

Taking, then, the new syllabus as a whole as compared with the old one in respect of "pass" requirements, we may fairly expect as the result of the change considerably more success in Standards V. and VI., and a certain increase in Standard III., but in Standard IV., and to a very small extent in Standards II. and I., a certain decrease; and this is almost exactly what we find in making up the summary for the past year, the only exception being in Standard II., where the number representing the proportion shows a slight advance.

As regards the qualities generally observed in the more important subjects of instruction in this district, the reading is nearly always fluent, but only in the best schools of such a character in respect of enunciation as to give any pleasure to the listener. In point of intelligence or comprehension, as tested by oral or written questions, it is not often commendable, though this branch of the subject rarely gives evidence of complete neglect. In many cases where there is reason to believe, from the reading and answering, that the scholars have a fair idea of what is meant, the lack of training in precise expression, where a definite answer to a definite question is required, is a conspicuous defect, which it is hard to get our teachers to recognise and remedy.

In spelling, dictation, writing, and freehand drawing we are well satisfied with the proficiency to which our schools have attained. These subjects are for the most part distinctly good ones.

In arithmetic the teaching is commonly on the lines of proper methods, but the degree of success varies much, depending, as it does, very largely on qualities of intelligence and "thoroughness" in the teacher. Generally speaking, the mechanical part of the arithmetic up to Standard III. is very creditably done, and readiness in adding (without recourse to unit counting) is quite a usual feature in schools having any pretensions to good work.

More attention has been given to composition during the year. Composition has always been a necessary part of the "pass" in grammar; but, as correct grammar is a good deal harder to get than the very moderate kind of composition we could require along with it, the grammar previously received the larger share of attention. Grammar now very properly occupies a secondary place, and a better class of composition is at least an object of ambition; but we regret to find that in too many cases the grammar has so far fallen away in the two highest standards in consequence of the change as to be quite worthless. The training grammar affords is of no value whatever if the work is done in a slipshod fashion, and, although we are prepared to make our tests in the subject above Standard IV. somewhat easier than before, we certainly expect them to be done with a fair amount of precision.

The alternation now permitted in the geography and history of Standards IV., V., and VI. has proved of great advantage to the country school, and is in every way to be commended. To leave to the teacher the choice of matter in history also appears to us a very desirable thing, and is perhaps, with the limited time now left at the teacher's disposal, the only way of securing due recognition of anything that has been done; but the permission to rearrange the programme in geography is a gratuitous embarrassment to the examiner in dealing with a subject that is still required to be treated as a "pass"-subject. In this case the regulation should, in our view, make a better graduation than it does, and ask teachers and Inspectors to adhere to it.

In the kind of geography prescribed, the new syllabus is a very great improvement on the old one. While limiting the details that the "pass-grinder" makes it his highest ambition to compass, it gives scope to the intelligent and well-instructed teacher to impart valuable information and to make of the subject a true means of education. But there is this danger to be feared: that we shall now in many cases have to rest contented with the limited details, and get nothing more.

In science and object-lessons the work done in the district continues to present the same general features. Nearly always something is done, whatever be its value, the branch generally finding most favour with country schools being agriculture. In the large schools the triennial rotation of chemistry, physiology, and physics is the common arrangement, and the teacher is generally both competent and effective. In the choice of object and similar lessons for the lower classes there is too seldom a judicious exercise of discretion. The subjects chosen are such as are to be found in the published text-books, and there is rarely much evidence of an attempt to graduate and arrange them into a complete course having any relation to the kind of instruction provided in the upper classes. Too frequently also it is difficult to choose from the list submitted any substantial number that might be considered specially designed to cultivate the power of observation and give an interest in surrounding things—the main purpose of such lessons in the elementary stages.

Under the head of "additional subjects," as much is done in our schools as we can reasonably expect from them. In poetry, matter of lessons, and needlework nearly all are represented. In singing there must always be a number where the subject is not taught, and on drill there is little profit in spending time where the children are few. We could wish that the matter of the reading-lessons possessed more substantial value, but the fault is here the fault of the reading-books. In poetry, pieces might occasionally be selected from other sources with much advantage, especially in the Second Standard, where the pieces contained in the reading-book are exceptionally poor. The needlework of the schools receives the earnest attention of our mistresses, and for the time at their disposal—generally two hours weekly—very creditable work is produced. It is particularly gratifying to find our young teachers taking so much pains with it. School Committees generally regard a good needlewoman with favour, but for the interest taken we have also to thank the spirit with which the head mistresses have taken up the matter in the large schools.

We have, &c.,

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The Chairman, North Canterbury Education Board.