

generally those in which the teachers themselves were but poorly informed: it has been my practice in like cases, when known to me, to encourage such to take those subjects only which they felt themselves best able to deal with. In a very fair number of the schools considerable skill is indicated in the systematic treatment of these subjects, whilst the interest taken by the scholars in the lessons so effectively treated dispel any fear of their neglect or value in promoting the mental condition of the children.

In past years I have referred to the defective methods used in the teaching of reading, which, unfortunately, retard that real progress so desirable to see. Again, it is needful to call attention in my report to the requirements of the syllabus on this subject, and insist upon more earnestness and better preparation from teachers, who in many cases are solely to blame. As long as the present standard of quality is reached, under those to whom I allude, all further effort appears to cease; hence I have marked this subject more heavily than formerly, with the view of urging its importance. Writing has also been treated similarly, though there have been but few cases of carelessness to reprove; yet the neglect of teaching details is obvious in the specimens throughout a few schools, where system and habits of order and neatness receive scant attention. There are few schools now in which spelling is not well taught: in this subject, and the three remaining pass subjects not yet referred to, the percentages of passes run from 10 to 18 per cent. increase on the returns of last year. The arithmetic of Standard II. was the weakest part of the year's work. The poor results can, however, be fairly put down to insufficient practice, caused by the absence of a large number through sickness. In the lower standards better preparation of the addition and other tables would well repay the time given to their study, as the want of these is very manifest in the limited number that show any degree of expertness. Much time, also, is generally spent over the ordinary mechanical operations through inability to work readily; so that the problem-tests are overlooked in the instruction, and, consequently, not attempted at examination. Grammar has been better treated than formerly: good methods and improved teaching power are driving away the old technical difficulties, which had effectually stopped any clear knowledge of the subject. Geography has shared in the improvement: locality and incident are more vigorously taught in the upper standards, whilst the work of Standard III. continues to make steady progress. Satisfactory results were obtained in drawing, which is, as yet, confined to freehand alone: the best work was obtained where the instruction had been given in class. Instruction in needlework is now given in every school. The examination of the specimens extended over two days, owing to the largely increased number. Several schools showed work of most excellent quality. This subject is now faithfully and well taught in the greater number of the schools. The suggestions made by the ladies' committee have been conveyed to the teachers, and there is every reason to conclude that this important subject will, with occasional exceptions, be treated most successfully.

The scholarship examination took place on the 8th and 9th December, when eighteen out of the twenty-one nominated were in attendance. Only seven succeeded in obtaining the marks required by regulation. The best papers were done by the country competitors, who were only fairly represented; but, owing to home circumstances and the low value of the scholarships, which is insufficient to provide for the expense of residence in town, the successful candidates from country schools decided to decline their acceptance. Another examination took place during the present month to award these; but I trust the Board will no longer delay the proposal to increase the value of the scholarships, as practically the country scholars are shut out from participation in this grant.

Before concluding, I refer to a few points that are certain to influence the future success of the educational work of this district. The aim of the Board has been to improve the teaching power, and so far it has succeeded in securing the services of several competent teachers, who are by their efforts steadily improving the attendance and the work of instruction in their schools; but I fear the much higher scale of payments in other districts will check and tend to hamper the supply for any future vacancy. Would it not be well to reconsider the separate scales of payment for male and female teachers? Were the payment to both alike, at least for schools with an attendance of under seventy, a greater number of applications would be received from young female teachers capable of carrying on the work as well as it is now done elsewhere, or in a few schools of this district where recent appointments have shown similar success.

Again, the so-called bonus on classification does not work fairly here; some teachers, placed high in their class, fail to give satisfactory evidence of teaching ability. Judged by their success of the past few years, the bonus, so far as the public interest is concerned, is not deservedly earned. To divide a yearly sum equal to the amount now assigned, according to a classification scale, amongst the teachers that give good results would be an incentive to more diligence, and create a healthier tone.

Another, and then I close. Your teachers labour under the disadvantage of a short school-day, which in other districts extends to not less than five hours. An additional half-hour a day might readily be added to the attendance of all from Standard III. upwards, because I am sure the Board is simply adding to instead of lessening the yearly effort of preparing so many subjects in each standard. Unquestionably this burden of forcing so much into a given time is the chief cause of the endless agitation against the syllabus. Although I personally object to the reduction of the syllabus by any curtailment of its subjects, I protest against their present distribution over a fixed and unalterable number of years in every child's case. Given the course of instruction over seven years, and leave to Inspectors to except in special cases, less would be heard of "cram," "pressure," and "percentages."

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Taranaki Education Board.

WILLIAM MURRAY, Inspector.