Copy of a report (dated 22nd May, 1937) of a full inspection made by the Council's Inspectors, Mr. J. B. Chapman, Mr. J. J. Bell, Mr. J. C. Hill, and Miss E. Matthias, with the Inspectors and Organisers of Special Subjects.

WIX'S LANE L.C.C. (J.M.) SCHOOL (BATTERSEA S.).


School visited on 13th and 14th April, 1937, and subsequently.

1. : Situation and History.—Charles Wix lies buried these hundred years by Battersea Parish Church, but his name survives in the lane which used to lead up from Lavender Hill to his house near Clapham Common and in the school which is the subject of this report. On 27th April, 1903, the school was opened; twelve years later a small wing was added, containing two classrooms on each floor, six in all; and in 1931 the school was reorganised, the ground floor being retained for infants and the two upper floors being allotted to the junior mixed department. The building is airy and commodious, the playgrounds, are ample, and as there are no houses facing the school in Wix's Lane the sense of spaciousness is thereby increased. Within the school there is also plenty of space. After provision is made for the needs of the junior mixed department there are fortunately several rooms remaining which can be devoted to evening institute use.

2. Pupils and Parents.—The rising ground between Lavender Hill, and Clapham Common was naturally well suited for development as a residential district, and on it several streets of good houses were built. In the early years of Wix's Lane school it was no uncommon sight to see twenty or thirty children being escorted by maidservants to and from school, but now the larger houses are divided into flats, and these as well as the smaller houses in the neighbourhood are occupied mainly by clerical workers in the City, by local tradesmen and shopkeepers, and by artisans and labourers of the better type. Among some of the residents spells of unemployment are frequent, and poverty exists although generally it is courageously hidden. The majority of the parents take a great interest in the progress of their children in school. They realise the value of a good education, and they are keen to secure for promising pupils the benefits conferred by the Council's scheme of scholarships. The children are responsive and intelligent; they are tidily dressed and well cared for; now and again when listlessness is evident it is attributable to a late night at some entertainment, generally "at the pictures". The provision of milk in school has been welcomed heartily at Wix's Lane; the daily consumption is about 400 bottles, of which fully 90 per cent, are paid for by the pupils themselves. It is clear that the regular supply of milk has a beneficial effect on the health and physique of the children; one proof of this is that the average attendance nowadays never falls below 90 per cent, of the roll. The school which feeds this junior department is the infants' school at Wix's Lane itself, but enrolments are also made from other infants' schools in the neighbourhood according to the proximity of the homes of the parents. More team-work, however, is required of the teachers; to this end staff meetings should be held at reasonable intervals and at these meetings syllabuses of work and methods of approach should be devised in concert. The Head Master, who was appointed in 1934, had nearly seven years' previous experience as a head of a junior mixed school, and he is well suited to deal with the problems that arise in schools of this type. He works, hard and cheerfully: the discipline is good—so good, we think, that it might be made more free in some classes with advantage to
both teachers and pupils. In Music the Head Master's wide knowledge and fine practical
skill are of great value not only to the school but to the district generally.

3. Staff.—This is one of the few schools in London in which there has recently been
an increase in numbers; the nine classes of last year were increased to ten at Easter, there
being now 226 boys and 183 girls on the roll. The staff, which consists of five men and five
women, is well above the average in ability; the teachers know the conditions that obtain in
many London schools, and they appreciate the fact that at Wix's Lane they are well off in
respect of accommodation and other amenities. They are thoroughly interested in preparing
their pupils for advancement in the school and are on most friendly terms with both the
children and their parents. Although none of them claims a specialist's knowledge in any one
of the academic subjects, the teaching in most cases bears the mark

4. Organisation.—Most of the teachers take practically all the subjects of the
curriculum with their own classes. The exceptions are Singing, Physical Exercises and
Practical Work. As all the classes are arranged in pairs, it is comparatively easy to provide
suitable practical work and physical exercises for boys or for girls alone by combining the
boys of two parallel classes under a master and the girls of the same classes under a
mistress. With regard to the allocation of teachers to classes, a new scheme of rotation has
been begun by which each teacher will move, as it were, two classes round after twelve
months; the scheme, of course, may be liable to some modification. The syllabuses of work
are most carefully prepared; they are, however, very full, and they may tend to discourage
the teachers who are not adepts at selecting those sections which are of vital importance. It
will be best for the teachers to look upon a syllabus as a guide to suitable subject-matter
rather than as a list of facts to be taught and absorbed. The whole organisation of the school
reflects credit upon the Head Master. Still, he must not allow himself to become too devoted
to this side of the work, and some of his clerical duties, e.g., the arrangements for the supply
of milk, might, we think, be delegated with advantage. With a staff of ten teachers, varying
in temperament and ability, there is such pressing need for co-ordination of work and
guidance of individuals that a head should always be free to further primarily the
educational interests of the school.

5. Curriculum.—(A) Scripture.—The first half-hour each day is devoted to the
teaching of Scripture, lessons suitable to the age of the pupils being selected from the Old
and New Testaments by the class teachers. Twice a week the whole school assembles in the
lower hall; a hymn is sung, a passage of scripture is read by one of the senior pupils, and the
Lord's Prayer is chanted, after which the classes proceed to their respective rooms to
continue the study of Scripture. In all the classes short passages from the New Testament
are committed to memory.

(b) English.—From the second paragraph of this report it could be deduced that the
ordinary speech of the neighbourhood is somewhat above the average. The majority of the
children speak without exaggerated accent, but their answers to questions often are
indistinctly uttered, and it is recommended that for every class a short but definite period of
speech-training should be inserted in the time-table; stress should be laid upon the "gymnastics of speech " and in all oral lessons subsequently proper pronunciation and
enunciation should be insisted upon. This will be helped by more dramatic work and by the
reading, memorising and repeating of suitable pieces of poetry. The syllabus provides for a
certain amount of verse each term to be learned by heart, but in all the classes inspected
performance in this respect fell far short of precept; when asked to volunteer to recite many
of the children had to fall back upon little poems which they had learned in the infants'
school Reading is being intelligently fostered, but writing begins rather badly; in some of
the lower classes much of the writing is mere scribbling, and the teachers of the upper
classes must have more than their own share of work in trying to bring the handwriting up
to standard. The style in vogue is rather difficult for little folk to master, but a simpler form
is now being introduced throughout the school and good results are sure to follow. English
composition at the top of the school is quite satisfactory, but in the lower classes it is
hindered at present by the physical difficulties of writing. With more command over the pen, the younger pupils are bound to express themselves more freely and copiously, and the standard of English throughout the school will eventually reach a still higher level.

(c) History.—The staff is able and hardworking; material is well prepared and carefully taught; some of the teachers are very well acquainted with local history and use their knowledge well. And the syllabus is not without value.

But the whole scheme of history teaching in this school needs reconsideration in the light of properly conceived objectives. In the first place instruction in history should be anchored to the realities of the children's lives, to their environment, culture, habits, experiences; in other words, history in school should explain the children to themselves. In the second place every effort should be made in history lessons to teach the pupils to speak, read and write. This second objective will be reached the more readily if the first one is kept in mind, for pupils will find it easier and more interesting to speak, read and write about their own historical origins than about the Whigs and Tories or about the opportunities afforded, for British Colonial expansion by the European rivalry of the Seven Years' War. At present, control over vocabulary and over the organs of speech is distinctly poor. Finally, some effort should be made to get the children in the higher classes to see some possibility of arranging historical data after a coherent style; they can think coherently in arithmetic and are taught to set out their line of thought on paper. There is no reason why junior children should not achieve equal control over their simple historical material. For instance after a lesson has been given by the teacher the pupils ought with a little training and encouragement to be able to set out by themselves the facts used under three or four headings. This, of course, is a result which will not be achieved unless the teacher has previously prepared the way by always using the blackboard in earlier lessons to show the sections of his subject while he is teaching. Every child should have his own text-book and note-book.

If these points are kept in mind the work done in history periods will have a more enduring value, for much more of it will have been done by the pupils themselves. It does not follow that the teachers' own work will need less of the careful preparation which it gets at present. The staff is equal to any demands which may be made on it.

(d) Geography.—Despite good teaching, good text-books and intelligent children, the amount of geography known by the pupils at the top of the school is rather disappointing. Information which is taught and completely forgotten in a few months is hardly worth teaching. We have suggested that a wide choice of subject-matter, should be allowed to the children; that they should be encouraged to study independently along a line of interest; and that half the time given to geography should be spent in expression work of some kind. It is desirable that the teachers should be allowed to visit junior schools in which original work is done by the pupils. With, well-informed, competent and earnest teachers, as most of the staff are, there is no danger in giving the children their heads among knowledge and letting them study in their own way. It is found that under modern conditions a better result is usually obtained in the end by this method.

(e) Arithmetic.—The teaching of this subject is most painstaking and thorough and a good standard of achievement is reached throughout. Practical arithmetic is taught as a separate part of the syllabus and in several classes the exigencies of the organisation make it possible only for the boys to benefit by this rational and common-sense method which should be extended to all classes. The following suggestions were made in discussion with the teachers.

More mental work should be given and every endeavour should be made to ensure the pupils having a real knowledge and understanding of number in paper and material. The mistresses responsible are to be commended on the progressive work which is being accomplished by the pupils in this school.

(k) Physical Education.—The boys and girls separate for their lessons, making five groups of each sex.

Boys.—Each class is taken by a separate teacher. Most of the classes were very sensibly attired, and all the boys of the top three groups wore plimsolls. The work taken
was generally on the lines, of the present syllabus and the three top groups gave a very fair interpretation of its scope, using plenty of games apparatus. More apparatus, however, might be used at the bottom of the school, and here, too, an increased alertness should be aimed at.

Girls.—One mistress is in charge of the two top groups, otherwise each group is taken by a separate teacher. A good effort is being made to get the children sensibly clothed for their exercise. The teachers concerned are interested in the work and all gave the children an active lesson. The younger children were slow in response, and somewhat lacking in initiative in the syllabus lessons. The games lesson taken with the youngest group was well planned and suited to the needs of the children. The top group was keen and purposeful, and showed a good standard of performance. It is interesting to note that dancing is now forming part of the curriculum for most of the girls. At present the scope of the work is somewhat limited, and the movement of the children lacking in spontaneity; a different method of approach should alter this.

GENERAL.—Each class has a daily period of at least twenty minutes of some type of physical activity. The four top classes get an organised games period at Clapham Common. No swimming is taken. Cricket, football and other out-of-school sports are arranged by members of the staff.

6. GENERAL ACTIVITIES.—The Team or House System has proved to be a useful stimulus in the school. Among the four teams into which the pupils are divided there is keen rivalry for marks in work, sport, conduct and usefulness in the school, and the handsome "Mortimer Cup," presented by a former Head of the Evening Institute, is a coveted award at the end of each term.

The school enters competitors for the Battersea district sports and also holds an annual sports meeting of its own.

The school cricket team won the junior championship of Battersea last summer, and the team in connection with the Old Boys' Association is also in a flourishing condition; the ground of the latter is at Motspur Park.

Wireless talks are eagerly followed by the pupils; usually six lessons a week of this kind are received, and a room has been specially prepared and equipped for the purpose. Vividness is imparted in other lessons by the use of the school epidiascope and by moving pictures WHEN SUITABLE REELS ARE AVAILABLE.

(1) Before mechanical sums involving big figures and dealing with, in many cases, unreal situations are attempted.

(2) The approach to arithmetic should be a practical one dealing with measurement, etc.; rules and tables should be learned as short cuts to operations which are clear in principle.

(3) The time allowed for arithmetic should be reduced.

(4) SCIENCE.—Clapham Common is very near to the school and affords excellent opportunities for the development of the work in nature study. It is suggested that more emphasis should be placed upon this part of the science syllabus and that a room should be set aside as a nature study room for use by all classes. The scheme of work based on the science of everyday things is well devised and with simplification should prove very interesting especially to the boys. Two members at least of the staff are very interested in science teaching, and given more opportunity they could make the subject a vital part of the school curriculum.

(5) MUSIC.—The school is fortunate in that several assistant teachers are able to engage in the teaching of music; the head teacher, too, is a very experienced pianist and musician and his general arrangements for the subject are most satisfactory. Instruction is given in voice training, song study, and in simple theory. The vocal tone is pleasing despite a tendency to change production on lower notes, and soft singing is encouraged throughout the school. The difficulties of notation are being faced, and, in the upper classes, the reading of music is most promising. The school takes part in all the activities of the local schools' music association and in this way keeps its own work in music alive and such as the children freely enjoy.
(h) DRAWING.—The school is experimenting with free expression work in drawing, but the initial difficulties in handling material have not yet been overcome. It would help the teachers very much if they were allowed to visit schools in which these difficulties have been met in various ways. The new approach in drawing should be very successful in this school, and it will help to transfer the initiative to the children in other subjects.

(i) HANDICRAFT.—On the boys' side of the school good progress is being made in certain directions of craft teaching but the subject as a whole is not making its full contribution to the curriculum. In addition to craft in substantive form, more use could be made of handwork as a method of approach to other subject-matter. It is thought, too, that a plan of attack should be considered for all classes, thus securing a progressive scheme for the school.

It is unfortunate that the girls do not receive the benefit of a wider scheme of handicraft. It is suggested that this matter should be discussed at a staff conference.

(s) NEEDLEWORK.—A syllabus has been planned to cover practice in the elementary stitches and processes of needlework and it is being carefully followed throughout the appropriate classes. The careful grading of the work has helped the children to reach a high standard of stitchery and to complete various simple processes with confidence and self-reliance. A variety of materials is used to stimulate the interest of the children and useful instruction is given in the drafting of simple patterns with practice in cutting out. In the upper classes pupils are encouraged, to make constant use not only of the classroom library but also of Battersea Public Library with its notable collection of children's books.

A special word of congratulation and thanks is due to those teachers who give up so much of their own time to aid the pupils in their various activities both indoors and out. The organisation of this important voluntary work reflects great credit upon the teachers concerned. Credit is due also to the schoolkeeper not only for the excellent state in which the premises are kept but also for his unfailing courtesy to pupils, parents and teachers alike.

The contribution of the school to higher centres of education is noteworthy. In the last five years about 50 pupils have proceeded to secondary and about 200 to central schools. Boys go to Clapham or Battersea and girls to Balham or Battersea central schools. The secondary schools favoured are, for boys, Sir Walter St. John's, Battersea Grammar, Henry Thornton and Emanuel, and for girls, Clapham County, Clapham High, Putney County and Notre Dame. Within the period mentioned one boy and one girl have gone to Christ's Hospital and one girl to Trinity College of Music, all with scholarships.

7. CONCLUSION.—Schools like Wix's Lane, normally successful in winning scholarships, tend at times to become stereotyped in their outlook and in their methods of instruction. It is hoped that the inspection of this school in April last may prove useful by raising queries in the minds of the Head Master and the staff and by suggesting certain deviations from routine. More attention, we think, ought to be paid to the weaker scholars, to those who appear destined never to win scholarships but who, after all, form the majority of every age-group in the school. Wix's Lane is a junior school with a fine record, but with its earnest and efficient staff and with the "excellent material in its classrooms we foresee even greater possibilities in time to come. As an experiment, "Less Teaching" might be adopted as a motto, and we feel sure that, given their freedom and wise guidance, the children will prove, as usual, that the sequel on their side is "More Learning."

With regard to equipment, we find that the Head Master, owing to a period of financial stringency, has been handicapped in his choice of suitable sets of books, etc., for some of the classes. We recommend, therefore, that a special allowance be granted in order to make good the deficit now existing and to provide for the growing requirements of this lively school.