

It's a Small World

SIR, ————— From the point of view of the experienced class teacher, your correspondent's summary of the Norwood Committee's conclusions as to the functions of the inspectorate indicates a deplorable omission. The inspectors are to "act as a tonic," to "stop drift," to "ask questions," to "cross fertilize," and to find light "for dark places." Are they never to approve the light places?

There are inspectors (and apparently the committee wishes to perpetuate them), who arrive in a school as witch doctors smelling out black magic. They walk into the classroom of a man or woman who, for five hours a day and often under the most trying conditions is in actual contact with the children, doing the job for which the whole creaking machinery of education, with all its hangers-on, exists. Many of these teachers labour at the task of training living people enthusiastically and with never a word of encouragement. And these are the men and women whom the inspector (together with many heads, managers, and administrators) treats as dirt beneath his feet, with hauteur and impatience, which are directly proportionate to the distance of the visitor from actual work with children.

This work necessitates and is fertilized by constant experiment and adjustment. Our inspector passes over all this constructive effort, and pounces joyfully on the line ruled too long or the unmarked misspelt word, adds a witticism or two at the expense of the teacher, and concludes his inspection with a few "all pals together" remarks to the children which harvest a sycophantic "yes, sir" chorus and utter boredom from the child-audience. The inspector passes out in a cloud of intellectual snobbery, leaving the teacher to re-shoulder the work . . .

Encouragement? A word of praise for a child's courteous behaviour or for an imaginative effort to fit the subject to the basic needs of the child mind? Not likely. A swift descent "at least once in every five years" from the Olympic slopes where the educational parasites have their delectable homes, a "full inspection," consisting of the hurling of a selection of lightning shafts, and then exit to the inspectorial car. . . .

There is widespread frustration and resentment among teachers, who feel that they are left more and more to "hold the baby" and are then sharply criticized as to their method of holding by all who have a fat finger in the educational pie but do not help to bake it—may this mixture of metaphors help to stir it! . . .

Is, then, a further host of officials to be created who, in the time that they can spare from compiling statistics upon the consumption of milk in schools, will sally forth to find out what the teacher is doing and to tell him to stop it?

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