

Printing the reading-lessons of beginners on the blackboard is by no means as much used as it should be. This method is coming more and more into use in Great Britain, and is highly spoken of by all the experts. It is now very uncommon to find the younger pupils reading the lessons by rote without knowing the words, and I hope the practice will soon be altogether unknown.

The number of pupils who remain on in the preparatory classes till they have passed eight years of age continues to grow, and this year amounts to 2,150, as against 2,136 last year. An effort needs to be made to stop the slight but ever-growing increase in the number of pupils in this position. The large centres of population, where schools are at the doors of the people, contribute far too large a share to this total of backward children. Dulness, irregular attendance, and recent entrance are the causes usually assigned for withholding these pupils from the examination in Standard I.

The management of the schools is generally good. The pupils are being carefully trained in habits of order, punctuality, obedience, honest work, and reasonable diligence; and their manners and behaviour, so far as they come under the Inspectors' observation, deserve warm commendation. The chief faults under this head are a frequently noticeable want of smartness in dealing with the school work that may be due to climatic causes, and considerable listlessness and inattention most frequently seen in the large classes of the larger schools. These closely connected defects have their root in teaching that lacks earnestness, force, and stimulating power. In the "Suggestions to Teachers" I have tried to describe what good attention implies, and to indicate how it may be secured, and I would urge teachers to strenuously to endeavour to make their management come nearer the ideal there sketched out.

A certain sombre gravity seems to me too prevalent in our school management, while a cheerful play of geniality and good humour—no impediment to good discipline—is too little cultivated. The schools in which the relations between teachers and pupils are most natural and most cordial are hardly ever marked by an atmosphere of frigid and unbending seriousness and restraint.

In a considerable number of schools oral answers are well stated—fully, explicitly, and quickly. In many the constantly repeated caution "That is not an answer" tells of ineffectual effort to have answers properly stated. Where answers are badly given the style of questioning is often at fault. Many teachers do not sufficiently realise this, but keep nagging at their pupils for defects that are largely the legitimate and natural effects of their own want of tact and skill. In trying to state their answers fully enough and in the form of sentences pupils too often still eke them out by incorporating the question asked. As a rule, this practice is undesirable and unnecessary, and it should be checked.

In comparatively few schools do we find the examination of written exercises as careful and thorough as it should be, though downright careless correction is rare. Due correction is often a great burden to teachers, and I have often had to point out that the written work had better be curtailed than be perfunctorily examined. It should be the rule that teachers should only mark in a suitable way where errors exist, and that the pupils should discover and correct them as far as they can. This practice is more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

Singing still forms but a slight and incidental feature in the life of all but a few schools. The giving of the stated weekly lesson is a sort of solemn duty, and promises to grow into a virtue. The lessons given, however, are satisfactory as far as they go. Our children seem to love song only when exhilarated by a drive on the top of a coach or 'bus. One would gladly see more of this generous glow of feeling infused into the too dull routine of ordinary school life.

I shall not refer at length to the methods and spirit of the teaching, but I would fain see more thought given to them. We are all too prone to fall into routine, and in our attention to mere processes to overlook what the processes are meant to accomplish. And this is undoubtedly a besetting weakness with many teachers, who too often forget that their main business is not the working-up of a certain amount of knowledge, but the training of alertness and intelligence, and the building-up among their pupils of moral and social habits of good report.

Of the fidelity and diligence with which the vast majority of the teachers discharge their duties I can speak only in terms of honest praise. Not a few may fail to display special skill in teaching and management, but it is very seldom that they do not try to do their best for their pupils.

To my colleagues I owe a warm acknowledgment of the arduous service they have done throughout the year, and especially during its latter half. They have repeatedly done in one day the work of a day and a half, and have worked on many Saturdays, and we have thus been enabled to overtake the examination of all the schools that were open throughout the year, a task that could not have been accomplished but for this willingly rendered extra service.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary, Auckland Board of Education.

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TARANAKI.

Education Office, New Plymouth, 9th March, 1898.

SIR,—

At the close of 1897 sixty schools were open, there having been an increase of 50 per cent. since the beginning of 1891. The schools bringing about the increase are small ones, costing for maintenance more than the Board receives as capitation on account of the average attendance, and as this opens up an important question I hope I may be pardoned for again discussing what I dealt with at some length in a former report. Districts that have within their boundaries few large schools and many small schools are labouring under great disadvantages, for the latter are a constant drain on the finances of the Board, and cause funds to run very low. Though the Boards in such districts may see the necessity for the collective