

centage of 48·6, or 8·4 in excess of last year, and for additional subjects an average of 37·9, or 7·3 above previous results. It seems to me, therefore, plain that all parts of the school work received a fair proportion of attention from the teachers, and that the improvement in the “pass” work has not been achieved by the neglect of other subjects. In short, and not to make too much of the matter, I think I may congratulate the Board on the work of the year and the progress exhibited by the scholars, a progress not unexpected by me, to whom the devotion of the present staff of teachers generally to their duty and their anxiety to achieve the best results possible under present conditions are well known.

Commenting on the “pass”-subjects seriatim, it will be well to begin with—

READING.—In many schools the mechanical part of the reading is well done; it is correct, fluent, and well inflected, so that to listen to it is often a pleasure. One defect in this exercise is, however, very general in the district, and that is, the reading is not intelligent; the children are unacquainted—in some cases entirely unacquainted—with the meaning of too many of the words read. In not a few schools it is plain that instruction in the significance of the words used has never been attempted; the whole subject has been overlooked; so that the scholars are not only ignorant of their own tongue, but are strangers to the mental discipline and the mental pleasure to be derived from the intelligent discrimination of meanings. The authorised syllabus of instruction, however, is emphatic in reference to this subject, and not only enjoins that all school work shall be intelligent work, but distinctly forbids the Inspector to pass a child in reading unless he shows that he understands the meaning of what he reads. Indeed, a very little reflection shows that anything short of this is quite unworthy of the name of education—that, in fact, to learn the meaning of words must ever be a very important part of a child’s school work. In the recent examinations I have not hesitated to “fail” a child in the subject wherever want of fluency was combined with ignorance of meanings.

SPELLING.—Closely associated with the art of reading is that of spelling, an art that tests the thoroughness of an English boy’s education more perhaps than any other, and differentiates in after-life between the educated and uneducated man. The boy who is launched into the business of life deficient in knowledge of orthography has good ground of complaint against his teachers; he “occupies the place of the unlearned,” whatever his other attainments may be. I must acknowledge that I am dissatisfied with the work of many schools in this branch of study, and the statistics of Table III. show that the number of passes in it has declined 6 per cent.—the only “pass”-subject, it may be observed, which shows any serious retrogression. At the best, proficiency in orthography only means with us proficiency in spelling the words of the reading-book, and in several schools this year, especially the Ross School, there has been serious failure even in this very limited field. The subject is a simple one, and requires only hard work on the part of teacher and scholar; perhaps, therefore, enough has been said on it when attention has been called to the neglect of it. I know that in some schools special methods are employed to secure good spelling, scholars and teachers both keeping manuscript note-books in which are entered as they arise the words which have occasioned difficulty. I need scarcely say these are not the schools in which bad spelling prevails.

ARITHMETIC.—I have already alluded to the increased proficiency in this subject throughout the district generally, an improvement, however, which is not shared by all the schools. It would not be just to quote the Hokitika School as an instance of inefficiency in this respect; but even here in the case of Standard IV. a simple example in bills of parcels was not so much as attempted by the majority of the class. At Kumara many of the scholars are, I much regret to say, nearly as ignorant of the subject of arithmetic as they were last year. In Standard V. in this school, notwithstanding the remarks made in this report last year, the old and cumbrous method of dealing with fractions is still maintained. But other conditions in this class also foster inefficiency. Instead of sums written on the board before school commences, a text-book is used by the scholars, and this, being Barnard Smith’s large book, is too expensive for all the scholars to obtain; consequently you find several sitting with their heads huddled together over one book, and seeing, of course, a good deal more of one another’s slates than is at all desirable, to say nothing of the fact that the author has good-naturedly printed the answers to the sums at the end of the book lest the scholars should develop too great self-reliance. Of course, it will excite no surprise when I say that of twenty-four scholars present on examination-day in this class twenty should fail. It may be hoped, however, that, the Board having now authoritatively prescribed a cheap and suitable text-book—the “Southern Cross Arithmetics,” without answers—at least one cause of inefficiency in this class will henceforth be removed.

In other schools also defective methods are only too prevalent, methods fatal to all thorough knowledge and correct working, and that not in arithmetic alone. I allude especially to a practice not yet extinct of dismissing an arithmetic class without any investigation of the answers arrived at by the scholars, or, what is nearly as bad, without insisting on the correction of the erroneous sums, or, as in one case, assuming that the answers arrived at by the majority of the class are necessarily correct answers. Equally useless, as far as efficiency in arithmetic is concerned, is the practice of suffering each scholar to supervise his own slate when answers are read out; in fine, only the utmost thoroughness will avail to procure that definite knowledge and correct working without which the study of arithmetic is almost worse than useless.

GRAMMAR.—This is now so little a “pass”-subject that I should not refer to it at all in this connection but for the circumstance that I am able to speak of the improvement made in it in most schools as very marked. There is a more intelligent treatment of the verb in the parsing exercise, and a better knowledge of its inflections generally, than was apparent a year ago, whilst in only two schools—viz., Ross and Okarito—is the unphilosophical treatment of the gerund referred to in my last report still persisted in. At one school, indeed, there is a short and easy method in use for avoiding the chief difficulties of the parsing exercise—viz., by uniformly omitting all reference to