

one, and is sufficiently explained by a reference to the syllabus of instruction. S5 again occupies the worst position, and is in marked contrast with S6; but on this contrast it would not be safe to base a conclusion as to the general character of the teaching or the gradation of the requirements. The bulk of the children in S6 belong to a small group of schools, where the highest classes have the advantage of excellent teachers, whereas S5 is more widely distributed. It is the better children, moreover, who remain the longer time at school. Yet we believe that the passing of Standard V. is a more formidable matter than the passing of Standard VI., and with the omission of geography as a pass subject in Standard IV., and its inclusion in Standard V., the tendency is in the direction of a more accentuated difference.

The children of S7 have been examined in about a third of the schools in the work of S6 simply; in the others a syllabus of additional work has been presented in algebra, Euclid, and Latin, or in one or more of these subjects. The answering is occasionally creditable. The reading is fluent enough; in other qualities of utterance the tendency towards an advance is not very strongly marked, and, though there is plain evidence of more general attention to subject-matter in the lower classes and to comprehension in the higher, the cases are still very few in which intelligent and well-expressed explanations of words and phrases are procurable. It is still no unusual thing to have the dull monotony of an examination enlivened by the ludicrously malappropiate answers that accompany fluent and even fairly expressive reading. Yet we are grateful to the teachers for the efforts they have made in the right direction, and are justified in expecting a continuous improvement. There is nothing that tends more to predispose an Inspector in favour of the school work than the evidence of intelligently taught reading lessons, and, if the books be well chosen, the influence exerted on other subjects is really important if not readily appreciable.

We have constantly urged upon teachers the necessity of taking in S1 a reading book of wider scope than the book hitherto in most common use, which is better fitted for the period of babyhood. We have also favoured in S2 either the sequel of the old series or one of the newer books, and have sometimes, in the interests of the annual alternation advocated in our last report, suggested that a change found necessary in S1 and S2 should be extended to S3; but we are opposed to the introduction into the district for S4, S5, and S6 of new books of which the order of difficulty is much below the standard of intelligence it is sought to cultivate in these classes; and we regret that in some of the largest schools, and by example in several smaller ones, changes in this direction have been made that were wholly unnecessary. The meagreness and simplicity of the matter in the newer books for the upper classes may suit an English school, in which three readers have now to be prepared, but they are decidedly objectionable in the schools of New Zealand, where one reader is accepted, and where, moreover, the children of corresponding classes are from one to one and a-half years older. We hold that the reading books of a school should be somewhat in advance in language and ideas of the child's ordinary surroundings, and this requirement is very fairly satisfied by Book V. and Book IV. of Nelson's original series, generally employed, and by the sequels, with which our schools are also familiar, down to S2, while in other respects these books cannot be considered inferior to later British publications. With the recent local issue of specially adapted books for Standard III. and Standard II. the two alternative sets necessary may be provided with even a less recourse to imported novelties than we have recommended during the past year.

We understand that the Board has in contemplation the prescription of certain defined reading books for use in our schools; and, as some action seems necessary, we have the honour to suggest the authorisation of the following, as involving the least change. The extension of the New Zealand series may, however, very shortly require a slight modification. S1: Royal Star Reader I.; New Royal Reader I. S2: Sequel to Royal Reader II.; Southern Cross Reader II. S3: Sequel to Royal Reader III.; Southern Cross Reader III. S4: Royal Reader IV., First Series; Sequel to Royal Reader IV. S5: Royal Reader V., First Series; Sequel to Royal Reader V. In schools where S5 and S6 are taught together we are willing, as heretofore, to accept the Reader of S5 for both classes, provided that the annual alternation already referred to be made; and, where S5 is the highest class, we see no objection to accepting S4 Reader for both S4 and S5 under the same conditions. For S6 and S7 in the largest schools we cannot advise the re-employment of the old Book VI., which is generally condemned. We should rather leave a book for this division to the good sense of the teachers; but we may mention the "Advanced Reader" of Chambers' "Graduated" Series as probably well fitting all purposes.

SPELLING AND DICTATION.—Spelling and dictation may be briefly treated as satisfactory, and transcription receives sufficient practice. The slate-writing of the transcription in S2, however, is not in many schools as well looked after as it should be. More attention has been given to letter formation in the infant classes and S1, and teachers cannot afford to allow the slate-writing to degenerate in S2.

ARITHMETIC.—Arithmetic has on the whole improved in quality, more especially in the mechanical portions of the work of S1 to S3. Good methods, too, are extending in their use, and are by no means confined exclusively to schools of large size, in which good arithmetic may be taken as the rule. Yet it cannot be denied that the cases of defective methods and indifferent results form a very substantial minority, and are much more formidable in their number if attention be confined to the higher work and to what may be termed intellectual arithmetic, as the term "mental" is unduly limited in general acceptation. The improvement in the mechanical arithmetic of the lower classes is the more gratifying since one of the most obvious of common faults is inaccuracy in the mechanical work of S4. This must be remedied, and the remedy, though depending principally on a sound foundation in elementary processes and the cultivation of general habits of care, has a close connection with a second fault—that there is not enough oral teaching. It is extraordinary how many visits of inspection have been coincident with supposed lessons in arithmetic which consist of slate practice alone. But by the want of oral teaching we mean not simply the excessive use of desk or test work, or insufficient practice in