

should, year after year, turn out better writing than scores of children of ten years old for miles around. Yet teachers are not ashamed to put before me—occasionally not without complacency—such ill-spelt, blotted, and misshapen scrawls as deserve to be torn up on the spot. It seems absurd at this time of day that teachers, often certificated, should neglect or should know so little of the rudiments of their business as to make no use of the blackboard or of simultaneous teaching in giving a writing lesson, or that they should disregard the proper position to be assumed by a writer. Nor is it creditable that it should be left to an Inspector to point out in a public report that very young learners who cannot even form their letters properly should not be set to attempt running hand in advanced copy books. In spite of the introduction of a better style of copy book, the handwriting has, on the whole, fallen off during the year. A fair warning being now given that a sharp remedy will be applied, it will be safe to predict that those who do not mend their ways in this respect will find a heavy record of failures placed to their account at next examination.

Last year I had the pleasure of reporting a marked improvement in the reading, especially that of the town schools. As regards these, there is certainly no falling-off. In two of them, indeed, there is a decided advance. But in all save a few of the best of our country schools, and especially in some of the smaller ones, much reading is still allowed to pass muster that would try the forbearance of the most lenient examiner. On my visits of inspection I have observed that every one of the stock faults condemned by examiners is habitually committed with hardly a check. A boy of ten is suffered to read without making the slightest attempt to group his words, to pause quite irrespectively of the sense of the passage, and to disregard all proper inflection. The American fashion of unduly emphasising the small words, leaving the more important ones to take care of themselves—a fashion ridiculed by Dickens nearly fifty years ago—has unaccountably got a strong hold upon our scholars, who by hundreds read about “a boy meeting the dog.” The voice of the teacher, if heard at all, is too often heard only for correction, and not, as it should be, for example. In few of the schools that I refer to does the teacher read in turn with the scholars, nor is simultaneous reading—a valuable help when not overdone—made sufficient use of. A notion has got abroad—whence derived I know not—that an examiner is stretching his powers who asks a class to read out of any book but that over which they have been poring for twelve long months. Nay, objections have been raised by teachers—who are quite unconscious that they are self-condemned—to any passage being selected that lies beyond that portion of their class book which the children have prepared. A stranger would, indeed, be quite misled who should judge of the reading powers of our children by listening to their fluent rendering of a carefully-prepared passage from their solitary reading book. Two things, at least, should nowadays be insisted on—that every standard scholar should use alternately at least two reading books during each year, and that he should have such a practical knowledge of the art of reading as to be able to read at sight any portion of either of these books. The first of these rules has for some time been universally enforced in England. I propose a simple test, by applying which to his scholars any teacher may judge for himself whether they read as well as they ought. If a child in his tenth year cannot read at sight fluently and intelligently the first volume of Scott’s “Tales of a Grandfather” (written, I believe, for a boy of seven), he has made poor use of his four years’ schooling. The stereotyped excuse about the multiplicity of subjects required by the syllabus does not hold good at this stage. Reading, spelling, drawing, writing, and arithmetic are the only pass subjects for Second Standard scholars, who ought to have mastered the mechanical difficulties of reading. Whatever else may be left undone, reading shall not, if I can help it, go to the wall.

NEEDLEWORK.—The good custom, begun in the city of Nelson, but subsequently followed by many of our country districts, which secures to our schools the valuable help of committees of ladies who annually examine and report on the sewing, has done much to popularise and bring into notice this art. And, although sewing is no longer included among the subjects necessary for a pass, it has not on that account been neglected, as is amply shown by the favourable nature of the reports generally given by the examiners, to say nothing of my own observation, taking it for what it is worth.

HOME LESSONS.—The nuisance of excessive home lessons, as to the revival of which I complained in last year’s report, has, I have reason to believe—though it is not easy to get at the exact truth in this matter—been considerably abated. The help for which I appealed to School Committees has been promptly and effectively given in several quarters, notably by the town Committee, who issued a stringent circular to their teachers on the subject. If, therefore, any child within the city of Nelson public schools suffers from excessive night work, the injury is being inflicted in contravention of the express injunctions of the Committee. No falling-off in the quality of this year’s work can be detected that can be fairly attributed to the diminution of the hours of work thus insisted on.

AIDED SCHOOLS.—The difficulty of finding qualified teachers for these small establishments, which have increased so much in number that they now form a fourth of our roll of schools, is becoming a serious matter. It was hoped that vacancies would be readily and efficiently filled up by those probationers who had completed their three years’ term of service. Most of these are well suited, both by natural aptitude and practical training, for the work of teacher of an aided school. Several, indeed, of our most promising probationers have taken, and have filled admirably, such posts. But the supply of those who are at once qualified and willing to go forth into the remote districts still falls short of the demand. Two difficulties stand in the way. The first, which has been shown not to be insurmountable, is the natural reluctance to leave the comforts of home, and, it must be added in fairness, the abundance of means of studying for the now almost indispensable certificate afforded in a town or village. The second difficulty is harder to grapple with. The remuneration offered in many of our remoter aided schools—a remuneration that will be still further reduced by the cutting down of the education grant—is so scanty that it scarcely gives a bare subsistence to teachers who must pay for their board and lodging. Unless, therefore, those more immediately interested in the maintenance of such