

three years' course (see syllabus, regulation 19), which some have overlooked, will be uniformly demanded. In many schools only a modicum of success has been achieved in the teaching of history. It is not uncommonly the examiner's lot to put a series of questions to a class with no better result than a vacant stare from the examinees. It is really astonishing how an interesting little book like "Blackwood's Short Stories" should be in the hands of a Standard III. class for a whole year to so little purpose. Again, there is perhaps no part of the school programme to which interesting objective methods are more easily applicable than to Standard II. geography, and yet, to take one example from several, a lesson given by the mistress of an important school consisted of two or three definitions written on the blackboard, copied by the children in an irregular hand much too small for the class, learned at home, and repeated next day; this too in a school with mountain, island, stream, and sea all in view. Singing has received much attention during the year, and the number of schools in which it is not taught is now very small. In most of the large schools it is taught with considerable zeal and skill, though some teachers, eschewing the drudgery inseparable from intelligent training, are content to teach melodies only. The language of the select pieces of poetry is nearly always well remembered, but the mode of delivery is quite often a mechanical sing-song, the pupils, taking their cue from the metre, and appearing quite oblivious that their modulation is not in keeping with the sense, produce little else than an unmeaning jingle. It is, of course, far otherwise in schools where only very few selected pieces are presented for examination, but where these few, besides being thoroughly assimilated as to matter, are rendered with natural expression.

PASS-SUBJECTS.—Under this head there is little to say. The high percentage of passes gained vouches in a general way for the quality of the work; indeed, success here is so much magnified as to almost wholly overshadow the importance of class and additional subjects. It may be noted that during the past year a considerable number of pupils failed in reading through inability to explain the language used in their text-books. It is of no avail to use mere synonyms, lists of which are found at the end of lessons. Pupils should have such a comprehension of the meaning of words as to be able to use them in more than one setting.

ADMINISTRATION.—During the year the new regulations affecting pupil-teachers have been brought into operation. Though it seems a hardship that, by regulation of the Board, a pupil-teacher, after serving it for four years, should, at the expiration of that term, be practically cut adrift, yet the wisdom of the resolution is abundantly proved by the skill and experience that these pupil-teachers, fresh from the better-class schools, carry with them to country districts, more or less remote, to which they may be appointed. Headmasters, knowing that the germ of the teaching power of the district is nurtured by them, cannot fail to be deeply interested in the practical skill and class management of their trainees.

Most Committees, after an inspection visit, carry out suggested improvements with a minimum of delay; from among many we gladly instance the Committees of West Plains, Dipton, and Clifton. On the other hand we fear that some are either culpably inert or altogether unsolicitous of the well-being of the schools under their charge.

In preparing for the standard examinations pupils use one reading-book only. This may be considered a satisfactory amount in standards higher than the Second, and in all standards in schools where the teacher is unaided; but in other cases there is ample time to cover more ground. It is unfair to the children and to the interests of education that a book easily prepared in six months should be kept in the pupils' hands for a whole year. We are accordingly inclined to recommend that, in all schools where there are more teachers than one, two reading-books should be used in Standards I. and II., of which books one only shall be presented for examination in spelling and knowledge of subject-matter.

The attendances of pupils at schools, even in the same district and at comparatively short distances from each other, are sometimes strikingly unequal. The method adopted at West Plains and at several other schools of giving the pupils cards on which are recorded marks for diligence, punctuality, and regularity, and on the presentation of which to the teacher, the pupils may claim remission of punishment, has proved a general incentive to regular attendance.

It has hitherto been customary to re-examine in the work of Standard VI. those pupils who, having passed this standard, have remained at school for another year. We venture to suggest that such pupils should enter on some line of study beyond the work proper to Standard VI., and that due intimation of the subjects studied be furnished to the Inspector before he proceeds to examine the school, so that he may test the progress made by these advanced pupils during the year.

SYLLABUS.—The vexed question of the syllabus requirements continues to be of all-absorbing interest in this as in other districts; and numberless maledictions are showered upon its head. Meanwhile its provisions must be carried out as best they may by both teachers and Inspectors; and, but for several misstatements that have stalked abroad unchallenged, we should be glad to let it rest. It has been stated unconditionally, on what grounds we know not, that our standard of efficiency is percentages *per se*. No statement could be wider of its mark. While we find that satisfactory percentages usually go hand in hand with intelligent teaching, we always gauge the quality of the work done at a school not merely by the proficiency of the pupils, but also, and chiefly, by the efficiency of the teacher. If, therefore, teachers convert the schoolroom, which should be the happy home of co-operative effort, into a mere cram-shop, they have themselves to blame. Their professional reputation is in little danger of waning so long as their teaching is intelligent. It is to be feared that, while some sincerely complain of the exactions of the syllabus, there are some also who are not loth to join the hue and cry merely to screen their own incompetence. Again, the charge is often brought against the syllabus that it is so hidebound as to destroy the teacher's individuality. But surely this a very loose statement; for in the invention of new methods, and in originality of their application, the teacher has endless scope for the exercise of his individual aptitudes.

We have, &c.,

The Secretary, Southland Education Board.

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