

gradually decreases until it is but 44 per cent. in Standard VI. This is no more than might be looked for. Though intelligent instruction in the lower standards is of the highest importance, mechanical work is for a time successful, and a good percentage of passes may be secured by a teacher of inferior ability if he is fairly zealous in his work; but as the higher standards are taken the ability of the teacher to deal with the intellectual side of primary education is fully exercised. Mechanical reading and arithmetic, and the repetition of geographical names, will not secure a pass. The nature of the examination demands a constantly increasing development of the scholar's intelligence. He must be able to analyse the passages read, and to apply his power of analysis to grammar and composition. The principles of arithmetic must be so thoroughly understood that they can be applied to the solution of simple problems, and his mental training is tested in a large number of the questions in geography and history. Under these conditions it is not surprising that the work of the higher standards in our smaller schools in many cases fails to stand the test of the rigid examination imposed by the syllabus; but I am pleased to be able to report that the quality of the work in the higher standards throughout the district is steadily improving. Many teachers are producing most creditable results in the face of the serious hindrances to effective work which are so general. Our town schools, possessing great advantages in the matter of classification and arrangement of staff, might fairly be expected to produce more than average results. It has however been necessary, in reporting on individual schools, to direct attention to several cases where the energy and ability displayed do not appear to be commensurate with the advantages possessed.

I have in previous reports spoken at length on the several subjects of instruction; but the requirements of the syllabus are now so thoroughly understood that, as a rule, the work, so far as it is taken, is well done; failures arising principally from inability to cover the whole work of a standard. There are, however, two subjects which are very generally defective—reading and composition. These two subjects are so intimately connected that probably inefficiency in one effectually hinders progress in the other. Teachers are too liable to rest satisfied with ordinary fluency in reading, and to neglect the laborious oral teaching necessary to insure an intelligent appreciation of the force of the passage read, and of the intrinsic meaning of the principal words used. One unaccustomed to examining would be surprised at the total absence of intelligence that may accompany great fluency, acquired by constant iteration. The prime cause of this defect, as I have previously pointed out, is the use of a single set of reading-books. The need for special attention to this subject is at once apparent when a new book is substituted for the one which a class has been trained to use. Composition, though one of the most essential, is probably the worst taught subject in the syllabus. This probably arises from the difficulty of obtaining immediate results and of gauging the scholars' ability by any definite standard. But, whatever the cause, the fact remains that the subject is seldom efficiently taught, even in our larger schools, and most of the failures in grammar are attributable to inability to meet the requirements in composition. There can be little doubt, however, but that, with more attention to intelligent reading and the use of words, accompanied by oral instruction in logical analysis, the difficulties of the subject would mainly disappear.

I cannot speak very highly of the instruction given in the extra subjects—elementary science, drawing, and singing. The Saturday Teachers' Lectures in these subjects, given two years ago, did much towards establishing them as regular subjects of instruction, but, with the exception of singing, which is fairly taught, they have gradually given place to the more essential subjects. Sewing is, with few exceptions, efficiently taught.

The discipline in most of the schools is mild, but effective. I seldom notice cases of harshness, but in not a few instances it is necessary to recommend greater firmness in the general management.

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Board of Education.

HENRY W. HAMMOND, Inspector.