

THE HIGH SCHOOLS.

In accordance with the standing instructions given me on assuming my present position, I sent notice to the Rector of the Boys' High School, and to the Lady Principal of the Girls' High School, of my intention to visit and examine the classes forming the lower schools. In consequence of obstacles thrown in the way by the Rector, the visit to the lower department of the Boys' High School was not carried out. The following report on the lower department of the Girls' High School was in due course forwarded by me to the Lady Principal:—

The lower department of the Otago Girls' High School was examined by me in reading, dictation, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, and composition, on November 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, 1877. The lower department or lower school comprises four classes, in which the numbers present at the examination were as follows:—D II. Class (lowest), 14; D I. Class, 27; C II. Class, 33; C I. Class, 29.

Reading.—As on the occasion of my former examination, this subject was heard under great disadvantages, chiefly because the pupils could not be induced to read aloud with any confidence. Still, the reading was uniformly fluent and correct, but generally in so low a tone that effective modulation was impossible. There was in most cases creditable comprehension of the meaning, and in the upper classes I was gratified to find great facility in explaining difficult phrases and expressions, both in the prose and the poetry read. Considerable pains has evidently been bestowed on this subject, and the pupils appear used to translating the language of showy composition into their every-day vocabulary.

Dictation.—This exercise is regularly practised in the various classes, and the manuscripts used every day were exhibited in some of the classes. These were most creditably written, and subsequently corrected by the pupils. The exercises done for me were, in two of the classes examined, below the average of accuracy attained in these manuscripts. The papers of C I. Class were very accurately done, and those of D II. and C II. Classes were fairly answered, while the D I. Class did moderately. The spelling in the composition exercises was very satisfactory.

Writing.—I had not an opportunity of examining the whole of the copy-books, but those I looked at, and the careful and neat character of the numerous written exercises I went over, showed that this branch of instruction receives adequate attention.

Arithmetic.—This subject was answered in all the classes examined with unusual correctness. It is decidedly the best-taught subject in the lower school. Not only were routine questions on the rules gone over accurately worked out, but those of a practical nature, and demanding some intelligence in the application of principles, were almost equally well done. The excellent results in this subject reflect great credit on the staff of teachers.

Grammar.—The three lower classes have not yet passed beyond parsing and the inflections of the parts of speech. The D II. Class pointed out the parts of speech in a simple sentence very fairly. The answering of the D I. and C II. Classes was less satisfactory. Many of the pupils in these two classes have been but a short time at the school, and appear to have been badly grounded in the first principles. The class exercise-books, however, showed work considerably superior to that of the papers done for me. It will probably be advisable to give a somewhat larger share of time and attention to grammar in the teaching of these two classes. The C I. Class was more advanced than the others, having mastered the simple rules of syntax, and the analysis of simple sentences. Their grammar papers contained very creditable answers, the syntactical relations as well as the analysis being in nearly every case correctly stated.

Geography.—This subject was moderately answered. It would be well to introduce a more detailed study of New Zealand than has been made during the past year. The difficulty of procuring a suitable text-book has no doubt been the chief reason for limiting the treatment of our own country to the meagre outline in a text-book drawn up for use in the schools of Great Britain.

Composition.—The two higher classes wrote for me the substance of a short fable once read over for them. The exercise was fairly done by the lower class, and well by the higher. The punctuation and the division into sentences were generally most suitable, and in many cases there was considerable variety of expression.

I was highly satisfied with the order, attention, and independence of the pupils. The habits of self-reliance and honest working, which the excellent tone of the school cannot fail to foster, constitute a moral discipline of great value, and entitle the Lady Principal, and those who assist her in the energetic management of the school, to the gratitude and thanks of its supporters.

In conclusion, I proceed to give "an account of the general principles upon which the schools are inspected," in compliance with the request of the Secretary to the Education Department.

An Inspector's duties naturally divide themselves into visits of surprise and visits for examination. Of the former it will be here unnecessary to say anything, as little is done that can be reduced to routine, and the procedure varies greatly according to circumstances. It is different with visits for examination, for at these methodical procedure is of great importance. For the methodical and efficient examination of the work of schools, I hold that a uniform and carefully-graduated course of instruction must be laid down for the guidance of teachers and Inspectors, and for establishing and maintaining a proper understanding between them as to the extent and amount of instruction expected at each stage. The arrangement of this course of instruction is a matter of capital importance and very great difficulty. That which has been in use for some years in Otago will be found in Appendix L. I had better explain here that the syllabus referred to was designed to serve two distinct purposes, one being to show the order of instruction and the co-ordination of the subjects, and the other to serve as standards of examination. For the latter purpose, a class engaged in the work of Class IV. was examined in the work of Class III., and so generally each class was tested in the work of the class immediately below itself. It would have been much better to keep the documents answering these two purposes distinct and separate, and a great deal of misunderstanding would no doubt have been prevented. Four years' experience of this syllabus has revealed several