Educational Opportunities in Switzerland

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EDUCATION in Switzerland is administered principally by the cantons (of which there are 25, each with its own Department of Education) and local authorities. As in England the Federal or Central Government has no power to determine the curriculum of public or private schools.

The Federal Authorities only intervene in order to establish certain standards below which education must not fall, as well as the requirements of the "Federal Maturity Examination", the school-leaving certificate which enables the entrance to universities.

Each canton enacts its own laws for the maintenance, support and administration of its public school system.

The principle of free, compulsory education is maintained throughout the country but within this framework, account is taken of regional differences and traditions, particularly at the primary school level.

Thus the school systems within the Swiss Confederation vary from canton to canton but, as in England, it is possible to detect general characteristics, particularly at secondary school and university levels.

In general, the pattern of primary education is that all children go to a common school between the ages of six or seven and 10 or 11.

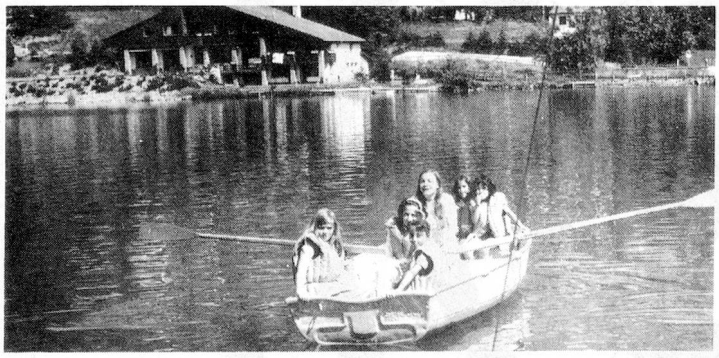
Then, as in England, pupils either continue at primary school or enter a cantonal secondary school establishment, comparable to the English grammar school.

At 16, after passing final examinations, education may be continued at the gymnasia (senior high school) which the student leaves two or three years later after obtaining his "baccalaureat" or "Swiss Maturity Certificate".

At the secondary school and gymnasium young people already tend to specialise, in classical (Latin-Greek or Latin-modern languages), scientific (mathematics-sciences), or commercial.

Entrance to the commercial schools is at 14. For technical schools of secondary level the age of entry is 15. These schools

Subjects may vary but the standard is the same



Swiss schools provide an opportunity for tourism

provide a general education along with vocational training.

Eight years schooling is compulsory all over Switzerland.

In addition continuation courses are open to those young people who intend to become skilled workers. They can attend full-time courses in vocational schools or take up apprenticeships, the education aspects of which are carefully regulated by law.

Some cantons add three to six months of compulsory domestic science courses for girls after the eight years. Attendance at continuation schools is also compulsory for all apprentices, whether they follow a trade or a commercial or a technical career.

Instruction in the Swiss public schools is given in the language of the region — principally German, French or Italian.

Foreign children must know the language of instruction thoroughly in order to follow the courses.

There are, however, many private schools which cater for the special needs of pupils from other countries. There are, among others, finishing schools for girls, and institutes which prepare students for Swiss and foreign examinations.

Many schools prepare pupils for the papers set by the University of London for the General Certificate of Education examination both at Ordinary ('O') and Advanced ('A') levels.

Particulars of Swiss private schools are given in the brochure "Private Schools in Switzerland" obtainable from the Swiss National Tourist Office, Swiss Centre, 1 New Coventry Street, London, W1V 3HG.

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