

15. Scarcely anything affords more convincing evidence of the merits or defects of a teacher's methods than the condition of the scholars' exercise-books, and I take every opportunity of examining them during my visits of inspection. Referring to the notes made during these visits, I find the following amongst others on this subject: "The exercise-books show a regular and systematic course of instruction throughout the year." "All the books in this school are remarkable for neatness of writing, and methodical arrangement of the work required in the respective standards." "Full of uncorrected errors." "Carefully corrected, but carelessly written." "No grammar exercises in the Fifth and Sixth Standard books, and uncorrected errors in the Fourth Standard books." "Remarkably clean and neat." When it is remembered that, with the exception of the copybook, the exercise-book is generally the parent's sole criterion of the efficiency of a school, the importance of its proper use, and careful and constant supervision and correction, can scarcely be over-estimated. Nor should the use of the exercise-book be limited, as it sometimes is, to one branch of instruction only, some using it as a repository for arithmetical problems, as was the custom fifty years ago, others reserving it for the transcription of poetry, &c. The exercise-book should present a reflex of the whole routine of the school work. In it every important subject should appear with a frequency proportional to its importance, and some arrangement should be made for the correction of the exercises of any who chance to be absent when the books of their class are examined—a matter which, at present, is too frequently neglected.

16. The subject which gives the worst results here, as elsewhere, is undoubtedly arithmetic. This, in the case of small schools, is, I believe, often due to an error of judgment on the part of the teachers, who sometimes take their scholars too far beyond the requirements of their standard in this subject, and do not continually recur to that part of it by their proficiency in which they are to be judged. It is not uncommon for a teacher to say of a scholar who is perhaps blundering over a simple division or multiplication sum, "He can do practice and proportion quite readily." Many mistakes are also made in copying down the figures from the printed papers, and I am inclined to think that the almost entire disuse of text-books, which has of late years come into vogue in the larger schools, is responsible for some proportion of these mistakes, the children not being accustomed to copy off printed questions as they would be if they were constantly in the habit of using such books as Collins's Standard Arithmetic, from which to take examples for practice either at home or in school. A large proportion of the failures in this subject are undoubtedly due entirely to carelessness. I frequently find scholars in the Third and Fourth Standards failing in all the easy straightforward questions and yet succeeding with the problems.

In connection with this subject, mental arithmetic claims a word of notice. I think that more attention should be given to it than it generally receives, and that the habitual use of mental calculations in connection with ordinary arithmetic should be encouraged, both on account of the saving of time that might thus be effected, and of its value as a form of mental discipline.

17. English composition is, on the whole, very fairly taught at most of the schools. There are, however, a few defects so common in this district that I think it is as well to mention them here. In the Third Standard, where the subject is first demanded, the principal faults are—an entire absence of punctuation, without even a capital letter to show where a new sentence commences, and the incorrect spelling of the simplest and easiest words in common use, a fault which I referred to in my last report. I think that many teachers in the district would find it advantageous to obtain and use a little book on this subject by J. B. Park, published by Coulls and Culling, Dunedin, with an introduction by Mr. Petrie, the Chief Inspector of the Otago District. The composition of the Fourth Standard generally takes the form of a letter, and is sometimes remarkably well written but I am haunted continually by one awful and stereotyped monstrosity in the shape of an opening clause "I write these few lines hoping to find you in good health, as it leaves me at present." When required to write a letter upon one of several given subjects, some scholars have an ingenious way of filling up their paper, first, by means of the introduction given above, followed by a declaration to the effect that, having no news of importance to communicate, they intend to furnish their correspondents with some information concerning—one of the subjects given. Then follow two or three lines on the subject chosen, and the writers discover that they have no time for more. At the last two examinations, the composition exercise in the Sixth Standard has been upon a subject chosen by myself from not less than six named by the teacher but, this year, I find that the papers sent in are in many cases almost verbatim copies of some portions of the reading-book, which, I presume from constant repetition, have become firmly impressed on the memories of the writers, and even when the subjects selected were not taken from the reading-books, the papers so closely resembled one another as to give the impression that the subject had been used so frequently for the same purpose as to entirely destroy its utility as a test of the scholars' powers of composition. I intend, therefore, in future to adopt a different plan.

18. There is a slight improvement in geography this year, but the mapping of the majority is still far from satisfactory. There are some schools where this branch of the subject is very well taught, and, as might be expected, those at which freehand drawing is practised produce the neatest and best maps. In drawing maps of New Zealand, although each island is frequently very fairly drawn, the two together are scarcely ever represented in their proper relative positions the common error being the placing of one entirely to the north of the other. The mapping at Hokitika, Kumara, and Kanieri is far superior to that at most of the other schools. At the last-named the parallels and meridians are shown with tolerable accuracy, and with the resulting advantage that, even when the maps are defective in other respects, the size, shape, and proportions are comparatively correct. Many of the maps of New Zealand in the Fourth Standard papers are so shapeless as to be quite unrecognizable, the North Island frequently appearing like a star-fish minus one ray. A map of New Zealand for beginners is, in my opinion, much required, and might easily be prepared in the colony. There are two alterations which, I think, are desirable in such a map first, the omission of about nine-tenths of the names that now almost cover it, and, secondly, the adop-