

execrable, specimens of penmanship from every variety of systems, I feel satisfied that the books in use here are as good as any, in the hands of a painstaking teacher; but, as there seems to be a desire on the part of some teachers to adopt the vertical style, and seeing that such books have now been authorised by the department, I beg to recommend that the Board should place them on the list of books that may be used in this district.

*Arithmetic.*—Considering the time generally devoted to this subject, the results at first sight seem very unsatisfactory, as, with the exception of geography, it yields more failures than any other pass-subject; but, when we consider the great extent of the ground to be covered in the higher standards, the very limited choice given to the scholars at the examination, the necessarily short time that can be allowed for the work, and the well-known liability of the ablest scholars to err through the hurry and excitement of an examination, I am not disposed to attribute the low position the subject generally occupies to any lack of care or ability on the part of the majority of our teachers. The cards supplied by the department are on the whole very reasonable tests, though in the preparation of such a number a certain amount of inequality is unavoidable. The cards for Standard V. would appear to have been rather more severe this year than those set for the other classes, since only 32 per cent. of the scholars in this standard gained half-marks for arithmetic.

The chief faults I have observed in the teaching of this subject are usually predominant in the preparatory classes, where the first foundation is laid. Oral addition is not unfrequently too soon abandoned for the multiplication tables, and the introduction of mental arithmetic too long delayed.

*Geography.*—Though still very low down in the scale, the improvement in geography this year is encouraging, and is, perhaps, partly due to the issue of Geographical Readers to many of the smaller schools.

*Composition and Drawing* are both steadily improving—the latter stimulated by the examination held under the auspices of the Wellington School of Art.

*Class and Additional Subjects.*—Of the “class” group, grammar again occupies the lowest place. In last year’s report I remarked upon the deterioration of this work since its removal from the pass-subjects. On looking through the Inspectors’ reports from the other education districts I find that the same opinion is expressed in ten other reports out of twelve. As, perhaps, these reports are not generally read out of the districts to which they refer, I will quote briefly the opinions expressed on this subject by the several writers. Auckland: “Grammar is now everywhere a class-subject, and has not gained by the change.” Taranaki: “Except in a few schools the instruction in grammar may be said to be confined to the work done in Standard III.” Wanganui: “In Standard V. and Standard VI. grammar has shown a great falling-off since it was placed in the class-subject group.” Hawke’s Bay: “Grammar is not taught as it used to be when a pass-subject.” Nelson: “When this subject is not neglected, its treatment is too often unscientific, the work rarely rising above what is expected from the Fourth Standard.” Grey: “Grammar is generally on the weak side.” Westland: “In grammar the results are on the whole only fair.” North Canterbury: “The mental arithmetic we expect to see much better; of the grammar we have no such hope.” South Canterbury: “Not only in smaller schools, but also in two or three of the largest, the quality of the work has been marked down as worthless” (this refers to the work of the two higher standards only). Otago: “The results in grammar are very disappointing.” The Wellington Inspectors are silent on the subject, while in Southland alone the report says, “Grammar is taught in a fairly satisfactory manner in most of the schools.”

In view of the remarkable concurrence of opinion shown in the foregoing quotations, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that grammar—“one of the most truly educative subjects in the primary course of instruction”—has ceased to be regarded as important in the majority of New Zealand schools, and that its removal from the pass to the class group has been the reverse of beneficial to the cause of true education throughout the colony. Pointing out a defect is, however, always far easier than suggesting a remedy; and in the crowded condition of the New Zealand syllabus the latter task is beset with peculiar difficulties. Should the reports on this matter for the year now under review be anything like as unanimously unfavourable as they were last year, the department will surely give the matter some reconsideration, or otherwise such reports may as well be committed to the flames, and the expense of reprinting them at Wellington avoided.

*Singing* was presented at only eight of our schools, the subject having been dropped at one or two that formerly took it up. The most marked improvement has been effected at the Blenheim schools, and at Renwick the subject was taken up this year for the first time with most satisfactory results.

With regard to the other subjects of the class and additional groups I have nothing to say this year except to remark that there seems to be a small but steady improvement in mental arithmetic, and that needlework, though very good at several schools, is at the others very far below the standard expected in other education districts. In repetition and recitation there is room for much improvement, and only nine schools have been awarded “good” marks in this subject, and five of these were small aided schools.

The instruction and training of the preparatory classes at the larger schools are usually satisfactory; it is at the smaller schools with a single teacher and with all the standards represented that the preparatory class is at the greatest disadvantage; and the experiment of introducing some of the kindergarten occupations into such schools will be tried during the coming year on the arrival of the necessary material from England.

*Supervision in the Playground.*—Although at my inspection visits I seldom have to report unfavourably upon this topic, yet circumstances occasionally reveal the fact that there is in some cases room for great improvement in this respect. The expense to which the Board is frequently put in repairing what may be styled preventable damage is far greater than it ought to be, and might be very considerably reduced by the exercise of more constant vigilance on the part of the teaching staff.