

and school material, and as to more various reading matter being supplied, especially to the younger scholars. Not one of these suggestions, so far as I can learn, has been adopted anywhere, nor has any one hitherto undertaken to show that they were impracticable or uncalled for. Experience has taught me, however, not to be discouraged by the failure of a first attempt at effecting any reform, but to trust to gaining something, at least, by constant reiteration. I shall therefore repeat that another year's observation has only strengthened my conviction that it would be better if school began throughout the district at nine in the morning, that the children suffer from being insufficiently supplied with cheap and suitable books, and that it is not good for them to be compelled to pore from the beginning to the end of the year over the same little reading-book.

It is satisfactory to find that the reprehensible practice of publishing in detail the results of an examination before they have been submitted to the Education Board has been put a stop to, except in a single instance, due, it is to be hoped, to pure inadvertence. Teachers and the public are beginning to understand, what ought never to have been doubtful, that, with reasonable diligence on the part of teacher and taught, a child of average ability finds little difficulty in passing a standard year by year. It is now also pretty generally recognised that, if at least four-fifths of the scholars presented do not pass, some sufficient explanation of such failure ought to be given. To comply with the minimum requirements of the regulations is by no means a remarkable feat; to fail is discreditable.

I subjoin a brief estimate of the state of each school at the time when it was last examined.

The Chairman, Education Board, Marlborough.

I have, &c.,

W. C. HODGSON, Inspector.

NELSON.

SIR,—

Nelson, 31st December, 1885.

I beg to lay before you my report for the year 1885 on the Nelson public schools.

Seventy-eight schools, with a total roll of 4,903 children, have been examined. The total number on the rolls of the district at the end of September (the latest date yet sent in) was 4,959; 4,511 scholars were present on examination day, the number of absentees—392—being still less than it was last year. The non-attendance of most of these was satisfactorily accounted for, showing that a better sense of duty in this respect prevails than was the case two years ago.

The percentage of passes—83—is exactly what it was last year. A better criterion, the proportion of passes to the number on the roll—49 per cent.—is higher by 5 per cent. than it was a year ago. On the whole, therefore, so far as the tests of passes and percentages are to be trusted, our schools have not fallen off.

The comparatively early age at which a steadily increasing number of scholars succeeds in passing the Sixth Standard does not, apparently, bear out the complaint that the work exacted, in this district at least, is too hard for the average scholar. If 178 children can, without being pressed, and at the average age of thirteen years and nine months, get through the highest kind of work expected from them fifteen months before the end of the time up to which they can claim admission to a public school, there does not seem much to complain of on the score of over-pressure. A comparison of the papers set six years ago with those used recently will show also that the demands of the examiner have not been lowered.

Although in Nelson the freest scope has always been given to individuality, as far as is compatible with the requirements of the standards, so that the practice of almost every school differs somewhat from that of its neighbours, such a general resemblance exists that it is practicable, and may be useful, to point out where the methods pursued seem generally faulty, and where each subject taught gets more or less than its fair share of attention.

Arithmetic, it appears to me, has gradually crept into too prominent a place. In some schools it has gone far to crowd out nearly everything else, occupying a full third of the school day. The great prominence nowadays given to this subject can only be justified, and that very partially, by its efficiency as one mode, among many others, of giving mental training. That the practical value of school arithmetic is not nearly so great as is commonly supposed is a truth that will be speedily discovered by the confident Sixth Standard boy when he sits for the first time on an office stool, or stands behind a draper's counter. He will then find out how much he has yet to learn before his school work can be made readily available. I believe that a teacher who really knows his business, and has himself some capital of knowledge to draw upon beyond what can be got from the ordinary text books, can make a reading lesson, with the illustrations and explanations that should invariably accompany it, just as valuable a means of mental discipline as any drilling in compound proportion. Even such subjects as geography and history, which are generally regarded as mere memory work, can be made, by a skilful interpreter, speaking from a full mind, very effective instruments of mental training. The plain English is that arithmetic makes fewer demands upon the imagination, the knowledge, and the power of expression of the teacher than any one of the comparatively despised subjects to which I have referred, and hence, it is to be feared, its excessive popularity. There is no other subject that makes so great a show—or, as that singular modern product, the man of passes, would put it, gives so quick and sure a return—as arithmetic. There is none in which, after the first four rules are mastered, so much work may be thrown upon the scholar. It should be remembered that there is nothing humanising or refining in the art of arithmetic. A boy may, and often does, leave school a mere barbarian, after mastering all the mysteries of stocks and cube root. And there is a danger in the not remote future of pushing aside altogether the imaginative faculties, with the disastrous result of turning out hundreds of young Gradgrinds, with a turn for nothing but "hard facts."