

In reading, my own observation agrees with the testimony of the above figures—that there has been some improvement, but still in too many schools the teacher does not seem aware of the fact that children, even in the lower classes, may be trained to clear and distinct enunciation, and find pleasure in the exercise, whilst the labour of teaching them becomes thereby much more effective and much less fatiguing. It should also be noticed in connection with this subject of reading that the failure of a scholar in history or grammar is often really due to his inability to read correctly and fluently—a discovery an Inspector is often doomed to make, who, pursuing his diagnosis further, will often find that the inability to read fluently is in its turn dependent on a further inability to spell. Of course in these remarks I am alluding only to the higher classes in the school.

Referring to arithmetic, I have been pleased to notice improvement in a small but important branch of it in the lower classes—I mean notation and numeration. This should contribute to a more intelligent knowledge of the science. At present in too many schools arithmetic means the mechanical arrangement of figures in a certain form called “a sum,” but that these mysterious processes have any connection with problems occurring in real life is undreamt of by the puzzled scholar. I am inclined to think that the Inspector’s frequent introduction of problems into the arithmetic work of examination-day has been one cause of fewer marks having been gained this year in the subject.

The high percentage gained in the subject of writing means no more than this that almost all the scholars write legibly. In some few schools the subject receives special attention, and really beautiful specimens of the art of penmanship are produced.

In no subject, I think, is the want of system that cripples many of our schools so evident as in this of writing, and in none might the spirit of order and system that is so necessary to the successful working of a school receive better illustration. The day’s copy should always be uniform throughout each class, and in some schools, I am glad to say, this is already the case, a page being left blank whenever a scholar has been absent a day. If this be objected to as leading to unnecessary expense in copybooks, the difficulty might easily be got over by using copybooks without headlines, the teacher writing the copy on the black-board before school commenced. It will not be out of place here to mention some other instances of the utter want of system which marks some of our schools, and connects them with an order of education one had hoped had long passed away. In one school we have children, presented for the same standard, reading in different reading-books, in other places, perhaps also in the same, each child in the class presents a different piece of poetry for recitation, whilst the teacher has to appeal to the children to ascertain what poetry has been learnt. And closely connected with this subject is the neglect of little details, such as the pointing of slate-pencils, which are sometimes, even on examination-day, handed out to the class with ends so blunt the children might almost as well attempt to write with their fingers. In no particular is the teacher’s interest in his work, or want of it, shown better than in such apparently trifling matters as this, whilst his attending to them, and requiring the children to attend to them, helps to improve the discipline of the school. The mention of this last subject suggests to me the desirability of making a remark or two on the difficulties which teachers have to encounter in conducting the work of their schools. Not the least of these is the want of sympathy and support from the parents of the scholars. If a teacher is to do any good in a school it is absolutely necessary he should have the supreme and undisputed control of all the scholars in it. Whether, however, he shall be maintained in this position depends very much on the co-operation of the parents of the children, and this is not always given. In particular, a parent will sometimes attempt to interfere with the teacher’s classification of his pupils, and will want to determine the question of his child’s promotion. If the teacher acts on his own judgment the child is removed from the school, or the teacher’s life embittered. Some teachers are weak enough to yield to the illegitimate pressure put upon them, and promote a child against their own better judgment. In this way children who have failed at the Inspector’s examination are next year presented, not for the standard in which they failed, but for the next higher standard, with the natural result that they fail again, and so continue from year to year, always out of their depth, doing no good to themselves, and bringing nothing but disgrace upon their schools. But this is not the worst. A teacher often shrinks from maintaining that strict discipline in his school that he knows to be essential to the success of his work, because he is aware that, if he corrects a child, his action will be resented by the parents of the offender. In this way, not only does the efficiency of the school suffer, but the moral character of the children also, always an object of solicitude to the true teacher under every system of education. Parents who are wisely anxious for the good of their children will always support the teacher’s authority in all the emergencies of school life. In a large number of the schools of this district the discipline is far from being as strict as it should be. In some, I am glad to say, it is at once strict and gentle.

The question that has most frequently recurred to my mind whilst reviewing my school reports, in order to compile the preceding tables, is one that is, probably, often present to the mind of the New Zealand taxpayer, viz., What are the actual results secured by the elaborate educational machinery now in operation throughout the colony? Are the girls and boys of New Zealand really receiving anything worthy the name of education, as the outcome of all the money and supervision expended upon them? We have got school buildings and school teachers have we got education? As far as the experience of this education district furnishes an answer to these questions, I think only a very qualified affirmative can be given. It may, I think, be freely admitted that we have schools in which the children are imbibing the elements of useful knowledge, and even some in which the thinking faculties of the children are being drawn out and cultivated; but it is impossible for any one, with the opportunities of knowing which an Inspector has, not to be aware that in a large number of our schools the results obtained are of the most meagre description, most elementary in character and imperfect in quality. Not a small portion of the Inspector’s work is