

In an appendix to this report will be found a statement* of the principal details of the standard examinations for all the schools in my district. Of these, 34 gained a gross percentage of passes of 75 or more; 17 gained a gross percentage of between 50 and 75. The following schools had a percentage below 50: Bannockburn, Black's, Blackstone Hill, Brighton, Drybread, Duntroon, Evansdale, Eweburn, Hyde, Ida Valley, Kawarau Gorge, Kyeburn, Maerewhenua, Merton, Naseby, Nevis, and St. Bathans. Last year nineteen schools in the same district had a percentage below 50.

INSTRUCTION.—The subjects generally taught with least skill and success are reading, writing, composition, geography, and history. On each of these it may be worth while to make a few remarks. Good reading is on the whole rarely met with, and the cause is, unquestionably, unskilful teaching, and inability on the part of teachers to set a good model. Many simply *hear* the reading lessons, and make no serious or earnest attempt to *teach* them at all. In such cases improvement is out of the question. There is not a work on school management but discusses this subject, and points out many methods and expedients for teaching reading, so that those who merely listen during reading lessons can hardly plead ignorance in extenuation of their bad methods. In a large number of schools I have been struck by the neglect of preparatory examination and explanation of the principal difficulties. This is surely an essential preliminary to every skilfully conducted reading lesson. For how can the reading be fluent if the new and difficult words are met with for the first time while the paragraph is being read; and how can it be intelligent and expressive if the meaning of the sentence or paragraph is imperfectly understood? It is too frequently assumed that children can prepare their reading lessons without the assistance or guidance of the teacher. No doubt they can and should do something in this direction, but their self-help should not be trusted too far, and, above all, home preparation should never be allowed to supersede the preliminary examination and explanation of difficulties, whether in the matter or in the words of the lesson. To give this, the teacher must have gone over the lesson carefully before. So far as I can judge from lessons given in my presence, it is rather unusual for teachers in Otago to make themselves acquainted with the lesson before it comes on for hearing. Such previous preparation by the teacher is admitted on every hand to be essential to intelligent and successful teaching, and neglect of it is, I believe, the principal cause of the insufficient comprehension of lessons that an Inspector encounters with such unwelcome frequency. I know of no reason why reading should not be much better taught on the average than it is at present. Improvement is certain if teachers would only take the matter earnestly in hand. So long as they do not take the trouble to put in practice the most approved methods of teaching it, and to make themselves familiar with the lessons before they come on for hearing, little can be done to mend matters. What is wanted is to develop a higher conception of what good reading is, but this is by no means easy of accomplishment. A well-conducted and efficient model school in connection with the Training College could do a great deal to form opinion on this and kindred subjects; but, so far as I can judge, that institution has not exercised any notable influence in this direction. There are certain faults so prevalent in some parts of the district that I may be excused for pointing them out in this report. One is the practice of hearing large classes read in turn as they stand or sit. I never lose an opportunity of pointing out how faulty this method is; but many teachers, and especially pupil-teachers, persist in adhering to it. I find this practice very frequently accompanied by inattention and a want of interest in the lesson, and these characteristics it tends directly to encourage. Another is the injudicious employment of simultaneous reading in the lower classes. This is a most valuable method in the hands of a skilful and attentive teacher; but where no care is taken to see that every pupil follows the place with the finger or a slate pencil, where the model is badly given, or badly reproduced by the children, and where the children are allowed to learn the lessons by rote without knowing the words, it may do, and often does, a vast amount of harm. For efficient simultaneous reading, excellent order and attention are indispensable. When these are lax it would be better to hear the class read in small groups of half a dozen pupils or so, whose efforts could be more easily and carefully watched by the teacher. A third fault consists in frequent, and often unnecessary, interruptions during the reading of a sentence or paragraph. It seems much better to have the sentence read through first, and to make the needful corrections in a thorough and impressive way afterwards. Only one other point calls for notice, and that is the neglect to use the black-board sufficiently in the correction of mistakes. I am very often told that mistakes made by pupils in the pronunciation or explanation of words have been pointed out and corrected in the course of teaching. In such a case the correction has manifestly been ineffectual, and might almost as well have been neglected. I am satisfied that most of this ineffectual correction and teaching is due to want of clearness and emphasis in the explanations. Were they written down in a clear and simple way on the black-board the explanations or corrections would be far more impressive and emphatic, and would appeal much more forcibly to the understanding of the children. A rapid revision of the difficulties so dealt with would form a suitable close to the lesson, and tend to make the teaching effectual and educative; for the value of a lesson as a mental discipline is to be measured, not by the amount of explanation and comment given by the teacher, but by what the pupils have assimilated, do understand, and will remember. A teacher who measures his success by the latter standard will hardly expect an Inspector to excuse ignorance and mistakes because he is assured that the pupils have been taught the things they show they do not know. Such teaching is not work to boast of, or to urge in palliation of shortcomings.

Writing is the next subject that is often taught with less skill and success than might fairly be looked for. I do not say that in a majority of the schools I have examined the copy-books were carelessly written; but I do say that in a majority of these schools the exercise-books, the written answers of the upper classes, and the slate-work in the lower, were written more or less carelessly. Even the copy-books in a good number of schools showed very poor work. Vere Foster's series is now in very general use. They work out a definite and easy style of writing, marked by certain peculiarities in the height, form, and linking of the letters and their component parts. With these characteristics a few teachers have not even taken the trouble to acquaint themselves, and they allow

* Not reprinted.