

The aided schools now number thirteen. Numerical results in such schools are more or less accidental, and the work necessarily varies very much. They are fairly meeting requirements; and, as a rule, should any weakness be pointed out at the examination, the teacher manages to remedy the defect before the next examination comes on.

The three large purely infant-schools continue to work satisfactorily—with the exception of the object-lesson work, which is taught very much on the old lines. What is still wanted is—that which has been pointed out again and again—more practical illustration, and consequently more interesting training of the observation and of the reflective powers by actual experimental teaching. We are much pleased with the improved Kindergarten work in these schools, and in many of the large infant classes of other schools. The mat-plaiting, especially, has made great progress. Singing has improved in the Te Aro Infant School; and it has always been a great feature of the work of the Mount Cook Infant School. New buildings have recently been erected for the Te Aro and Masterton infants, and we hope to see the object-lesson work take a new departure in the new buildings, and become a daily lesson. When these lessons are intelligently and experimentally given, and duly prepared, they are the most interesting and the most educative of the school curriculum.

Looking at the work and condition of the schools as a whole, we are well satisfied with the steady progress made. We aim at a fair, though not an unattainable standard of efficiency; and the tests afford scope for the more intelligent, while they are fairly within the reach of the less intelligent, if carefully taught. The result is that, in very good classes, from one-third to one-half of the pupils clear the work; and on the whole, only 5.4 per cent. fail. It is a feature of the standard system, and by no means a bad one, that the teacher must care for the children of average and less than average ability—more so than for the more intelligent of his pupils; and many of the faults and weaknesses of class-teaching arise from the teacher appealing to the capacity of the more intelligent of his pupils, rather than to the average or meaner capacity of the class. How often, for example, in looking through drawing-books, do we notice that the exercise is suited to the abilities of the upper third of the class, and is badly done by two-thirds. Had the exercise been adapted to the average capacity of the lower two-thirds, there would still be scope for excellence of execution by the more advanced one-third. When all is done that can be done, there will always be much difference in the attainments of a class; and the contrast between the strong passes of the upper pupils and the weak passes of the lower ones is at times very noticeable. It is further noticeable—and to the credit of the teachers—that, in most cases, the difference between strong and weak passes is determined more by regularity of attendance than by superior ability.

There are some points in class instruction in which amendment should be made. For example, we may mention that in the teaching of reading more attention should be paid, in the lower classes especially, to the various vowel sounds and to distinct utterance. Much improvement is already taking place in the cultivation of expression; and in many schools enunciation is duly attended to, but not in others. In the writing taught, slope or inclination of the letters is generally too far from the vertical; and too little importance is attached to the position of the body and the method of holding the pen. Pupils, who write a good hand in Standards II.–IV., sometimes degenerate into a scribble in Standards V.–VI. In arithmetic, more painstaking oral teaching of ready methods and of the reason for processes is desirable. In higher standard work it is noticeable that some of the more interesting and more mathematical methods of working are lost sight of, because more commonplace methods are more widely applicable. Take, for instance, the clearing of the fraction $\frac{2\frac{2}{3}}{3\frac{2}{3}}$. Any Standard V. class would readily obtain the answer, but not

many pupils would clear it by multiplying numerator and denominator at once by 9. Again, few pupils could find the square root of a number by breaking it up into factors containing, say, 9 and 4. To take a still more ordinary example: the interest on £1,560 for four months at $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. In this case not many pupils would be taught to see that this is the same thing as finding the interest on £520 for one year at $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.; and then it would not occur to many of them that the easiest way of taking $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. would be to take 520s., plus half the sum. We feel sure that more time would be profitably spent in oral or mental work, which would lead up to the employment of more ready methods of working. In the teaching of composition, pupils should be encouraged to use their own natural modes of speech, and to write as they would speak. Very few exercises indicate this. In point of fact, it would almost appear that, while pupils are evidently taught sentence formation, they are discouraged in any attempt at acquiring a style of their own.

The programme of physical geography is working well. Two of the Wairarapa schools each possess a good tellurium, and in one City school the knowledge of physical geography is further enlarged by the first principles of navigation, including the practical use of the sextant. The maps asked for in Standards IV.–VI. are creditably done, but they might be more uniform in each class, be illustrative of the teaching, and show names only which are really known to the pupils, and are really worth memory room. Very faint parallels and meridians should always be accurately drawn.

With regard to the individual classification of children in standards much has been said. In this district teachers are practically at liberty to place children in any class of a school; and in some cases they would do well to put children who have little faculty (say, in arithmetic or drawing) in a lower class for their weak subjects than for ordinary work. We certainly do not make a practice of re-examining children in the same standard if they have previously passed it, nor can we see any advantage to be gained by doing so. We carefully inspect the preparatory classes, and see that children over eight years of age are not held back from standard presentation without sufficient reason. In examining children of good age, who are dull, or whose attendance has been low from accidental causes, we are reasonably indulgent; on the other hand, when pupils under seven and a half years are presented for Standard I., unless they are very strong candidates, we often say it will be wise to present them next year.