, for there are always children who need to be given special help to enable them to catch up with their contemporaries. Some fail to respond to treatment, however skilful, and these are likely to prove very difficult to help. They may be children who have been deeply affected by failure and show other signs of emotional disturbance. With these it is difficult to decide what are causes and what are effects—whether some personal problems have led to the failure in school work, or whether failure at school has led to the maladjustment. In any case a vicious circle is created in which continued failure at school intensifies anxiety and loss of confidence, and these in turn cause further learning difficulties. A child's ability to learn depends as much on his attitude to work and on his emotional stability as on his intellectual capacity; it follows that remedial education must consist of far more than additional instruction. The severely retarded child may find it difficult to respond to ordinary teaching in spite of willingness to try; his whole attitude to work has to be changed, his confidence restored and his will to learn revived. For this reason there are some who would prefer remedial education of this kind to be called 'emotional re-education'. Withdrawal from the scene of failure may be important if a fresh start is to be made. The severity of the problems may vary; when effective measures are considered, there will be some common ground between remedial teaching and the education of the maladjusted.

The term 'remedial education' carries implications that the backwardness is temporary, that lost ground can be made up, and that the child will eventually work with others of his age and ability. These assumptions are usually made when a child is recommended for remedial education and it is therefore important to distinguish between the kind of help he needs and the education required by the dull, for in their case the objective is not to help them to catch up but to make the most of whatever abilities they have. Yet there is much in common between the education in a good special school and good remedial education. Both are distinguished by a more than usually complete understanding of the child and his needs, by good relationships between teacher and pupil, and by a secure and relaxed atmosphere.

Remedial education is most frequently provided for children whose attainments in the 3 Rs, particularly reading, are poorer than their ability would suggest. In theory it could be provided for a child backward in music, painting or craft work. Pronounced back-

wardness in reading, however, is readily apparent, easily confirmed by objective tests, and leads to difficulties in many other branches of school work.

It is difficult to assess how many children need remedial education. Many whose difficulties are not severe are given short term help in their own school. Others attract attention only when their difficulties have become acute and are perhaps accompanied by difficult or nervous behaviour. Among children referred to educational psychologists or child guidance clinics some are found to have high potential ability, whose underfunctioning might otherwise have gone unnoticed, their attainments in school being at least average. It therefore seems likely that there are other able children who are working below capacity.

More and more local education authorities are devising ways of giving help to such children. The first task is to discover the extent of the need, usually by giving tests both of intelligence and attainment. Some authorities administer group tests to whole age groups, most commonly to the first year in the junior school, the earliest time that underfunctioning can be assessed with any accuracy. Area surveys are sometimes held, individual schools undertaking such testing themselves. Educational psychologists, particularly those active in the school psychological service, often initiate other procedures in collaboration with head teachers and class teachers, all designed to reveal children who are failing. The important thing is that these children should be noticed in the classroom so that help may be given soon enough to prevent a simple problem becoming complicated by the disturbing effects of prolonged failure.

When full records of a child's progress in school are kept it is readily seen where help can be most effectively given. In any case the causes of retardation should be sought for as soon as it becomes apparent. It may be that previous work has been missed or not understood; this can often be discovered by using one of the many diagnostic tests. Perhaps the causes lie outside the school—in difficulties at home, parental ill health or disharmony, or in pressure on the child to achieve more than he is capable of. If the main causes remain obscure, then examination by the school medical officer and educational psychologist may be required. Finding out as much as possible about the child is an essential step in deciding what help may be most effective.

Many people are reluctant to take a child out of his own school to give him help, on the grounds that such a step may create more

anxiety. Ideally, arrangements should be made in every school to give what help is needed especially if classes can be made small enough. The head teacher can often withdraw those who need help and teach them in small groups in his room. Part-time and peripatetic teachers can also be useful in this way. Such arrangements, however, can be effective only where a good relationship exists between teacher and child. This is essential if tensions are to be minimised and energy released for learning. In this way groups of up to five or six children can receive short, preferably daily, periods of help while other members of their class are doing similar work. The remedial teacher needs to keep in close touch with the class teacher to ensure that conflicting demands are not made upon the child.

When the child presents a more difficult and perhaps sudden problem or when the simple measures possible in the ordinary school are ineffective, a more comprehensive investigation is called for. Initial consultation with the parents, the school doctor, the educational psychologist, and other social agencies may suggest referral to the child guidance clinic or for other specialist investigations. Only when all the evidence has been fully examined will it be possible to decide what kind of help is required. Whereas with less serious difficulties specific help in a particular subject, such as reading, can be effective, in the more serious cases a much broader approach may be needed, designed to alleviate emotional problems and to provide new incentives to learn.

Remedial education units or centres have been established in a number of areas. In them help can be given to children with severe learning difficulties away from the scene of failure. Sometimes special classes have been formed in existing schools, drawing pupils from several schools in the neighbourhood. At other times work is carried on in small schools or in converted private houses where the entire building may serve as a centre for remedial teaching. Similar work is undertaken by University Departments of Education when small groups from different schools attend Department Centres full time or part time according to need.

Though they may differ in their approach, remedial centres have a number of common features which characterise good remedial work wherever it may be given. If seriously failing children are to recover the will to learn, they must enjoy a large measure of freedom and independence. Children who have not responded to the approaches of their ordinary school may need an entirely different routine in a new setting. Their problems may be best tackled obliquely through activities such as painting, modelling, craft

work, dramatic work and play. These are all means by which a child may renew his interest in learning and gain confidence to make another attempt to overcome his difficulties.

These centres usually start the session with a period of creative work or play. During this time it is hoped that the children will become less tense and more able to concentrate, so that individual work in reading or arithmetic can be attempted with some interest and hope of success. It follows that accommodation must be informal and include space and facilities for such activities as well as quiet rooms or corners where work in language and number can go undisturbed.

Remedial teachers usually have one or more sessions set apart for visiting the pupils' own schools. Such visits help to co-ordinate the work of centre and school, and keep the school alive to the problems of individual children. Close co-operation between everyone concerned is essential for a deeper understanding of the pupils' difficulties. Some local authorities convene periodic conferences between head teachers, remedial teachers, psychologists, medical officers and others to consider methods and discuss individual needs. Regular contact with parents is also necessary: many of them will be conscious of their child's failure in school and be only too glad to co-operate in any attempt to solve his difficulties.

The quality of the teacher is, as always, the vital factor. He needs tolerance and understanding, and should be able to prepare patiently for the moment when the child is again ready to learn. He must have sufficient skill to help him overcome his difficulties. For the child who has failed badly often becomes unwilling to try again lest he expose his weaknesses afresh. Some children develop a protective withdrawal, to avoid further failure and anxiety, while others try to conceal their concern by naughtiness and hostility. Release from this anxiety will help him to trust the teacher and to feel secure and confident enough to want to try again. The teacher must know the children intimately and have a flair for quick and friendly contacts. Where individual needs are appreciated, difficulties in the children's adjustments one to another will begin to improve and a happy and harmonious group will slowly emerge. The teacher will recognise that the composition of a remedial group is important and will need to be a party to the careful selection of children for such help. Finally there is no one teaching method which meets the needs of all the different kinds of children who need help. In consequence the remedial teacher needs knowledge and resourcefulness, a wide acquaintance with

different methods and an ability to adopt the right approach to each difficulty as it arises.

A completely fresh start may be needed to arouse interest. This will demand skill, patient planning and much preparation on the part of the teacher if he is to meet the varying needs of some thirty or forty children in the course of a week. He also requires generous supplies of books, materials and equipment and in this regard most local authorities are wisely generous in their allowances.

There has been a good deal of controversy about the value of remedial education. Nevertheless, the great majority of children who have been given help appear to have derived some benefit, judged either by their improvement in basic attainments (usually reading) or by a general improvement in social and emotional adjustment. But some of the children have made only limited progress, and with others some of the effects of remedial education seem subsequently to have been lost. Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid to the conditions in the child's school, to the attitude of the staff to backwardness, for example, or to the amount of help given to re-settle the child after he has attended a remedial centre. All these considerations point to the need for more knowledge of the causes of learning failure, and of what the ordinary school can do to prevent it.

Remedial education is, by definition, indicative of an imperfect state of affairs—the failure of a child in school caused by difficulties at home, in school, or perhaps in himself. Evidence of its success must be sought not only in improved school work, but in improved attitudes at school and at home. A good remedial centre should help to improve the outlook and methods in ordinary schools, where there is still unsuitable teaching of less able pupils, and where many brighter children are not working as well as they might.

Some remedial centres have already established a reputation for the success of their work. In some areas there is evidence of the tonic effect of a good centre on the schools it serves. Liaison between the remedial centres and the schools is indispensable. For remedial methods are not novel techniques but very careful adjustments of the teaching and the curriculum to accord as precisely as possible with the child's needs. Except in severe cases of backwardness, with its accompanying signs of maladjustment, it is highly desirable that appropriate help should be given in the child's own school by a teacher specially interested, and preferably

one with some training in working with unsuccessful children. The great majority respond quickly if they can be noted at an early age and given a fresh start. If they achieve early success and gain renewed confidence, they will go on to overcome their difficulties.

The Day Special School

Most backward children are taught in ordinary primary and secondary schools, but there are some who need more skilled individual attention than most schools can provide even where teachers are able to give a generous share of their time and energy. By the age of five years it is possible to make a relative assessment of the backwardness of children, and some will be found whose backwardness is so pronounced that they need to be transferred to a special school. Others will reveal their limitations in the infant school; certainly by the age of seven most children who may need special schooling should have been noticed. Most children placed in special schools have intelligence quotients somewhere between 50 and 75, but intelligence is not the only factor taken into account when recommending special education. This is particularly true of a child whose intelligence quotient is at the upper end of that range; then the main factors determining whether he should go to a special school or stay where he is are his emotional development, social adjustment and the measure of progress he is making.

In January 1963 approximately one child in 180 was in a special school for educationally sub-normal pupils. In response to an enquiry by the Minister in 1956, local education authorities gave varying estimates of the number of educationally sub-normal children needing education in special schools. Estimates in the counties ranged from 0·3 children per thousand of the school population to 18·0 per thousand; for the county boroughs from 3·6 to 24·7 per thousand. The variation in the estimates is probably accounted for partly by differing views of what is the best placement for borderline children, on the extent to which primary and secondary school in different areas are able to help their dullest pupils, on the availability of special school places, and on parents' readiness to allow their children to accept a place when offered.

But the estimates leave little doubt that there is still a substantial number of children (including many young children) who need places in special schools, the majority of them in day schools.

If this need is to be met, day special schools will be required in all places where there is sufficient density of population and where adequate transport exists to enable children living in the more remote areas to reach them daily. This should not, of course, involve any children, particularly any young children, in excessively long daily journeys.

If special schools are to be able to help the really dull children places should not be taken up by abler children who can be successfully educated elsewhere. The number of children in them with an intelligence quotient above 75 ought, therefore, to be very small. The special school is not the place for able pupils who are seriously retarded by reason of emotional disturbance; their place is in a school or class for maladjusted pupils. There will, of course, always be some children with more than a single handicap: dull pupils can be to some extent emotionally disturbed; many of the physically handicapped are markedly backward, some because of dullness, some for other reasons. In such instances there may well be no ideally satisfactory placing, and a decision must finally be made after full consideration has been given to the particular needs of each child and the nature of the schools available.

Most backward children who need to be taught in a special school are admitted to day schools. This has always been so and is likely to remain so. By 1939 there were established in England and Wales some 154 special schools for 'mental defectives'; at least 133 were day schools. Of the total number of places then available 14,115 were for day pupils and only 2,270 were residential. Even now, despite the considerable growth of special boarding schools since 1945, day pupils outnumber boarders by more than three to one; precise figures for January, 1963 were 29,471 day pupils and 8,358 boarders. While there may well be some increase of places at boarding schools and at hostels during the coming years it is almost certain that the greatest emphasis will be placed on the provision of day schools. There are good reasons for this. Not only is education in a day school easier and more economical to provide, but it accords with accepted opinion, which regards the family and the child's own home as the setting most conducive to satisfactory development. Many children of limited understanding belong to social groups which look upon going away to school as a punishment rather than as a privilege. As long as

family relationships are acceptable children are best left at home, even if steps have to be taken by voluntary or official effort to improve its functioning.

Those who need to go to a special school should not have to wait too long before they are admitted. As yet, only a few special schools for educationally sub-normal pupils admit them under seven years of age. Most of the less severely backward remain in infant schools; some indeed are not discovered until they reach the junior school. But the very dull children need earlier and more specialised help, for their social and emotional immaturity make it difficult for a busy teacher in an infant school to give them the attention they require, and their inability to take part successfully in the activities of abler children may discourage them from trying to do anything.

To meet the needs of such children as these, some local education authorities have established units or classes for backward children under the age of eight, so that they may be given help, be closely observed and have their abilities assessed. Some of these classes have been set up in close association with special schools, others independently. Rarely have the children been 'ascertained' in the full sense, but they are admitted to the classes because their parents have been persuaded that this is the best way to help them. There is much to be gained by the establishment of such units, especially since the alternatives are exclusion from school or retention in ordinary schools, which in consequence may be unsettled. The members of these classes are often among the most difficult in the educational system. Indeed they would not be admitted could they be placed at all satisfactorily in ordinary infant schools. The groups should not include those who are obviously unsuitable for education at school, but they inevitably and rightly consist of those concerning whom there is very serious doubt. In the course of a year or two it becomes possible to be more definite: some show themselves to be unsuitable for education at any school; others turn out to be able to benefit as pupils in a special school; a few as a result of the stimulus to new development, even show sufficient quality and stability for transfer to an ordinary school. But these are rare, for the characteristics which lead to the admission of children to these groups arise from serious causes, whether of severely limited ability or crippling illness.

It is an obvious requirement of such groups that they should be small, with not more than twelve children. Staffing needs to be generous, including attendants as well as teachers, and accommodation ample, with room to play, to act and to rest, with easy access to lawn and paved playing space, and with adjacent sanitary,

cloakroom and washing provision. At least some of the teachers concerned should have extended their knowledge of young children by experience in a nursery school or class, for the primary objects of the class will be to provide the children with a rich nursery-school life and the teachers with opportunities for skilled, personal observation of them.

Most day special schools admit pupils from the age of seven or eight; at the other end of the age range pupils are required to stay at school until the appropriate leaving date after they have reached the age of 16; a few are beginning voluntarily to stay longer. But an official review of a child's progress should always be possible, and if pupils make such progress that they are ready to return to an ordinary secondary school, then the decision to transfer them should be taken in time to allow at least a year's attendance at the schools to which they will go. There is little to be gained by transferring a boy or girl from one school to another for the last term of school life; to do so solely in an attempt to conceal a pupil's limitations from his employer is fair to neither.

Most of the thickly populated urban areas have had one or more day special schools for many years, and the large number that have been opened since the last war have ensured that some special school accommodation is now available in most places where there is sufficient school population to support it. But the more sparsely populated areas pose a difficult problem. A special school of 100 pupils presupposes a total school population of some 10,000 pupils between the ages of five and sixteen years within travelling distance of the school. Where there are fewer than this the problem of alternative provision arises—a smaller school, special classes, or some form of boarding provision.

Most day special schools contain between one and two hundred pupils, include both boys and girls and cover the whole age range. These features are interconnected, and a school with a more limited age range or consisting of boys or girls may well have fewer pupils. That there should be a lower limit to the size of special schools is hardly in doubt, and the last thirty years have seen the abandonment of many two—and three—class schools. If a school is to cater for both boys and girls between eight and sixteen it can hardly be educationally efficient with fewer than five classes, containing in all some eighty or ninety pupils. Even a five-class all-age mixed school has problems that call for good organisation and generous material provision. The boys, certainly in the top part of the school, usually outnumber the girls by about three to two; the number of older girls therefore is small, making it

difficult to provide effectively for them, especially in the practical subjects. A few education authorities have preferred the solution of an even smaller school of only three classes with fewer than sixty pupils, usually mixed juniors and senior girls, with the senior boys leaving at the age of eleven or twelve to go to special classes in the secondary school nearest their home or to a boarding special school. Though this plan ensures that the senior boys shall enjoy the wider facilities, especially for practical work, of the ordinary school, and the chance of joining with greater numbers of boys of their own age for games and other physical activities, it leaves unsolved as many problems as it solves. An all-age special day school with only sixty pupils can be very inward-looking and can hardly be expected to meet their requirements at every stage of development; the very small staff cannot normally provide the necessary variety and development in the curriculum. Nor can it be accepted without question that pupils who have shown the need for special education in a junior special school will necessarily be ready for transfer to an ordinary secondary school; experience, in fact, suggests the opposite. For these reasons many authorities have understandably avoided very small mixed all-age schools. A school of juniors only or of senior boys or senior girls might be as small as three or four classes, but if it is any smaller it is likely to lack stability and it will be found very difficult to give pupils a sense of progress.

In the larger and more densely populated areas where more than one day special school can be provided, a number of possibilities exists. In some areas a mixed junior and a mixed senior school have been established; in others an all-age boys' school exists besides an all-age girls' school. Both arrangements have their merits and disadvantages. A mixed junior special school can offer excellent conditions for the development of young children in surroundings specially designed for them. But the problem of transferring them, even if the age of transfer is sensibly kept flexible, usually arises just when they have firmly settled in the school and when they are about to embark upon what will be for them the stage of most rapid progress in reading. This fact, coupled with the difficulty of adjusting to new people and new situations, will call for the exercise of great care at the time of transfer; the children need to be carefully introduced to their new school and teachers beforehand, while the teachers in both schools will have to make certain that there is the closest co-ordination of aims and methods. If this is done, one of the problems of the mixed secondary special school will be overcome—the difficulties that can arise if older backward boys and girls are brought to-

gether for the first time in a new community rather late in their school life. Physical maturity coupled with less than average judgement and commonsense can raise problems of behaviour unless they are already accustomed to working together in the school community. The disproportion between the numbers of boys and girls will once again demand thoughtful planning.

The all-age single sex special school has, understandably, often found favour, and has obvious advantages. Progress is uninterrupted by the need to transfer pupils in the middle of their course, and a curriculum can be devised entirely suited to the needs of boys or girls; nor does the difficulty of disparate numbers arise. Yet there are some who feel that in the day school this is an evasion of the important responsibility of preparing young people to take their place in adult life, where boys and girls will join together at work and in leisure, form friendships and later marry. To educate them apart, many would say, is to lose the opportunity of helping pupils to form sound human relationships.

A very normal upper limit for a day special school is 200; this is however often considered too large for a school covering less than the whole age range, and a school of that size including pupils of all ages is usually organised into two departments, junior and senior, the head teacher having as responsible deputy one whose particular care is the needs of the juniors within the school as a whole. The acceptable maximum is rarely likely to exceed eight or nine classes, such is the concern that handicapped pupils shall be known in their school as individuals and shall not be confronted with a society too large and too complex for them to comprehend. The organisation of special schools is affected by official regulations, social circumstances and established traditions. Yet regulations are flexible, circumstances change and traditions can be questioned and set aside. In almost all matters limits are set, rather than patterns dictated and the limits are often loosely defined, much discretion being left to local authorities and schools to arrange what is best suited to their particular conditions. Thus there is freedom and consequent variety.

The boarding school will always have its place for pupils from unsatisfactory homes. But fewer children are now given a boarding school education solely on account of their backwardness, even in rural areas, and certainly very young children should not be separated from their family unless home conditions are very unfavourable. In some sparsely populated areas where numbers are insufficient to justify a day special school it has been found possible to establish a hostel in some convenient centre, and to board

children coming from farther afield. And since it serves an area rather more compact than that of many boarding schools most of the children are able to maintain close contact with their own home, often by going home every weekend.

The size of classes in all special schools is limited by regulations made by the Minister of Education. For educationally sub-normal children the maximum number permitted on the register of a class is twenty. This number can be exceeded only on two grounds: first, if this is desirable in the interest of the efficiency of the school as a whole, and if the average number for all the classes in the school does not exceed twenty; second, if the shortage of teachers or other unavoidable circumstances make it inevitable. Happily such 'unavoidable circumstances' have been exceptional. In January, 1963, there were 1,945 classes with not more than 20 children on roll and 579 with not more than 15; for the schools as a whole the proportion of teachers (including head teachers) to children was one to 13.3. Many schools have been able to arrange for smaller classes for new entrants and for those who have greatest difficulties in learning. Both these adjustments to the need of the youngest and of the weakest are admirable, although the second is perhaps easier to contrive when a school takes over a house containing rooms of varying size rather than occupying premises built as a school. The head teacher is responsible for arranging children in classes as his principles and his knowledge of pupils and staff dictate. For almost a generation now it has been accepted in ordinary schools that age shall be the main basis of division into classes. This principle is followed in almost all special schools, and classes are composed mainly of children within the same two or three year range. But if children are to be thought of as individuals and their own particular needs met, age will not always be the deciding factor in assigning a pupil to a particular class. Some account will have to be taken of general or particular abilities, of personal likings and antipathies, and, particularly at each end of the age range, of their general maturity. Some of the younger children will need to remain longer than others in a class where the régime is of a nursery type, where play and opportunities for social development predominate. At the other end of the scale, the needs of adolescent boys and girls require special thought. Some girls are physically mature at the age of 12; at 14 one boy may be physically a child, another a man. This will demand some care in placing them in appropriate teaching groups, in devising the right kinds of work, and in seeing that those who are socially and physically more mature are treated in a way more suited to young men and women.

Such a group will usually be the unit for almost all the work except that for which boys and girls naturally divide. To reorganise pupils into groups at a similar level of attainment for reading or for number is to fly in the face of their need to be with their peers in age, to present the teachers of the least capable groups with an overwhelming task and to present reading and calculating as skills to be learned and practised in isolation from much that gives them point and meaning. Individual children, singly or in small groups, may be taken for regular special coaching for a time by the head teacher or some other member of staff, but not at the cost of dislocating the structure of their work or of arranging in compartments the work of the whole school. This is not to advocate unrelieved class teaching. In every class there is a place for individual and group work, as well as for work with the class as a whole.

One outstanding problem confronting the mixed, all-age day special school is that of planning the work of the older boys and girls. In considering this, schools are pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand are the very real considerations in favour of mixed classes; on the other are the growing divergencies in interest between boys and girls, firmly based in the different rôles of men and women in society. Women and girls become interested and occupied largely with the arts of dress and personal appearance and the crafts of the home—buying, preparing and serving food, furnishing the house, choosing and caring for clothes, bringing up children—while men and boys become similarly interested in and occupied with machinery, with constructing in such materials as bricks and mortar, concrete, wood and metal, and with gardening. It is natural that boys and girls should separate for that part of their work which is particularly relevant to their different lives as adults. If we assume that it is desirable to give reality and purpose to work involving language and measurement by linking it with the interests of the pupils there is a strong case for organising separate classes of older boys and older girls. Yet for social reasons it is not desirable and for educational reasons perhaps not necessary to go the whole way in this. Practice varies with the differing situations of different schools, but religious education and work in local studies, for example, can usually be taken by mixed classes, while in drama, music and dancing each sex is deprived by the absence of the other. Even if older boys and girls separate for much of their work, mixing for some lessons gives more ease and naturalness to the usual mixed activities of a school—the daily assembly, the midday meal, clubs, visits and journeys. A feature of the day special school which deserves reconsideration

is the length of the school day. Regulations prescribe, as they do for all schools, at least three hours of secular instruction for pupils under the age of eight and at least four hours for those mainly over that age, divided into morning and afternoon sessions. Unfortunately in special schools the minimum of four hours' secular instruction has come to be considered a norm. Pupils of a special school are inevitably drawn from a wider area than pupils of most ordinary schools, and difficulties of transport have led to the school day beginning at 9.30 and ending at 3.30, with a break of an hour and a half for dinner. Younger pupils may well tire easily and need special consideration, but it is a pity that the hours of the older boys and girls do not more often approximate to those in ordinary schools—short enough if the school is to exercise the influence it would wish and sometimes woefully short in comparison with those that await boys and girls on their entry into employment. Many schools realise this; there seems to be no reason why older pupils using public transport should have school hours different from those of pupils attending ordinary schools and it may be that, as existing school buses come to be replaced, smaller vehicles can be provided to make possible the shortening of individual journeys and the consequent lengthening of the school day.

Most day special schools try to provide for their pupils a way of life which meets their changing needs as they pass through the school. The nature of the provision in any one school depends upon the children with whom it is concerned, upon their age and upon their qualities and difficulties. A school whose youngest pupils are eight, for example, does not face to the same extent the difficulties confronting one which admits children at four or five, and a school with a large number of pupils at the upper end of the special school range has very different problems from one with many pupils who are much duller, including perhaps a number who are barely suitable for education at school. Very different, too, are the problems presented by stable and by disturbed children. However, whether it has a bias or not, almost every special school has a mixture of pupils needing flexibility and adaptability as well as plan and system in both organisation and curriculum.

During the last few years day special schools have been developing some of the out of school activities which distinguish other types of school. Teams play other schools at games, visit them and are entertained, are visited by them and return the entertainment. Limited hours and difficulties of transport are apt to interfere



The young artist





(Above:) Bedtime story

(Opposite page:) Young children at play

(Below:) A 'family' meal







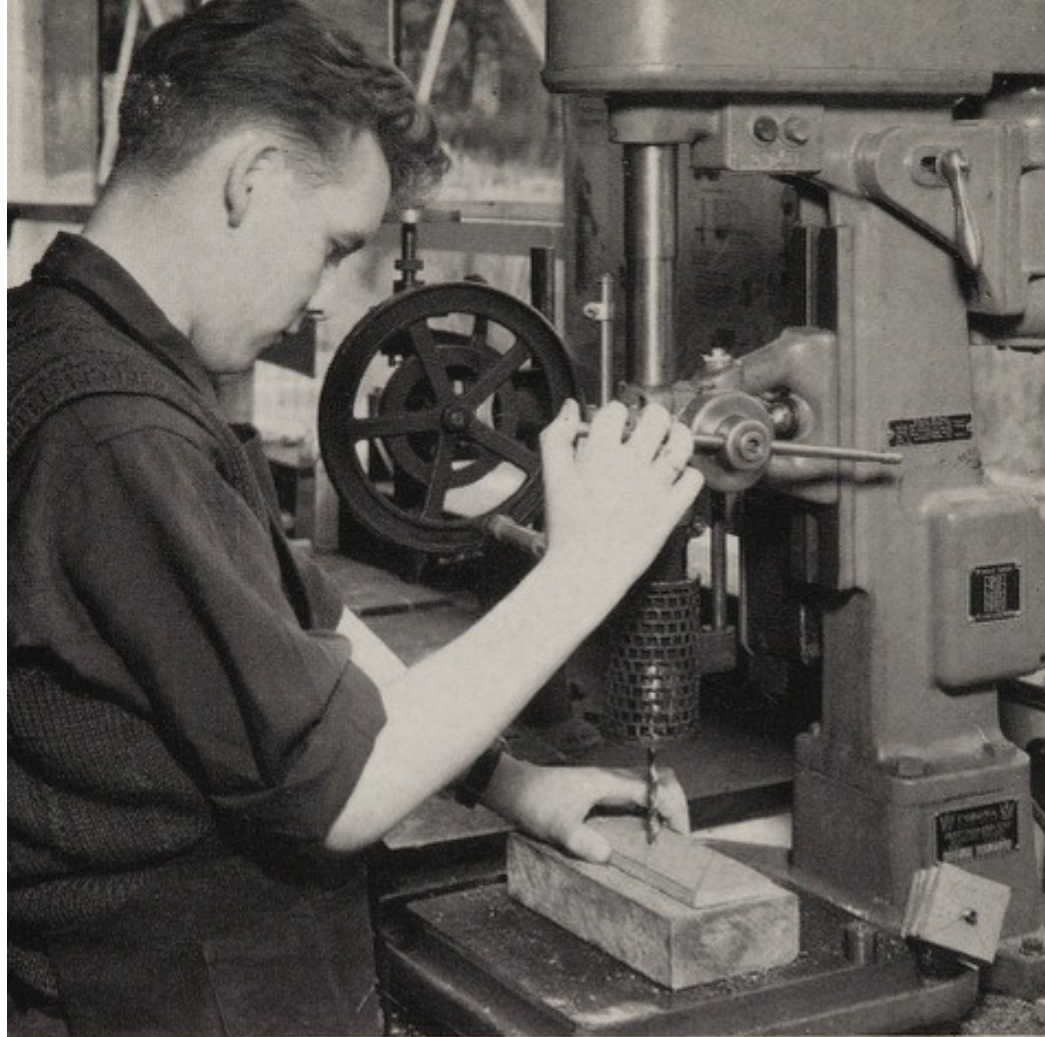
(Above:)
Hen keeping on a
commercial scale

(Right:)
Practical arithmetic

(Top left :)
Modern dance

(Bottom left:)
A corner of the
modelling class





Using a power
drill

Preparing
lunch





Washing day

Craftwork



with clubs, but often the time between the end of dinner and the beginning of afternoon school is set aside for club activities, for games and for dancing. Some schools organise societies so that the older boys and girls can meet in the evenings, and those who have left often visit and join in what is going on. This prolongation of regular contact between a school and its former pupils brings an enrichment of social life and young people who need help can easily seek it from those whom they have come to trust. School journeys have already been mentioned; teachers take children from special schools on holidays to camps or hostels and some walk and climb from Youth Hostels. Once more there is the inestimable gain of knowledge of a different way of life for the boys and girls and of a new aspect of their pupils for the adults. Finally there are the efforts made by the special school serving a wide area to get to know employers and parents. Time spent in developing contact with sympathetic employers brings fruitful returns, as does the difficult task of bringing parents into a state of friendly confidence in which they see what the school does, learn how their children seem to others, and establish a relationship in which they can both receive and give.

As in other schools the day usually begins with an assembly of all the pupils. The Department's Regulations require that 'provision shall be made for every pupil, so far as practicable, to attend religious worship and receive religious instruction in accordance with the wishes of his parents, and no pupil shall be required to attend religious worship or receive religious instruction contrary to the wishes of his parents'. Naturally these rights are observed but it is usual for all or almost all pupils to gather for a morning service consisting of prayers, a hymn, a reading and perhaps a brief comment by the head teacher or some other member of the staff. This is an introduction to worship and one means by which members of the school come to know it as a whole and to sense their changing place within it. Many day schools gather their pupils at the end of the day for a brief goodbye and dismissal.

Special school premises are as diverse as those for any other type of school in this country, different views of the nature of education having combined with historical circumstances and temporary difficulties to produce many variations. On the one hand are buildings, some about a hundred years old, no longer needed for normal purposes but serving for a few more years the small numbers of a special school. On the other are buildings erected since the war, providing classrooms of the same size as those found in ordinary schools, craft rooms, halls which serve for

physical education and for dining, together with adequate playgrounds and all other facilities. Between the oldest and the newest buildings are many schools, some built to the narrow formula of 15 square feet of classroom space per pupil, others built more liberally in the 1930s. Sites too vary, from those which in extent and variety of opportunity challenge comparison with the best belonging to boarding special schools to those which are part of a stretch of asphalt shared with several schools in closely built up districts. Some schools have almost every opportunity for the development of appropriate ways of living and learning; others have little but problems to overcome, being cramped and noisy and lacking in almost all amenity. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that 'men, not walls, make' not only 'the city' but the school, and in spite of difficulties work of first rate quality is often to be found.

Although space in new special schools is generously provided, there is no reason for complacent acceptance of present achievements as the last word in school planning. Indeed, during the last ten years some dual purpose rooms in which senior pupils can combine both practical and academic work or develop a mixture of the two have led in some places to an increasing liberation and sense of purpose in work, especially on the girls' side. In addition, the size of the classrooms now provided has also encouraged a widening of the activities normally undertaken during the school day. These developments are only a beginning. It may be that there is a case for experiment in extending classrooms to include all the space which now usually goes into specialist craft rooms and for fitting at least senior classrooms for many purposes. Perhaps we should experiment in breaking away from the established conception of school. Traditionally, schools are planned so that pupils normally remain in their classrooms occupied mainly with language, number, information and ideas, but leave them from time to time for physical education and practical work. It might be more appropriate in special schools to plan so that pupils were normally in workshops of various kinds—less finely finished perhaps than the usual classrooms—and withdrew from time to time to classrooms or to quiet alcoves for some appropriate, short-lived concentration on the 'academic' side of things. Be this as it may, it is certain that if education for backward children becomes less bookish and more practical the changes involved will entail some rethinking of the design and equipment of the schools they work in.

The Boarding Special School

Most backward children can and do receive appropriate education in a day school. To send a child away to school is a serious step, and one which should not be taken lightly. There are however many reasons why the boarding school has an important place in special education. By providing a community which lives and works together it caters for an important group of children who would otherwise be unable to benefit from special education. Such children fall into three main categories. There are first of all children living in rural areas where the population and transport facilities do not allow the establishment of a day school. They may come from homes which provide all the care, affection and security they need; only administrative reasons prevent their remaining at home to receive special education.

There are others, however, whose home conditions are unfavourable, and where children are neglected or ill treated the boarding school can offer a richer environment and greater care. Children who have been taken into the care of the local authority are sometimes sent to a boarding special school. Particular thought, however, needs to be given to children who live in a children's home for their difficulties may be increased if they have to adjust to two residential communities, the school and the home. For this reason they are sometimes best placed in a children's home from which they can conveniently attend a day special school.

The third important group to be considered are those who are emotionally disturbed as well as limited in ability; for them living at home and healthy development may be incompatible. This group includes those who have tranted or shown difficult behaviour in a day special school, those whose home circumstances cause them to be very anxious and unhappy, and those whose parents cannot reconcile themselves to their children's limitations.

Boarding schools opened in the last decade have found themselves increasingly called upon to cater for such unhappy children.

The post war years have seen not only an increased number of boarding special schools but an improvement in the standard of their amenities. Many schools now occupy fine buildings, attractively decorated and furnished.

Few entirely new boarding special schools have been built since the war. Limitations imposed on capital expenditure led to the establishment of many schools in existing buildings, especially in large country mansions. Many of these have been successfully adapted to provide schools; few have proved ideal, and some have been found difficult and expensive to run, and too remote from town or village. Well designed modern furniture, attractive curtains and pleasing decorations have, in many instances, combined with the inherent beauty of fine rooms to offer a gracious setting in which to work.

Converted country houses with their grounds and outbuildings have permitted activities not always possible in a purpose-built school. The grounds give opportunities for wood craft and learning about living things; stables have been used for keeping livestock, and outhouses have made excellent rooms for pottery, woodwork, weaving, painting and modelling. The fact that a building was once a home has helped children to live and behave as if they were members of a large family. The kitchen may provide not only daily meals but an intimate and informal setting for cocoa and biscuits before bed-time. Many of the smaller rooms can become quiet rooms in which groups may follow their interests undisturbed; they can also make small, homely and private bedrooms. There are, however, disadvantages. Few existing houses have been able to offer any space large enough for assembly, meals, dramatic work, movement and music. Some have proved difficult to staff.

Some boarding special schools consist of groups of separate houses or units instead of a large building where all the pupils and staff live under one roof. In such schools the pupils live in groups of ten, fifteen, or twenty with a house father or house mother, coming together for lessons, possibly for the main meal of the day, and for school activities. This arrangement can offer important advantages. It can preserve some distinction between 'school' and 'home', and so make possible the kind of adjustments children would make in ordinary life. The smaller living unit encourages a real family spirit and helps the children to behave as responsible members of the family. But this kind of organisation

can prove rather costly to run. Each 'house' needs to have separate sanitary arrangements, dining and kitchen facilities, and adequate accommodation for the house parents.

Resident staff must have comfortable quarters where they can find peace and quiet when not on duty. Good accommodation helps to secure and retain staff and contributes to contentment and good personal relationships. Each member should have at least a bedsitting room with its own handbasin and W.C.; married and senior members of staff need their own bedroom and sitting room. Houses and flats for the staff are often sited within the school precincts. Whatever arrangements are made should preserve some flexibility, as the ratio of married to unmarried staff can change.

The accommodation and facilities available for children and staff are however secondary to the care of the children. The atmosphere in which both live is the most important consideration. From the first moment children arrive at the school, often nervous and ill prepared for living away from home, they need a warm welcome and to be made to feel at home as soon as possible; they should also be helped quickly to make a relationship with a sympathetic adult to whom they can turn.

If the boarding school is to resemble a family, where each member is known and respected, then it should not be too large. If the school is large—and there are some who see in the larger school wider educational opportunities—then some subdivision is desirable if the child is to feel a member of a 'family' group. Smaller grouping within a school gives a pupil a greater sense of being considered as an individual, and a greater responsibility as a member of the community. Each 'family' would consist of a small number of pupils who sleep in the same dormitory or group of dormitories, and have their own common room where they may spend their leisure and keep their personal belongings. A further development of this is the 'cottage' home organisation previously referred to.

Any arrangement, in fact, which gives the individual a sense of belonging to a small coherent social unit will be valuable. The pupils need to experience security and affection and to be regarded for themselves as worthwhile persons. In return they may be expected to show an increasing response to social training. As one headmaster put it, 'It is amazing how big a change comes over a boy who lacks confidence when he realises there is something he can do for which people rely on him.'

In fostering his social needs within the school and helping him to become a member of a lively and sensitive community the child's

links with home must not be neglected, nor must his contact with life outside the community of the school. Many means have been devised to help the child at boarding school keep in touch with his family. One is the four-term school year, another, the system of weekly boarding. Advocates of the four-term year point out that the shorter terms ensure that the child's separation from his family is less prolonged. They claim, too, that the shorter school term is a more effective learning period, ending before the efforts of pupils and teachers have begun to flag; holidays, on the other hand are not long enough for the influence of the school to be lost and for the child to forget all that he has learned. The main disadvantage (which may not be so compelling today when family holidays tend to be longer and more staggered) is that the school holidays may not coincide with those of other members of the family, particularly of children at other schools. This could also prove a problem in recruiting teaching and domestic staff.

The system of weekly boarding is growing in favour. In this way a pupil can keep in close touch with his family, and regular travelling gives valuable opportunities for developing confidence, initiative and responsibility. But the arrangements need to be made with care. Not every child will be able, unaided, to make the journey involved; not all will have a home to go to or one that is near enough to avoid the strain of prolonged travel. In any event, the proportion of pupils who remain in school at week-ends or mid-term should not be so small as to leave them feeling lonely or deprived. A large, almost empty building can be very desolate and may increase the sense of deprivation for children unable to go home. To avoid leaving a small minority behind it may be necessary to arrange that pupils who might otherwise have gone home every week go rather less frequently so as to provide companionship for those less fortunately placed.

The practice of 'weekly boarding', has recently increased because of the concern felt by headmasters and others at the estrangement that can develop if a child does not see his home for twelve weeks on end. During this period it has been found that some homes, especially if there are other brothers and sisters and some overcrowding, tend to 'close up' while a child is away at boarding school, with the result that he has found, on his return, that even his bed is in use by another member of the family. Such an event can make him feel rejected and insecure, and an occasional weekend at home can lessen this danger. In at least one rural area the arrangement works very satisfactorily. Pupils (in this instance senior boys) travel up to 45 miles by train and bus, and few of

them have needed more than a preliminary initiation before making the journey successfully on their own. This plan might prove more difficult to operate in urban areas, but there is little doubt that it can develop initiative and responsibility as well as reinforce family ties.

In all these contacts with home it must not be forgotten that there will be many children who are at the school because their homes are unsatisfactory. In making arrangements for visiting, weekly boarding, and other schemes designed to maintain close links with the family, only pupils who will positively benefit from such contacts should participate; the arrangements should not be made just for administrative convenience. Suitable alternatives should be found for those children who cannot go home or who may not be visited.

The boarding school ought also to maintain a close contact with the neighbourhood. Schools which have shown imagination and initiative in enriching the education they offer are becoming increasingly aware that the school community is incomplete unless it has such relationships. Pupils need to be able to go shopping, to visit houses, join clubs and generally keep in touch with the world outside school if they are not to be at a disadvantage when they leave.

To give children in boarding school increasing responsibility for their own actions necessarily involves some risk; how great or how little only those teachers who know the individual children concerned can justly estimate. Freedom to go shopping, to go to a football match or cinema, to make a journey by bus or train, will always involve the possibility of misadventure, but such a risk must be run if children are to grow in trust and confidence. A head teacher will know how much freedom to give. Some schools have a list of graded visits in order to develop a growing sense of initiative and responsibility in their pupils. Earlier visits may be made in company with adults or with older pupils, and then no farther than just beyond the boundaries of the school grounds. Later visits may well range farther—to the village shop, to the nearest town, perhaps culminating in a sterner test requiring real initiative. A final test devised by one boarding school involves a journey by train and bus to a town some fifteen miles away, a meal in a café, a visit to a football match or cinema, a telephone call back to school and a return journey at an agreed time. Only once in several years has a pupil failed to complete the test satisfactorily, and he showed tact and resourcefulness in informing

the headmaster by telephone that he had missed the last train and in asking to be picked up by car!

Many boarding schools have developed their own relationship with the local community. Some have their links with the local school, meeting its pupils socially or in games. Primary and secondary schools have often gone to some trouble to produce a team comparable in age and skill to the team the special school has managed to make up. Such contacts with abler children are valuable, and they in turn usually relish the privilege of being entertained at the boarding school. Some schools have also developed their associations with local clubs, church choirs, scout troops or guide companies where they can again share in the wider life of town or village. Such arrangements have to be carefully made if they are to work smoothly. Not every backward child can be expected to be an immediately acceptable member; training may be necessary. The number joining should not submerge the individuality of a club; not every club leader is able to handle dull boys or girls successfully. It may be necessary to have a number of different clubs or groups, some held at school, and run perhaps by a teacher or by some interested person from outside yet admitting some outside members, as well as some ordinary youth clubs, run by their own leaders, and which the boarding school pupils may join. Ideally the clubs should enable the older boys and girls to meet socially and develop healthy attitudes and relationships with one another, a task requiring careful planning and good leadership.

All these activities will play their part in the preparation for the transition from school to work. Increasingly, schools are trying to ensure that their boys and girls are equipped as well as possible to meet conditions which will be different. There will be situations in the world outside where adults may not be understanding and where active encouragement will be lacking. Work may be repetitive and tiring and standards of behaviour may also be different. School leavers will have to take responsibility in many ways for running their own lives and making their own decisions. Those who fail at work do so more often through inability to make relationships with adults and a lack of responsibility and self confidence rather than because they lack skill to do the job.

Boarding special schools are of various kinds. The mixed school has in principle much to recommend it; but marked disparity in the numbers of backward boys and girls has led many authorities to favour the single sex school, especially for senior pupils, ad-

mitting them from about the age of ten. Some boarding schools have been provided for junior boys and girls and senior girls but these have difficulty in providing a sufficiently full and varied life for what may be a very small number of older girls.

Some thirty boarding special schools in England admit day pupils who live conveniently near. The proportion attending daily varies greatly, sometimes exceeding the number of boarders, in other schools forming only a small fraction of the total. Whatever the arrangements the boarding school should not lose its identity by the presence of too many day pupils; nor in turn should their number be too small. The day pupils can give the school continued contact with the local community and provide the boarders with fresh and different relationships. At the same time they may be less able to benefit from all the social activities of the school.

It is upon the personal qualities of the staff, and particularly of the head teacher, that the success of any school depends. This is especially true in the boarding school. The head teacher must combine insight into the needs of backward children with the ability to foster good personal relationships that will make the school into a real family. Many boarding schools have been fortunate in finding such men and women to guide them. Sometimes it has been found convenient to appoint the head master's wife as matron; in some circumstances separate appointments may be desirable. In either case these appointments are of vital importance if the school is to live harmoniously as a family.

The boarding school, while offering many advantages, makes demands of a special kind on all the staff. The majority will need to be resident, and as long as they are on the premises they are usually contributing in some way to the life of the community. A boarding school calls for more than a usual degree of co-operation, and both teaching and other members of staff have a very important part to play in helping with the children's personal development. This continual giving of themselves and of their time can be very exhausting.

For in a special school staff have to deal with children of low intellectual ability who can also be difficult. The ratio of twenty pupils to each teacher, which might be inferred from the maximum size of classes prescribed by the regulations, is rarely found in practice, and is unrealistic with disturbed, delinquent or very dull children. It is not surprising to find that, on average, the ratio of adult staff of all kinds (both teaching and non-teaching) to children is high: one adult to three or four children. Much depends on individual circumstances: the type of children and the nature

and situation of the buildings are relevant factors. Adults who devote themselves to these children should have sufficient leisure to pursue their own interests. Too unsparing a devotion of some head teachers to their pupils' welfare can lead to a serious impoverishment of their family life, especially if they have young children of their own.

Many education authorities have provided a generous number of teachers, partly because of the exacting nature of the work, and partly because their schools are staffed with additional teachers in place of house-parents. It has not been easy to find good supervisory staff, although the recent increase in the number of training courses may enlarge their number. Where the teachers undertake entire responsibility for the children it is easy to ensure that no artificial distinctions are made between their lessons and other activities. Some boarding schools have been very successful in integrating all aspects of the child's school life. But there are some who consider that there should always be a distinction between school and home, and that to entrust children to the care of the same adults for lessons and leisure is to deprive them of the chance to adjust themselves to different people and circumstances. There is logic on both sides. Teachers should not in any case be expected to undertake domestic duties that leave them intellectually tired or stale, for this is a misuse of skilled manpower. If a teacher is to spend much time and energy in out-of-school activities then some relief during the day is desirable. The vast majority of teachers in boarding schools undertake the work in the spirit of service to a community, rejecting 'the lore of nicely-calculated less or more'. A boarding school is not a day school with boarders but an integral whole, with opportunities for service of a special kind. Nevertheless, the total number of adults must always be sufficient to prevent the loss of freshness of any of their number.

With this in mind some authorities have made visiting teachers available during the evening to organise leisure activities. Such arrangements can have their uses, but they may accentuate the distinction between lessons and leisure activities, and school life after lessons are over tends to become over-organised. Even the employment of day teachers in a boarding school has inherent disadvantages; the best boarding schools have proved that they cannot function effectively without a substantial proportion of resident teachers who both teach and share the lives of their pupils.

The fundamental need is to secure enough men and women, whether teachers or house-parents, who can work harmoniously together to foster the fullest development of the children. If the

teachers are responsible for the general well-being of their pupils outside the classroom, the children's free time should not savour excessively of the classroom; if the house parents are responsible, they need the necessary qualities of mind and character to provide not only care for bodily needs but also sound and fruitful leisure occupations. The talents of all members of staff, teaching and non-teaching, should be fully used; if trained supervisory staff are secured, then the head teacher should know their abilities and use them. There may be instances where trained house staff might be used during classroom hours for such activities as club meetings, explorations, visits or nature walks.

It is not proposed to comment in any detail in this section on the school work itself, for in its general principles it is no different from that of any other schools or classes where backward children are taught. The boarding special school at its best can undoubtedly offer dull children generous opportunities for development of mind and body, and it can hardly be fortuitous that some of the outstanding achievements of backward children have been accomplished in boarding special schools. For only here can they both live and work in conditions specifically designed to influence them for good and in the company of adults who know how to meet their needs. Here, perhaps for the first time in their lives, some backward children have had the chance of living fully, not merely in the classroom but as active members of a well-run community. Many a teacher in a day special school regrets the limitations imposed upon his work by a school day of five or six hours, at the end of which his pupils return to conditions that do nothing to sustain the standards he has tried to set. The boarding school, by contrast, exerts a wider influence, in which almost every detail of the daily routine can exert a positive influence for good—the learning in the classroom, leisure occupations in the evening, the experience of living in a well-ordered society. Regular and good meals, adequate clothing, attractive surroundings and high standards of personal hygiene and good human relationships all help to give the child mental, physical and moral reserves on which his future well-being may depend.

The Curriculum

The aims of education for the backward are not fundamentally different from those for any other children—the fullest development of their personalities and talents within the society in which they live so that they may grow into responsible and acceptable adults. The most successful schools have provided an education that recognises each child's combination of abilities and limitations, conscious that purely intellectual achievements will almost certainly mean far less to him as an adult than a pleasing personality and a dependable character.

Whether backward children spend their early years in an infant school or in a special school, their education in the early stages should resemble that of the nursery group. Although the teacher's provision and expectations will not be identical with those in normal nursery schools, it will be her aim to establish conditions in which the children settle happily and confidently. These conditions are created by the qualities of the adults themselves, by their understanding of, and care for their charges, by the provision of suitable materials for play and for investigation and by the organisation of the children's day. In a successful class the children come to trust the adults, find satisfaction in using sand, water, paint, clay, bricks and other toys and materials, talk with their teachers and with each other, go on expeditions of discovery, care for pets, listen to stories, join in verses and rhymes and respond to music. It is not time yet to be directly concerned with traditional school subjects such as reading, writing and counting. These children are usually slow in beginning to speak, so talk should be encouraged. Attractive, simple books together with some written and printed names and notices will form part of their surroundings; the teacher will read as well as tell stories and some children will look at the books and will very likely refer to them in the course of their play. In this way there will be a very natural introduction to print, but the main business at this stage

is not the acquisition of literacy but to bring backward boys and girls into a state in which they are ready to begin to learn in a more systematic fashion. First things first is a good precept for those who deal with backward children, and first things are those which abler children achieve largely at home and at play before they ever go to school.

This first stage is, however, not the concern merely of those dealing with backward children under the age of eight. No matter when pupils are transferred from the ordinary school to the special school, many of their needs are those of much younger children. Unless they are very fortunate, an accumulated experience of failure will have left them bewildered and humiliated and may have led to emotional disorder. This failure is deeper than failure to learn in school, and they are almost certain, even if of secondary school age, to need a period of recovery during which they learn to mix with others in a friendly fashion, to trust their teachers and to meet the demands of school. First hand contact with real things is required, encouragement to play at whatever simple level is appropriate and to develop from that level: to regain, or perhaps gain for the first time, experience of success, of being accepted for what they are. Special schools which receive most of their pupils at the junior stage can form a class to meet these needs. Elsewhere the arrangements should be flexible enough to accommodate newcomers of eleven, twelve or even older, though if an authority's plans for discovering backward children are effective, there should be very few of these.

The second stage of a backward child's school life may be roughly indicated as covering the years between a period of getting ready for more formal learning and the period of preparing to leave. School life during this period is akin to much in the infant and junior departments of those primary schools which base the children's learning upon activity and experience, and much general guidance may be derived from recent thought on such schools and from many publications including the Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School (1931) and the Ministry's book *Primary Education** published in 1959. Changes in approach and emphasis there must be in view of the slower development, diminished initiative and limited potentialities of the pupils, but they will come to show ingenuity, vitality and even some originality. The curriculum will include physical education, drama, music, painting and modelling, and practical work with a variety of materials; with the girls there will be a growing emphasis on

**Primary Education*, H.M.S.O., 1959.

activities connected with the home and with the boys on work with wood, metal and building materials, in the garden and with livestock. With the help and encouragement of teachers a store of general knowledge of life and the world as it is around them is acquired. This includes material which is geographical, scientific and even historical in content, though this is not differentiated as fields of study. Almost all that is done in class should stimulate talk and discussion and, in this way as well as more directly, teachers foster the development of language. At this stage too, pupils will begin to become familiar with number in its widest sense, including money, time, weights and measures, capacity and speed, and to develop their skill in understanding and in making simple numerical records as well as carrying out the simpler calculations needed for everyday life.

The third stage occurs as boys and girls approach the age of fifteen and sixteen, when their thoughts turn increasingly to leaving school and taking their places more fully in the outside world. They have learned of it from their parents, from older brothers and sisters and other relations, from neighbours and friends; they have shared in the ordinary rough and tumble of life, in the work of the house, in shopping, watching television, attending cinemas, churches, chapels, clubs. As they grow older but while they are still at school the girls frequently take a serious and even burdensome part in the running of their homes and the boys often obtain part time employment out of school hours. All this brings problems which arise from knowledge half-formulated and ill-digested. Teachers are deeply concerned for the total welfare of their pupils and strive to give such direction to what is done during the last years at school to assist the transition to work and greater independence. Perhaps the most important aspect of this is that boys and girls shall gradually experience prolonged physical effort and labour, at first for an hour or two but later, as they approach the age of sixteen and as development of physique allows, sustained for a full school day and even for two or three days in succession. The world which they will enter as employees is one of physical effort or activity resumed day after day, and hours spent at a desk in the atmosphere of a classroom do not toughen the body or develop the attitude needed in factory or market, park or farm. An employer's first requirement of a boy or girl is apt to be that he should be a worker, and this should affect the programme of practical work done in school. Whatever this is, it should give experience of real jobs of some scale.

Men and women are not merely workers and the last terms at school will be equally concerned with other aspects of living.

Boys and girls are likely to marry and have families within a few years of leaving school, and it is fortunate that much of the practical work which is broadly vocational and educational is also connected with skills useful in running a home. As adults they will be members of our highly literate society, and during their last terms at school can continue to develop and practise their reading on the material they will meet—on newspapers, periodicals, catalogues, instructions; they can also write real letters and fill in real forms. Number similarly can be concerned with real life; it is a great advantage when entering employment to have some familiarity with current wage rates and with deductions for tax and insurance, and it can do nothing but good to consider how much hire purchase payment can be borne by a given income. Physical education continues through school life, and in the later years emphasis may be directed toward socially desirable skills and sources of satisfaction such as dancing and swimming for boys and girls, or football and cricket for boys. Thought for the leisure to come leads schools to maintain an interest in music and in singing, and to encourage some discrimination in popular entertainment. Finally religion and morality demand attention: experience and observation confront dull pupils, as all others, with problems of belief and conduct, and they have much to gain from considering them as they arise with adults with whom they share mutual trust and respect.

With these ideas in mind it may be useful to consider briefly the content and relevance of some of the traditional branches of the curriculum. This does not mean that they can profitably be treated in isolation for to do so deprives many of them of reality and value. Some will be treated incidentally, as when training in good taste comes from living and working in a school where good aesthetic standards make their own impression.

Primacy must be given to the development of language. Spoken language, though not the only means of learning, is the all-pervading medium of instruction. Much may be and is gathered by imitation and by trial and error, but language is so vital a means of communication that its sound development must be an important aim at all stages. Those who have been most successful in fostering language with duller pupils emphasise that for them words have meaning chiefly in their relation to known people, known things and first-hand experience, and that the use of language grows best through being stimulated by teachers and used by children in all that goes on in a school. Play and the imaginative re-creation of experience in acting and puppetry encourage the

growth of language in younger children just as real investigation and exploration foster it in later years. Speech is the first and by far the most important use of language, for men make themselves known and accepted (or disliked) more by speech than by any other use of words, just as at almost all levels they communicate chiefly by speech. But speech is not merely a social asset; the ability to speak clearly and sensibly is inseparable from clear thinking. Confused and inadequate speech is a sign of confused and inadequate thought. Recent research shows clearly the central position of language in children's mental development, and its importance in thought and in learning to control actions. The need is not, of course, for speech training, except for those with actual defects of articulation; it is rather for talking whenever the occasion arises, with emphasis on clear speaking and on the natural careful choice of words to convey exact meaning. Occasions will arise informally, when talk is not inhibited by self-consciousness or restraint—discussion about how to weigh, measure or play, how to cut, construct or plant; how to choose something, how to seek help or advice, how to argue without becoming ill-tempered. Hand in hand with talking goes training in how to listen—an art of general importance: how to listen to and remember instructions and directions, how to listen to a point of view before attempting to counter it, how to listen to music and story and rhyme for pleasure. The emphasis at all times is on regular and systematic encouragement to use spoken language naturally and effectively, stimulated by practical activities and by interesting and interested adults. Writing is less important for the less able. Few of them will get far with it, and few are likely to use it in later life, apart from writing an occasional letter, a simple account of a process or event, or filling up forms or coupons—and there are ways in which adults can evade even this. Except when a child shows a real pleasure in attempting story-writing, written expression should be brief and realistic. Writing, like the early stages of reading, develops most successfully as a record of what is done and known, enjoyed and felt. Progress is achieved by giving meaning and purpose to all aspects of written language by using it for communication rather than by concentrating primarily on the acquisition of techniques. Many slow learners find spelling so difficult that even after the most painstaking instruction accuracy eludes them. While every attempt should be made to help them to learn to spell the common words in everyday use, we must remember that correct spelling is much less important than clear and vital expression. A simple account or letter can be clearly understood even if occasional words are mis-spelt. Too

much time should not be spent on the laborious practice of writing without considering what it yields by way of return.

Reading has come to hold a central place in education as a means of communication in a highly literate society. As standards of literacy have risen, so have the demands made on children. Whereas in days gone by a dull child would have been unlikely to learn to read and would have been little the worse for it, today he suffers because he feels personally inadequate by comparison with others who can. To help all who are able to learn to read (and this will be the great majority of slow learners) is a worthy aim, though its realisation should not lead to premature instruction. The reading of books is usually preceded by some recording in pictures and in words of things known to teacher and child, and these serve as a home-made introduction to writing as well as to print. In teaching reading schools usually find continuity and coherence in using one or more series of primers, reinforcing them by books and magazines containing the stories, pictures and information that children find interesting and useful. Even more important is the need to make good use of the power to read: to use books of information, time-tables, telephone directories; to understand signs and directions and bus destinations and commodity labels; to read instructions on machines and food-stuffs; to read recipes in a cookery book and announcements on television. Few slow learners will read literature for pleasure, but many want to follow articles and stories in magazines and parts at least of the daily paper. They should be encouraged and helped to choose wisely. Many will enjoy literature if it is well presented. Appropriate school broadcasts and television programmes can be profitably used, but regular and effective reading of good prose and poetry by the teacher with the emphasis on sheer enjoyment is of great value, for without this they may never experience the impact of good literature. Any moment when the atmosphere is right is the time for reading familiar and well-loved poetry or prose. In boarding schools just before bedtime, with relaxed children in the informal setting of bedroom or commonroom, good reading can make a memorable impression upon receptive minds. Reading aloud is an art worth cultivating by the teacher but rarely, on account of its difficulty, to be asked of children.

Mathematics needs careful scrutiny for its relevance to the lives of the less able. For all of us, able and less able alike, mathematics is as much a part of our environment as language itself, and to speak of it as a skill alone is to diminish its true stature. The earlier stages at school will be concerned with a widening of

mathematical experience and the language with which to express it. For slow learners calculations should be based on real things, for only in this way do dull children gain insight into the meaning of the sums they work and of the vocabulary (six, a half, add, take away) they use. Later, as knowledge grows, the course needs to be based closely on their actual needs after leaving school, giving rise to simple problems that demand for their solution the employment of only those mathematical principles they are likely to use. The dull tend to find multiplication difficult and division incomprehensible. Some might find the ability to use a ready-reckoner a useful asset. The scope of the work therefore will be limited, but all should be thoroughly practised in the mathematical situations likely to be met in real life.

Slow-learning children, unable to achieve much mastery of speech and writing, often delight in other forms of creative work as an alternative means of expression. For duller children creative activities are doubly satisfying; not only do they, in common with us all 'joy in the making', but often find that they can, perhaps for the first time, experience success by producing work of equal merit with that of children abler than themselves. Special schools have proved that in weaving and in pottery, to name only two examples, dull pupils can attain remarkable quality both in design and workmanship. The range of possibilities is unending; what can be achieved depends on the individual interest and gifts of the teachers and in their readiness to discover and exploit whatever resources exist. Few slow learners will be able to excel at woodwork, metalwork and needlecraft, which demand technical and manipulative skill that few of them possess, but some pupils of limited ability have worked finely with traditional materials, and where such gifts are discovered they should be fostered.

Creative work justifies a prominent place in the curriculum not only because it meets a deeply-felt desire for self-expression, but, because, by reducing tensions, it produces a calm, confident and constructive attitude towards the rest of the work. The confidence that comes from success in painting encourages perseverance in reading or arithmetic. Nor should the social value of craftwork be underestimated. The making of a frieze or the construction of a hut or a garden path leads to fruitful and informal collaboration. Needlecraft exercises choice and discrimination in colour, ornament and textile, and helps a girl to beautify the home. Gardening promotes healthy exercise, giving a boy a chance to learn to work methodically and patiently, to observe and to wonder, to realise man's dependence on the soil as the source of his food, to learn

how to grow flowers to beautify the home, and to develop a healthy, productive hobby.

Some backward boys and girls have pleasant voices and an ear for music and can, with training, learn to sing pleasingly. A few like to make music, using a variety of instruments, provided conventional teaching methods are modified and they are free to experiment for their own enjoyment. But for the majority the aim will be to extend their enjoyment primarily by listening to music and by singing for the joy of it, without too much emphasis on the niceties of performance. Music can aid mime and dramatic expression, permitting boys and girls to lose their own identity in an imaginative experience shared with others. Few of the printed plays available make this possible, but the resources of poetry, myth and story are infinite. With the aid of music, story and costume children will, if the mood is right, find expression through words and movement for deep-seated feelings otherwise denied an outlet, and by so doing gain greater control of their own emotions.

Geography, history and science, as separate bodies of knowledge, should find little or no place in the curriculum. All depend, in their higher reaches, on the power of abstract and imaginative thinking beyond the capacity of dull children. For them they will be represented through familiarity with their surroundings. The study of the locality has obvious practical value for active learning—making journeys by bus or train, paying visits to local places of interest, meeting people and entertaining and talking to them in school. All of these, wisely handled, give a chance for talk and discussion, for making suitable written and pictorial records, for learning to behave sensibly and courteously and for displaying initiative and responsibility. Their scientific experience will be derived from everyday life: simple observations of the weather, of living things in field and garden; water, gas, electricity; food and its preservation; the body and its functions.

Recent work in the field of movement has shown the value of developing a child's awareness of his weight, position and the space in which he moves. Physical activity may therefore not only improve co-ordination but enrich his vocabulary and quicken his interest in other school work. Many aspects of physical education involve the participation of other pupils, teaching co-operation and the suppression of personal interests in the interest of the team. The value of team games needs no emphasis, though few slow-learners will be able to excel. The suggestions made in the Depart-

ment's two pamphlets* on the subject of physical education are as relevant to dull as to bright children, but the emphasis will be especially on activities promoting good health and physique and on those which have a social value in later life.

Religious education, dealing as it does with so many abstract ideas difficult for a duller child to comprehend, raises obvious problems. It is, for the slow learner, more a way of life than a subject of instruction. In schools where there is respect and regard for persons and where consideration for this is encouraged, the implications of Bible stories and of the life of Christ will be more readily appreciated and understood.

The final word must be a plea for unity in the curriculum. If backward pupils are to learn to live well, then their school life must offer them some experience of living richly, interestingly and enjoyably, engaging in pursuits that give them the chance to develop their abilities and to acquire good attitudes one to another. There is no ideal curriculum: different children have different needs, and each school will have its own opportunities. What is undertaken may well prove valuable not so much for the knowledge it offers as for the opportunities it affords for the promotion of co-operation and understanding. Opportunism and flexibility are needed, so that the work may develop in whatever direction interests lead. When interests are captured and enthusiasm runs high, backward children, when imaginatively led, show themselves capable of achievement not previously thought possible.

**Moving and Growing and Planning the Programme*, H.M.S.O., 1952-3.

Learning to Live

Among the contributions to educational thought made by the special schools during the last ten years or so has been the re-examination of the curriculum to help pupils grow into reliable people who can achieve independence, form a happy relationship on marriage and run a home competently. Many teachers have, with youth employment officers, studied the causes of success or failure of their former pupils, and have reconsidered much of what is taught during the later years at school.

It is not now regarded as the function of a school to offer direct vocational training. In years gone by it was a familiar sight in special schools to see classes in cobbling, perhaps justifiably at a time when boys secured employment repairing shoes. This trade, like many others, no longer demands a craftsman's skill except at its highest levels and craftsmen who make hand-made articles are not likely to be drawn from among backward pupils. Most leavers from special schools or classes go into unskilled or semi-skilled work; a few go into transport, others on to the land. Girls normally go into shops or factories. What little vocational training they need will be given them in employment; it is no longer realistic to imagine that any specific training given them at school will be relevant to their later work. But the school can give them a useful familiarity with tools and machines, can develop in them a sound attitude to work in general, and help them to be able to use their leisure well.

The emphasis here given to preparation for adult life does not imply that what has gone on in the earlier years at school is irrelevant. In a very real sense everything learned in school, from learning to be polite to learning to read and to write, is of importance in later life; the training referred to here is the development of what has gone before. But during their last few years at school the backward need to be prepared to meet the challenge of leaving school and standing on their own feet. The transition

from school to work is a crucial stage in any child's life, and unless dull children are carefully prepared to meet it they may fail, with results as unfortunate for society as for themselves. Backward children find difficulty in adjusting themselves to new people, new situations, new conditions and new demands. At school, life and work are carefully planned to avoid being over-demanding or wearisome. At boarding school it is even more true that the whole way of life is organised to suit the pupils' needs, and capable, understanding people are usually at hand to help.

Once the protective environment of school is left, boys and girls are largely thrown on their own resources. At this stage the value of a good, stable home and understanding parents is inestimable; nevertheless, those leaving school now have to rely on themselves far more than ever before—to be responsible for getting up, washing and dressing without supervision, for travelling to work and arriving punctually, for following instructions, for enduring the monotony of routine, for accepting the supervision of adults far less understanding and accommodating than teachers, for buying their own meals and clothes and controlling their own expenditure, for making fresh friendships and for occupying their leisure. For this most backward pupils need careful preparation, which cannot be considered complete unless they have begun to learn self-discipline and have taken some responsibility for their own life and conduct at school. To postpone the exercise of responsibility until they have left school and no longer enjoy its support is to increase the risk of failure considerably. It says much for the generous devotion of teachers, youth employment officers, other officials and voluntary workers and not least of employers that over recent years so many have made the transition successfully. The small minority unable to settle into employment usually fail because of unsatisfactory personal qualities rather than through lack of intellectual attainments; in these instances failure usually occurs through dishonesty, unpunctuality, laziness, an ill-controlled temper or an inability to get on with others. The significance for the school is obvious. The curriculum must be thought of less as so much information to be learned and so many skills to be imparted, but rather as an apprenticeship for life.

In terms of monetary rewards, few backward children will be very successful, but most can be enabled to lead full and happy lives despite their limited mental powers. To hold a job, however humble, enables a man to feel he is doing something of worth in the eyes of others.

Older boys and girls in their last years at school respond most

readily to whatever seems to have most relevance to real life. Almost all are eager for the time when they become more grown up and their responses reveal their anxiety to gain the appropriate knowledge and experience. The girls are keen to know how to make the best of their appearance, and how to create a good impression through good manners and attractive clothes. Perhaps they are already looking ahead to courtship, marriage and homemaking. The traditional curriculum pays far too little attention to the primary needs of the pupils. A sound attitude to work and leisure, good physical and mental health, the power to form adequate social relationships and 'home-building' will be the keynotes of the curriculum for the last years at school.

Such a programme may entail some reconsideration of the design of the buildings in which it is carried out. In this respect boarding schools in former country mansions are fortunate, despite problems the buildings have presented. A building that still retains some of the character of a family home has led some schools to encourage older pupils to take a major share in planning their daily lives. One school has recently had built a detached boarding house for the older boys who take almost complete responsibility for their conduct and routine outside lesson hours—for their leisure pursuits, minor domestic duties, and for times of getting up and going to bed. A *Building Bulletin** makes some useful incidental observations on the curriculum for older backward pupils and offers suggestions for suitable planning. The new schools are already using 'dual-purpose' rooms and flatlets effectively, but it may be that more imaginative provision will need to be made if older pupils are to be given more opportunities to manage their own affairs.

The care of the body, personal hygiene and physical fitness will be an important part of the school programme for both boys and girls.† Physical development may outstrip intellectual and emotional development. Before they leave school, therefore, they should have learned something of the natural functions of the human body as well as some understanding of standards of behaviour and personal relationships.

The first responsibility for sex instruction lies with the parents, but those able and willing to undertake the task are likely to be few and the school may well have to shoulder it. Many children with a hazy knowledge of the physiology of sex will be grateful for

*No. 14, Day E.S.N. Schools, H.M.S.O., 1956.

†Suggestion for a comprehensive scheme of health education are given in *Health Education*, Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 31, H.M.S.O., 1956.

accurate information given in simple terms. Animal husbandry and simple biology will initially provide some information. As no two boys or girls are alike in their development further help is probably best given individually by a trusted and responsible teacher who can suit the approach to the child. Instruction about natural functions should precede puberty but during adolescence most young people experience new emotions and their interest in human relationships becomes more intense. It is during this period, continuing long after they leave school, that young people of both sexes need the counsel of mature adults whom they can trust to listen sympathetically and to give frank and sensible answers to their problems. Often problems of social behaviour, relationships with the opposite sex and future marriage can be discussed in small groups where young people can learn from each other. Any discussion of sex should emphasise the need for consideration of others and respect for social conventions. Factual knowledge needs to be given with reference to accepted standards of conduct.

As children pass through the school they should become more considerate, generous, honest and reliable. They will have learned to accept that at times anyone may meet a situation beyond his own resources which requires him to seek help and advice. Towards the end of school life these attitudes and qualities should mature into social competence. If the school plays its part well its pupils will have learnt to live and work closely and amicably with others. Social contacts in the later stages can be deliberately widened, parents invited and entertained, visitors received and opportunities given to meet and talk with other people. Young people vary greatly in their ability to do this; poise and confidence need to be fostered over the years,

But a wider relationship with other people eventually involves discrimination. For a boy or girl to leave school trusting all people alike would quickly invite disillusionment or even danger; the boy, and particularly the backward girl, must learn to judge character, to weigh advice and to reject what is undesirable. This demands clear thinking and some experience, and dull adolescents are vulnerable and easily led. School can do a good deal by example and by the skilful use of history and literature; films and school broadcasts provide a basis for discussion of actions and motives that can be related to religious teaching. The ethics of personal conduct have a very real interest to older boys and girls when they are beginning to think about themselves in relation to others: how man can fulfil himself without prejudicing the fulfilment of others, how it is better to give than to receive, to

learn to go without, to exercise self-restraint instead of pursuing one's own desires, to bear occasional frustration and accept rebuke without sulking or losing self-control. To learn, in short, a sense of values and the meaning of duty.

Such training forms an important part of preparation for employment. In the course of daily lessons pupils should have learned the satisfaction and pride that come from work well done. However small the task, a standard of neatness and finish should always be sought, and this applies to preparing and clearing away as much as to the actual task itself. They should be taught to persevere until a task is completed, even though it may sometimes be uncongenial—this is an important element of their training which may later prevent them from changing employment for frivolous reasons. Much of the later work in school might consist of substantial assignments, involving listening to or reading instructions and carrying them out. As the end of school approaches, the work pupils are asked to do should demand more prolonged periods of application and greater physical exertion, especially for boys, and should include experience with powered machinery—electric sewing machines, power lathes and drills, and possibly portable electric tools—with emphasis on safety regulations. Evasion or malingering in the face of disagreeable or monotonous tasks needs to be dealt with in a firm but kindly manner: they are sometimes the refuge of the backward adolescent cloaking unhappy feelings of personal inadequacy.

Work in reading, writing and arithmetic will at this stage consciously be given a realistic basis. Competence in the simple money transactions of daily life will be broadened to considerations of hire-purchase, taxes and union dues and their impact on the pay packet; saving and spending; purchasing essentials and saving for more expensive items such as clothes. Despite the great advances towards realism in the curriculum, there are still pupils who leave lamentably ill-equipped to spend their wages wisely. A warden of a hostel who has had considerable experience of the difficulties of backward boys during their first weeks at work discovered that some young people from boarding schools who had hitherto had everything provided at public expense could not appreciate that personal necessities had to be paid for and that the money had first to be earned. Practice in the wise spending of pocket money, and some experience of buying necessities is very valuable. Pupils should also, before they leave school, be able to use public transport and the post office, to read a time-table, to buy a meal at a restaurant or café, to use the telephone and perform many other simple routines of everyday life.

Sometimes the arts of home-making are taught exclusively to the girls, although a growing number of schools are wisely allowing boys to share in the work. Sound preparation for running a home can later bring rich rewards in human happiness; recognition of this has led to an emphasis on the practical subjects of housecraft, needlework, and handicraft. Happy human relationships and successful marriage depend, of course, more on personal qualities than on domestic and economic efficiency, but incompetence can jeopardise a happy family life. Understandably therefore the practical subjects have become the focal points of the curriculum in special schools.

The importance of the family in the welfare and happiness of human beings and the vital rôle it has to play in the mental health of young and old alike need no emphasis. Special schools offer an experience of living closely, resembling a well-run, kindly home in the responsible behaviour that is expected, in the domestic duties performed, in the care and choice of clothes, the conduct of meals, the care of pets, and in the quality of material surrounding.

Good feeding and adequate hygiene keep the family in good health. No cookery course for backward pupils can be considered complete if it has not given the girls—and, if possible, the boys too—experience of shopping, of preparing a variety of simple, nourishing meals and of serving and eating them graciously. This is more important to a family than the most delicate array of fancy cakes and pastries which a busy housewife will almost certainly buy ready made. The cookery course should teach the intelligent use of pre-packed, tinned and frozen foods, as well as of prepared cake-mixtures. To learn to use the right tools is an important element in the training. Experience of shopping and familiarity with homely measures will lend reality to arithmetic; to refer to simple recipe books and household magazines is to make natural use of the ability to read.

A homemaking course should also take account of the actual working conditions in the modern home. In the last two decades improvements in housing have been marked, and many once poor homes are now generously equipped with mechanical aids—electric cleaners and irons, washing machines and spin-driers, refrigerators, gas and electric cookers. Training in their efficient use is a modern necessity.

The needlecraft course should also come to terms with the likely needs of the girls, and of the boys, after school. Now that attractive clothes of good design can be purchased relatively cheaply, few

girls, unless they have special gifts, are likely to make their own dresses, but to be able to mend and care for clothes is a useful art. Good grooming and the art of choosing, wearing and caring for clothes should form part of the training of both girls and boys; if in a boarding school, they can in their last year or so be given responsibility for buying and caring for their own clothes.

Much of this training can be common to a course for girls and boys: no boy can be said to be educated if he cannot cook his own breakfast and sew on a button. Both sexes need some training in home economics, learning something of household maintenance, repairs and decoration. The ability to make the most of the wages and to resist advertisements and high-pressure salesmanship would increase the happiness of many families.

A housecraft room usually includes a flatlet or at least a dining alcove in which training can be put to practical use. Here meals can be eaten in attractive surroundings, guests entertained, the bath used, the flat cleaned. The flatlet can profitably be occupied by the older girls for at least a week on end.

'The practical subjects' is perhaps not the most adequate description of courses which are so broadly and deeply educational. They are certainly more than 'subjects', especially for the backward; the quality of the work done will quickly be reflected in many aspects of school life. 'Practical' however they are in the very real sense that they should be very closely integrated with, and give practical expression to, much of what has already been learned; they should be instrumental in emphasising standards and in helping pupils to resist the many adverse influences they will encounter in the world at large.

Finally, education for leisure. The five-day week has now been achieved by many workers, and the working day continues to shrink. Few schools have yet faced this new challenge. Many laments are heard about the passive nature of many of our recreations; there certainly appears to be some connection between the resourcelessness of many young people and their consequent boredom. Education for leisure can add to young people's happiness and contribute to the good of the community.

Preparation for leisure, like preparation for work, must in many ways be the development of what has gone before. If teachers have been alert to discover special interests and build on them, few pupils will reach the end of their school lives without some hobby or worth-while recreation. The school is fortunate that can not

only run clubs of its own but which also has in the neighbourhood a well-run 'outside' group, so that members can graduate from one to the other. The 'school' group can contain both present and former pupils as well as 'outside' members, providing security in the company of known companions and familiar surroundings. These clubs have an important rôle to play in supporting pupils during their first years at work.

Contact with the world outside the classroom is an important part of preparation for leisure. Pupils should learn to use the local library, visit places of interest and the local church; some will have taken longer school journeys, gone on camping holidays or even abroad. These are valuable preliminaries for adult life in an age when holidays with pay are almost universal and travel commonplace. It is, however, the ability to enjoy the minor pleasures of life—helping in the home, doing some decorating, pottering in the garden, reading the paper, having a drink at the local, taking wife and baby out for a walk, and buying a new hat, that will bring many backward pupils greater rewards in terms of lasting happiness.

Employment and After Care

At a time when the number of pupils leaving school has been greater than normal because of the increased birth rate shortly after the war, it was feared that the least able might find it impossible to get work. Such fears have not been realised, largely because with careful preparation the majority of backward pupils leaving ordinary and special schools have proved acceptable employees. Exact figures for successful placing in employment are unavailable, but a recent survey made a few years ago by the Ministry of Labour for the British Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled showed that as many as 96 per cent of a representative sample of physically and mentally handicapped school leavers were found to have obtained a reasonably satisfactory start in employment. The deductions which can be drawn from a sample of pupils which included the physically as well as the mentally handicapped and with the very wide variation in the degree of disability, cannot be precise, but the general impression of an encouraging achievement is reinforced by the smaller scale investigations which many schools have made into the success or failure of their own leavers. More recent enquiries have, however, shown that, in problem areas affected by the decline of some of their major industries, most of the long-term unemployed under 18 years of age were backward when at school. There is, therefore, evidence to show that when employment conditions become difficult the less able are the first to suffer and they tend to be unemployed for longer periods than their fellows. Full and buoyant employment conditions may thus mask the difficulties of the handicapped—the less able and the less mature—at work.

The importance of pre-vocational training at school cannot therefore be over-emphasised. Placing a boy or girl in suitable employment is an exacting task that demands the close co-operation of a number of people including teachers, youth employment officers, parents and employers. With careful placing and adequate support,

there is a wide variety of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs that backward children can do. The great majority will manage best in work which is simple and repetitive, where there is a clearly defined routine, and where they can work with sympathetic adults. It has already been noted that temperamental and social inadequacies are more common causes of difficulty in work than limited ability. The child needs to be matched both to the job and to the people with whom he will work.

Clearly youth employment officers, with their knowledge of what work is available, and teachers, with detailed knowledge of the young people, should co-operate closely. In difficult cases, the reports of school medical officers and educational psychologists will be pertinent. Consultations need to start at least a year before a boy or girl is ready to leave, especially if they are leaving a boarding school far from their own homes.

Confidential school reports need to be supplemented by first-hand personal knowledge, so that the youth employment officer may know the pupils, and teachers be aware of the nature of the employment. In giving information head teachers should be entirely frank; it is not in a child's interests to conceal, for example, a physical weakness, a violent temper, a fear of machines. The school alone is in a position to know whether a boy is reliable, persevering and co-operative, and whether he has manual dexterity, or whether a girl is temperamentally suited to a repetitive job in a factory or would fare better in a domestic post with helpful adults about her. A carefully planned programme of school visits should enable the staff to know whether a noisy or a quiet job is preferred, an indoor or outdoor life, a comparatively lonely job such as a gardener's or a gregarious one in a factory. The youth employment officer, for his part, needs to give as much information as possible about the nature of the proposed employment to enable teachers and parents to predict the likelihood of success. Problems arise with unstable pupils or with the very dull. Some of these may need to attend an Industrial Resettlement Unit for a short period where an assessment can be made, but such facilities are available only to those living within daily travelling distance. The youth employment officer may also seek advice from the disablement resettlement officer of the Ministry of Labour, whose special concern is the operation of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts, 1944 and 1958. He has available specialist advisers to supplement his own considerable knowledge of the employment problems of the handicapped. Such reference in no way implies that registration of the pupil as a disabled person

will necessarily follow, though this course may be advisable in difficult cases.

The school can perform a valuable service at this stage by co-ordinating the efforts and knowledge of all those who can help the boy or girl about to leave. During the first few years of his working life the support of his parents can make the difference between success and failure. Sensible parents can give help and encouragement to persevere in the face of setbacks. They can see that he gets to work in good time and looks his best, and that he asks for advice if he needs it. They will avoid urging the child beyond his powers and will prevent his throwing up a job without good reason, valuing it for what it offers in terms of happiness and satisfaction rather than for financial rewards. These years can be worrying for those parents who are concerned for their child's welfare. But others show little interest and give little help. For all of them the school has a valuable service to perform in enlisting their interest early, in helping them to a clear understanding of the issues involved and of the part they can play, and in arranging for them to meet other parents with similar problems. The importance of the school's relationship with parents is becoming increasingly recognised; its value is never greater than at this stage of the child's career.

The youth employment officer needs also to know whether the employer, foreman or supervisor is ready to give help, encouragement and understanding. The new Mental Health Act has emphasised the responsibility of the whole community in helping those with limited mental powers. The forbearance, at least, of employers and foremen is vitally important for the new employee. Head teachers have already done much to give employers some understanding of their pupils' limitations and have shown how, given a little more help and time, they can adjust to a new environment, make new relationships, learn new skills, and become sound and useful workers.

The lower educational attainments of backward children and their greater difficulties in making adjustments to a new situation raise problems that are not solved the moment they are successfully placed in employment, though with adequate help and support the great majority should succeed. But many of them will need occasional advice from someone—parents, former teachers, youth employment officer, after-care worker or voluntary helper. If parents are sufficiently understanding, any further help may be unnecessary, though even so the continued watchful interest of youth employment officers has proved its value.

Until the passing of the Mental Health Act, 1959, those considered to be in need of continued supervision after leaving school—usually the less stable—were reported under Section 57(5) of the Education Act, 1944, to the local health authority, which was then required to arrange for statutory supervision for as long as was necessary. Local authorities varied greatly in the use they made of these powers. In some special schools most pupils were reported; in others, few or none. Voluntary supervision has also proved its worth. In one area in England arrangements were made for the education committee, as agents of the health committee, to exercise the supervisory powers of the local health authority in relation to every child leaving a special school. Each child had at least one visit from an after-care officer or social worker some three months after leaving school, with additional visits where necessary. The whole scheme operated with humanity and informality. Among other promising ways of meeting this need two evolved by local education authorities deserve mention. In a rural area where the centres of population are widely dispersed a member of the teaching staff of a boarding special school devotes part of his time to the further education of the pupils by holding evening classes in the main centres of population, while in another the housecraft mistress spends two days each week visiting former pupils in their homes or places of work. The advantages stem from the fact that the pupils already know and trust their teacher, who in turn knows their needs and can combine instruction and advice as required. In the second case an authority has appointed a trained social worker to the staff of a special school, with responsibility for getting to know the boys and girls about to leave and for helping them after they have taken up employment.

The Mental Health Act of 1959 abolished statutory supervision; any supervision is now voluntary, and parents who feel their backward child needs supervision are encouraged to seek it. The nature of the arrangements made depends on local authorities. Many of them already had well-proved schemes and some of these have continued almost unchanged, except for the disappearance of statutory reporting. The best achieve the main objective of having a sympathetic, informed adult available who can become a familiar and trusted figure to whom the young worker can turn for support and guidance. The success of any arrangement depends on the close co-operation of all concerned so that their combined knowledge and experience can be readily available during the testing period just after pupils have left school.

A few pupils who present special difficulties such as a more pro-

nounced mental handicap, some physical disability or some emotional or social problem, may need a further period of full-time supervision after leaving school as well as specific vocational training. The Education Act, 1944, empowers local education authorities to provide for the further education and training of such pupils. Little use has hitherto been made of this power. The Ministry of Labour also has powers, under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts, 1944 and 1958, to provide purely vocational training for persons above the upper limit of compulsory school age. For those likely to need further help, vocational training as part of a wider programme of general education given in an educational atmosphere is preferable to trade training in workshops or institutions. Short courses of a purely vocational nature can be arranged at Ministry of Labour training centres; longer general courses may be provided by local education authorities or by voluntary bodies on their behalf. So far these facilities have been used for physically rather than for mentally handicapped young persons.

Old Scholars' Clubs give useful support during the transition from school to work, especially if pupils become established members before they leave school. The school staff usually bears the major responsibility for the organisation, and the club meets at the school. It usually offers recreative pursuits, but its chief value lies in that it enables its members to keep in touch with people they trust and from whom they can seek advice, to meet former friends and share experiences. In a few clubs there has been a demand for further instruction in the 3Rs. This is understandable since slow-learners tend to be immature and to feel educationally inferior. Certainly when they began to stand on their own feet many become conscious for the first time of the usefulness of what they have been taught and of the need to make good their deficiencies. In some parts of the country there are longstanding arrangements for the further education of backward pupils. Backward pupils may find the kind of class they need in the existing range of classes provided at a local evening institute, but many because of limited attainments or through personal inadequacy may feel diffident about enrolling, or, if they do enrol, lose heart because the work is too hard. Slow learners from special schools seem to require classes specifically attuned to their limitations. Classes have been arranged for them at some evening institutes (such classes being open to others wishing to join) and sometimes in the special school itself. One such evening institute recently established in the West of England offers promising possibilities. Both boy and girls are catered for, and enrolment can take place a year before leaving school. Some

80 young people, made up of almost equal numbers of former pupils and of boys and girls from other schools, are offered classes which include woodwork, cookery, the 3Rs, modelling, pottery, art, first-aid, ballroom dancing, physical education and games. In addition there are such club facilities as a canteen, indoor games and television. An advisory service provided largely by teachers of the school is available to deal with personal problems and with difficulties that arise at work. This club undertakes a good deal of social work and encourages service to others.

There can be little doubt of the value at this period in a young person's life of further education and training in the use of leisure. There are some who look forward earnestly to the day when continued part-time education of the kind envisaged for county colleges, and vigorously endorsed by the Crowther Report, becomes available for all pupils. Certainly the combination of evening institute and youth club seems promising, though school may not be the right place in which to meet. Once these young people have left school they often feel too grown-up to return, and few schools as yet can offer the right facilities. There is clearly a need for further thinking and experiment in planning new buildings. Possibly some of the special school accommodation might be associated with rooms specially designed for a youth club or for further education. Perhaps a solution might be found by providing separate premises to attract from a wider field young people anxious to benefit from what is offered.

Those who are unstable or who come from unsatisfactory homes may need to live away from home for at least a few years if the effects of their education are not to be quickly dissipated. A small number of hostels has been established by a voluntary body. The Mental Health Act, 1959, empowers local authorities to provide residential homes and hostels for mentally handicapped young people who need them and to give financial aid to voluntary bodies for the same purpose.

The emphasis on the need to support slow learners during the transition from school to adult life should not leave the impression that they are all likely to fail if denied it. Not all of them, even if it were humanly possible, should be subjected to continued supervision at work and leisure. Most manage with no further help at all, though many are grateful for interest and advice from adults they have come to know and trust. But there are some whose whole success or failure may depend on the friend available to give advice in case of need.

Looking Ahead

The progress achieved since the end of the Second World War in meeting the needs of backward pupils is a source of justifiable pride. Knowledge of their emotional and intellectual characteristics has continued to grow steadily. There are more and better schools and more teachers with special training and experience to teach in them. The education given, the care taken to establish boys and girls in suitable employment and the wider interest and sympathy of the community generally have been reflected in a satisfactory level of employment and in increased social competence. These are solid grounds for satisfaction. But a good deal remains to be done, and interesting developments lie ahead.

More special school places—possibly as many as 20,000—will be needed if all the markedly backward are to be given an education suited to their limited ability. Some older schools will need replacement, or at least improvement, if they are to meet modern requirements. Changing ideas about the education of the backward in their last years at school and during their first years at work are already leading to reconsideration of the kind of accommodation that will be needed to give practical expression to them.

There is a welcome growth, particularly in boarding special schools, in the number of sensible and realistic courses which develop character and ability and help to produce responsible, independent young men and women. Ordinary secondary schools, with far larger numbers of slow-learning pupils whose backwardness is less pronounced, have a more difficult problem. A variety of courses, some of them leading to external examinations, have been designed for abler pupils, who are responding by remaining at school in increasing numbers. The problem of the least able pupils has still to be faced, and may prove to be their greatest challenge in the years ahead. It is unlikely that their needs will be met by any external examination, yet they urgently need an in-

centive, a sense of purpose, which must for them be found in the nature and quality of the work itself. This is a challenge that has been well met in schools able to call on gifted teachers specially interested in slow learners. It must in fairness be recognised that conditions in many primary and secondary schools in recent years have not yet been favourable for the slowest pupils, who are often adversely affected by shortages of teachers and accommodation. Classes are too large, and a lack of practical facilities limits the amount of time they can devote to the things that interest them most. In some new schools one or more rooms have been specially designed for the slowest learners, and existing schools might consider similar additions.

The Mental Health Act of 1959 reflects a changed outlook in the community towards the mentally handicapped much as the Education Act of 1944 reflected a changing attitude towards the needs of backward children. In both, the intellectually limited child or adult is no longer considered as a being apart, but as a person with specialised needs which society has an obligation to satisfy, and who has, in turn, a contribution to make to society. The change of outlook is already to be seen in the growing appreciation of the work done in special schools. More and more parents of backward children are voluntarily consenting to their attendance at a school which they recognise gives them every chance to gain confidence and develop their limited powers. Many of these schools are doing excellent work, through their growing contacts with parents, in helping them to understand their children's problems. The school can inspire and co-ordinate the efforts of all people, both voluntary and professional, who contribute to the welfare of the backward. The slowly increasing number of educational psychologists is also proving valuable in helping teachers of backward pupils. In some areas they are able to make more time available for visiting schools, for meeting the teachers informally, for discussing their problems and for giving advice. The varied educational provision for backward children and the increasing number of people promoting their welfare is leading to a demand for careful records. Besides official medical and psychological records, teachers are making their own long-term studies of the general development of their pupils, a very useful undertaking since it gives them greater insight into the characteristics of the children they teach and helps to augment the general sum of knowledge, still far from complete, about the emotional and intellectual characteristics of slow learning children. University courses of advanced study for teachers of backward children are encouraging child study and research of this kind, and their publications are now reaching a wider public.

The need to ensure that the backward can successfully stand on their own feet when they leave school is provoking a good deal of thought about the curriculum during the last years at school. Though in many ways intellectually and emotionally immature, many slow learners are physically already young men and women, wanting to be treated as grown-ups and to do the things that grown-ups do—to work, to earn money, to be independent. The problem is to find ways of giving some of the preliminary experiences that will fit them for employment and at the same time see that these experiences are broadly educational. Though boarding schools, with their advantages of longer hours and more extensive facilities, can undertake substantial schemes of husbandry, market gardening and constructional work, some teachers now feel that not until school and the first year or two at work can in some way overlap will realistic experience be given in a truly educational way. They envisage a system under which young men and women can learn by living and working for a year or so in an embryonic society specially created to meet their needs, and where they can work not so much for the sake of the product as for the sake of the experience, the growth of self-discipline and the greater insight into human relationships.

Even after such a transitional stage some of the less stable young people will still need further guidance and support. Statutory supervision has gone, but has left the way open for the growth of other ways of helping the school leaver, though it is perhaps too early yet to see what pattern is likely to evolve.

Life does not consist solely of work, and preparation for living must embrace some training in the use of leisure. In some ways the pattern of our society has become more favourable to the backward person. Once he can do a simple routine mechanical job successfully and get on with his fellows there is no reason why he should not lead a normal life. Among his friends and workmates academic prowess is unlikely to be esteemed. It has been asserted that less than half of the boys and girls who leave school subsequently read a book; certainly many working people tend to seek their relaxation in family relationships or the mechanical pleasures of television set or motor-car. This is not to argue that the school should accept or deplore these facts, but rather to suggest that education should be both adaptable and realistic, consciously concerned with the techniques of living in the world as it is.

In view of the very varied types of organisation, curriculum and teaching methods in use it is right from time to time to assess what has been accomplished and examine the value of different

methods and arrangements on which firmly held views are based. What advantages, for example, has the backward boy in a special school enjoyed over another of similar ability who has continued his education in a secondary school? Can such advantages be accurately assessed? Can any inferences yet be drawn from the information collected by schools about their pupils' success or failure after leaving? Are specific follow-up studies needed? There is no doubt that many leavers from special schools seem better fitted for life than others from the lowest classes in ordinary schools. How much advantage is gained from a residential school by a child of low intelligence whose home affords him little encouragement or support? How does a boarding school education affect his stability, his general development, his attainments and his subsequent employment? To what extent would more elaborate arrangements made to help and advise parents of backward children—perhaps even before their children reached school age—contribute to their well-being and lessen the need for boarding places? What are the intrinsic advantages, if any, of the boarding school over the day school? Does the day school need, for example, facilities for large-scale enterprise such as animal husbandry which the boarding school can provide? How far can a single special class meet pupils' needs? Can it include both dull children and retarded? On what basis should the backward children be selected for a special class in an ordinary school or in a special school? On their physical maturity? On intellectual ability? On their social development? What is the best curriculum? Are any teaching methods more suitable than others? Should there, for example, be a difference of approach, perhaps with less emphasis on words, to the education of the very dull? What forms of help after leaving school are proving most valuable to backward pupils? Precise answers to these and similar questions may be difficult or impossible to find, but the questions are none the less worth asking and systematic research is needed.

Special schools and classes will achieve little if the right teachers are not available. Only a minority of the teachers so engaged undertake an extensive specialised training, though many have attended local and national short courses to increase their knowledge. The extension of the training college course from two to three years affords future teachers time for a more detailed and profitable study of child development and psychology which will prove of particular value should they later decide to specialise in the teaching of backward children. One-year supplementary courses in the teaching of handicapped children (including educationally subnormal children) are now offered by eleven training colleges

in England and one in Wales; advanced courses of study of one year's duration have been established at nine universities in England and at two in Wales for teachers already experienced in work with backward children. Yet the total number of teachers who have attended such courses still forms only a small proportion of those who teach backward pupils. Even so their impact is already being felt, and their numbers and influence will grow. The number of teachers who can be released for full-time courses is limited and there are many, for example married women, who are unable to take advantage of full time courses away from home. It may, therefore, be useful to consider the provision of more part-time courses involving in-service training. One local authority has, in conjunction with the local training college, organised a one year part-time course which serving teachers attend for at least one evening a week and for which they are released for an afternoon of each week. This type of course does not deprive schools of a teacher, it allows for close correlation between the course curriculum and the teacher's work, and it can be adapted to meet local conditions. There is much to be gained when training colleges take part in in-service training of this kind.

Backward children owe much to teachers of primary, secondary and special schools who give so generously of their professional skill, energy, understanding and encouragement. The time is fortunately passing when a class of backward children was automatically allocated to the least experienced or the least effective member of staff, for it is now generally recognised that a good teacher of backward children requires more than usual gifts. He is a specialist not so much in English, or mathematics, or science or any other subject so much as a specialist in children, knowing their intellectual and emotional needs and adjusting his teaching to meet them. There is no single 'method' or technique appropriate for backward pupils; the best teacher is he who has a sound knowledge of the ways in which children learn, with sufficient resources to adapt his methods to suit the individual. When progress seems slow or when his trust seems to have been betrayed, then he needs to be an optimist as well as a realist. His pupils will not necessarily bring him tangible proof of success but he has his reward in seeing them grow in confidence, able and willing to help others. He may have the satisfaction of working in a school where he can meet some fundamental problems of learning, and where there is freedom to experiment. Work with backward children is no longer an ineluctable burden, but a challenging and rewarding vocation.

APPENDIX

A note on the procedure usually followed when a child is found to be backward at school

Many children at one time or another, and for a variety of reasons, fail to make normal progress at school. Some of them turn out to be naturally slow at learning, but can be suitably taught within their normal schools. Others, if promptly given special help by their teachers, are able to make up lost ground. But the moment it becomes apparent that a child's difficulties are unlikely to be resolved by such measures within his own school and that further investigation is needed, the head teacher should seek the help of specialist advisers. Although a severely retarded child usually becomes known to the authorities and appropriate arrangements are made before he reaches school age, many others start school without anyone being aware that they are sufficiently backward to need special education.

In many areas there is a well established procedure, familiar to all head teachers, for obtaining specialist advice. This is most important, for there should be no delay in finding the cause of a child's backwardness if help is to be given promptly. In most cases head teachers are able to call directly upon the authority's school medical officer or educational psychologist; at the same time they notify the chief education officer that special arrangements may need to be made.

By the time he has decided to take this action the head teacher will have talked to the child's parents to tell them what is being done. Indeed, the closest contact between home and school should be maintained so that a child's referral for special help is a logical step for which his parents are fully prepared and about which they are fully informed. There is no need for elaboration, for all that is being done at this stage is to investigate their child's backwardness so that help may be given. Parents who are not taken into confidence in this way may well feel shock and resentment at a belated revelation of their child's backwardness, or if the first

intimation they receive is an official request to submit him for medical examination. This can lead to such tension and hostility as to frustrate the best efforts of any school. If, on the other hand, the head teacher has been able to gain their confidence and understanding, they will realise that what is being done is intended to help their child and they will be more likely to co-operate in whatever measures may be suggested to provide him with suitable education.

In most cases informal advice from the educational psychologist or the school medical officer, combined with the results of the tests of sight and hearing and of the normal medical examination which every child has soon after entering school, is sufficient to enable the pupil to be given suitable special education without leaving his own school. Where, however, his backwardness is more pronounced or is complicated by other factors, his ordinary school may not be able to meet his needs and the question then arises whether he would do better at a special school. The decision cannot be made unless there has first been a full investigation of his physical, emotional and social characteristics and his level of intelligence. For only in the light of the fullest knowledge can it be known which kind of school is best fitted to help him; a thorough physical examination, for instance, may reveal defects that account, at least in part, for his lack of progress, and they require medical treatment before any further action is taken.

This investigation includes both a medical examination, carried out by one of the authority's school medical officers who has been specially trained for the work, and a fresh assessment of the child's intelligence, carried out either by the medical officer or by the educational psychologist. For this purpose one of the standardised tests of intelligence is used, and the testing may take some time; indeed, if it proves difficult to get on good terms with the child, it may be necessary to see him more than once, perhaps in the familiar setting of his own home. The medical officer also has a report by the head teacher on the child's work at school, the reports of any previous medical examinations or intelligence tests, and the findings of any other specialists who may have been consulted about particular aspects of his handicap. A report by a health visitor or social worker who has visited the child's home may give valuable information about his progress before he started school, or reveal behaviour problems or other difficulties caused by illness, bereavement or adverse family circumstances.

In this way, a great deal is learned about the child's physical condition, his interests and aptitudes, his level of intelligence (usually

expressed in terms of an Intelligence Quotient*), his powers of concentration and perseverance, and any other qualities or defects that may affect his ability to learn. The school medical officer is thus able to give the local education authority a carefully considered opinion as to the nature and extent of the child's backwardness and whether he needs special education. It then becomes the duty of the authority to decide what arrangements should be made for his education. Before reaching a decision they naturally take note of the medical officer's opinion, the head teacher's report and any other information available about the child; some authorities have found it useful to seek the collective views of all those who have expert knowledge of the child and of the educational facilities available.

If it is decided that the child needs to be educated in a special school and his parents are persuaded that this is the best course, then his admission can be arranged without any formality. They are naturally much more likely to accept such a decision if they have all along been kept fully informed about what is taking place. Some authorities make arrangements for parents to go and see for themselves what the special school is like, what sort of children go there and what kind of work they do. Head teachers are usually very willing to talk to parents and proud to show them round; some authorities produce attractive illustrated booklets on the life and work of their special schools. In ways such as these misconceptions are dispelled and apprehension is allayed. What is even more important is that if authorities gain the confidence and co-operation of the parents, they will not need to exercise their powers to compel attendance at a special school; compulsion is inevitably an inauspicious prelude to any kind of schooling. Should such

*As far as dull children are concerned, the process of testing may well prove of greater value in predicting future achievement than the actual Intelligent Quotient itself, which is sometimes believed by the layman to have greater significance than it actually has. Intelligence is now known to be neither innate nor entirely constant; other factors besides heredity may combine to depress a child's score at any one particular moment. Some children have shown significant alterations between their score in their first test and those in subsequent tests, particularly when some time has elapsed between them. For this reason, it is perhaps more useful today to think in terms of I.Q. ranges rather than actual scores when considering a backward child's suitability for different kinds of education. As long ago as 1905 Binet clearly stated that the purpose of his test was to measure the intellectual capacity of a child at a particular moment, and that the intelligence test indicated neither the cause of failure nor a prediction of future success. Since then intelligence tests have proved their value as pointers to educability—to the probable degree of a child's success in intellectual tasks. But it should not be forgotten that they give only a limited indication of a dull child's future success or failure in life, where the ability to get on with his fellow-beings in the home, the workshop or the club will almost certainly be far more important to him than purely intellectual achievement.

powers have to be exercised, it is almost always to secure a child's attendance at a day special school in the neighbourhood; an authority rarely seeks to compel attendance at a boarding school, and then usually only if there is no day special school within reach of a child's home and no ordinary school can provide for his needs. Backwardness is not regarded as a sufficient reason in itself for removing a child from his home surroundings unless these are so bad as to have a markedly adverse effect on his progress at school.

If, when a local authority has decided that the child's needs can be met only in a special school, the parents do not agree, the matter may then be referred to the Secretary of State. In considering such cases, the Secretary calls for all the reports and information upon which the authority's decision was based, and also considers any additional medical or other evidence which the parents may submit. Where he feels that an independent medical opinion may assist him in reaching a decision, he arranges for one of his own medical officers to examine the child. Only after the fullest consideration of all the evidence is a decision finally reached as to which school is best able to provide for the child's needs. In the last resort, parents may be liable to prosecution if they fail to comply with this decision or to make other arrangements for their child's education which are acceptable to the local education authority, but it is only very rarely that authorities find themselves obliged to take such action.



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FOR THE PROMOTION

Founded 1876

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