

half as large as what the Board has given for some time to assistant-teachers whose qualifications are by no means superior to those of the class I propose training.

SCHOOL-BUILDINGS. ORGANIZATION.—These two matters, in Nelson, are intimately connected. The peculiar circumstances under which many of the Nelson public schools were built will account for many of the apparent inconsistencies, and for much of the apparent absence of design, that must at once be obvious to a stranger. It must be remembered, however, that those districts which, when building grants began to be dispensed with a lavish hand by the General Government, had as yet done but little towards supplying themselves with school-buildings, had a great advantage over places like Nelson, which, for long years, had been struggling to provide themselves with schools of the cheapest and most primitive construction, as occasion served. In such cases it is a great point gained to have nothing to undo or to pull down. The difference is that between a modern city constructed on a carefully thought-out and symmetrical plan, and an old-fashioned town, in which house has been added to house according to the necessities or the present means of the builders. But, although these reasons may be thought sufficient to excuse admitted shortcomings in the past, the time has come when some general principles as to the building and organization of new schools should be laid down and carried out, so far as is practicable, when opportunity offers. False steps cannot be retraced at once, but if correct standards are once laid down and assented to, approximations to what is best can gradually be made. Contrary to what might have been expected, fewer mistakes have been made in the country than in the town. Taking it as a canon that, unless some impassable barrier intervenes, no two country schools should be less than four miles apart, I find only three groups that violate this rule, the first being Lower Wakefield, Upper Wakefield, and Foxhill—the total distance between all these three schools being little more than four miles; Ranzau and Hope—with an interval of about a mile and three-quarters between them; and River Terrace, Brightwater, and Spring Grove—these three schools being separated by less than three miles altogether. It ought to be stated that in the first two instances an attempt on the part of the Board to consolidate the schools was frustrated by an active local opposition. Little fault can be found with the organization of the country schools, which is indeed of the simplest kind. The staff is now, it appears to me, in every case numerous enough for the work required of it, the Board having invariably granted one or more assistants where the numbers fairly warranted such appointments. The division of comparatively small schools into separate departments for boys and girls has, to say the least of it, been carried quite far enough, and, if not carefully restricted in future, will lead to increase of expense, and, what is worse, to diminution of efficiency. It is only in large schools, indeed, that this system can be carried out without throwing away the enormous advantages to be derived from the division of labour. It is in the City of Nelson itself that the want of a definite plan is most palpably shown, both in the erection of school-buildings and in the subsequent organization of the schools. Some years must elapse before much can be done in the way of consolidating the now scattered groups of buildings. But defects in organization are more easily remedied. For many years the means at the disposal of the Board did not admit of two groups of schools being built in a central spot, with accommodation enough for all the children of both sexes within the city. Small detached schools were therefore erected, where the population was thickest, from time to time, as funds were available, and the opportunity for building capacious schools on a well-considered plan was lost. There is nothing for it now but to make the best of such buildings as we have, two of these, at least—Toitot Valley Girls', and Haven Road Boys'—leaving little to be desired, if considered as detached schools, and not as instalments towards a future whole. But the prospect of a reform in the organization of the city schools is not so remote. A beginning may be made by showing what direction improvements should take, as opportunity offers. At the opening of the year three of the schools were fairly organized—Hampden Street, Haven Road, and Toitot Valley. Each of these establishments had a head-teacher, responsible for the general conduct of the school, and a sufficient staff of assistants, looking to the head-teacher for direction in carrying on the work. But towards the close of the year the power of supervision has been taken from the mistress of the Toitot Valley School, which has been split up into three departments under three independent heads. Excellent special reasons doubtless exist for this change. All that I wish to point out is that as a general rule this is a step in the wrong direction, and the reconsolidation of the school, under one head, should be steadily kept in view as a thing desirable in itself. The present organization of the Bridge Street group of schools is unique. In one room is a master with about forty scholars, drafted from the most advanced boys in the other town schools. Each of the other two rooms is occupied by a master doing junior work, but who has nothing whatever to do with his neighbour on either hand. A building in close proximity, intended for boys in the earlier stages, is taught by a mistress, who acts quite independently of any of the three masters of the Bridge Street School. At Hardy Street Girls' Schools there are also three independent heads of divisions, in three separate rooms. Here, as in Toitot Valley, whatever reasons connected with the *personnel* of the present staff may be alleged in favour of the existing anomalous arrangements, it will hardly be seriously contended that they approach ideal perfection, or that they ought not to be altered as soon as the personal reasons that may now exist for their continuance cease. These schools are all doing their work well, and I advocate no sudden or violent changes, confining myself to pointing out what direction changes should, in my opinion, ultimately take.

METHOD OF TEACHING.—It is impossible to make any general statement as to the way in which the prescribed subjects are being taught that shall be even approximately true of all our schools. I shall, therefore, confine myself to stating generally that there is little to complain of in the methods of teaching the leading subjects now pursued in the Nelson schools. The one weak point is composition, or letter-writing. This invaluable art has been so grossly neglected in a large proportion of our schools, that I have resolved not to grant a pass in future in any of the three higher standards, unless the candidate is able to express himself readily and clearly on the simple subjects set.

I have, &c.,

W. C. HODGSON,
Inspector.

The Chairman of the Nelson Education Board,