

bringing the matter within the comprehension of the pupils, he could reasonably expect some home preparation. Arithmetic, again, opens the way to grave abuses of home-work. It is easily assigned, easily corrected, but too often the sums are long and have no bearing on the day's work. Under proper conditions, however, a sum may be set with advantage to both teacher and pupils. If during the day a new rule has been taught and thoroughly explained a very simple sum may be given for home-work, but it should be well within the comprehension of the pupils, and should contain as few figures as will serve to illustrate the principle taught. The pupils should thus require no home assistance, and if the work is wrong either the instruction has not been clear or the pupils have failed to comprehend it. From the quality of the work the teacher may gauge his success, and may know whether to repeat the lesson or to proceed to other work. I have taken the two subjects geography and arithmetic as typical of the two classes of home-lessons, memory-work, and written work, and the same care must be exercised with both.

Of the sixty schools open at the end of the year, fifty-six were examined. The following table shows the summary of examination results for the whole district:—

Standard Classes.				Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.	
							Yrs.	mos.
Above Standard VI.	...	...	...	18	...	...	...	...
Standard VI.	...	...	...	86	82	56	14	2
" V.	...	...	...	247	229	122	13	10
" IV.	...	...	...	466	440	222	13	0
" III.	...	...	...	540	516	328	11	9
" II.	...	...	...	563	546	414	10	9
" I.	...	...	...	632	603	492	9	6
Preparatory	...	...	...	1,294	...	...	...	...
Totals	...	...	...	3,846	2,416	1,634	12	2*

* Mean of average age.

On the days appointed for the examinations 3,846 pupils were on the rolls; of these 1,294 were in the preparatory classes, 18 in the class above Standard VI., and 2,534 in Standards I. to VI. Comparing the above with the returns for 1896, I find the roll-number shows an increase of 68, the number in the class above Standard VI. an increase of 8, the number in standards an increase of 137, and the number in the preparatory classes a decrease of 80. The numbers in Standards IV. and V. have increased considerably. Standard I., also, has increased, and this, combined with the decrease in the preparatory classes, points to a more rapid transference of pupils from the preparatory classes to Standard I., due, I believe, to a diminished tendency to retain pupils below Standard I., and to the improved roads, which allow pupils to come to school more regularly and at an earlier age.

Though in reading a slight improvement was noticeable I am not satisfied with the instruction, as it tends to produce not an easy, natural, and intelligent style, but a stilted, laboured, and monotonous utterance of words. With only one reading-book in use in the four lower classes this is not surprising, for, as I formerly pointed out, the younger children know most of the lessons by heart, and when tested depend upon their memory of the text as much as upon the eye. In most districts two reading-books are insisted upon, and in some districts three are used. In three of our schools—the Central, Stratford, and Omata—supplementary books are being used in Standard I. The remedies for the poor reading are the more careful training of the pupils in the preparatory classes in the principles of good reading, better model-reading by the teachers, wider reading in all classes, and the establishment of school libraries.

Spelling is still unsatisfactory. The special tests may be fairly correct, but the spelling on the general papers is often poor in the extreme. Here are examples taken from a geography paper of "one of the best boys" (I quote the teacher) in Standard V. in a large school. In three lines "Otago" is spelled "Otaga," "south" is spelled "southe," and "north of of the river" occurs. Many worse cases could be mentioned, but these examples are taken from the first paper I touched in a pile of last year's papers. Our scholarship candidates are chosen presumably from the best pupils in Standard V. and Standard VI., and yet the misspelling I cited in my report on the last examination would almost lead one to suppose that spelling is omitted from the primary school curriculum.

Writing in most schools is satisfactory, and during the year good progress has been made in getting the pupils to write neatly on the examination papers and to arrange the work nicely. From business-men who employ ex-pupils as clerks one sometimes hears complaints of the quality of the writing. Whether such complaints are justified or not I am not prepared to say, though I have heard other business-men, whose opinions are entitled to respect, speak very favourably of the writing of our pupils. The complaints seem to me, however, to be made without a recognition of what our primary education aims at. It does not profess to make experts in any department, yet this is what seems to be expected in every department: the employer who uses mental arithmetic wants an expert, the employer of clerks wants an expert, the worker in timber wants an expert in measurements, and so on *ad lib*. What we hope is that, with the groundwork we give to the pupils passing through our best schools, specialisation of practice will produce the expert, but we cannot supply him ready-made. In so far as writing is concerned, my own opinion is that what-