

papers, that while Standard III. was somewhat weaker this year in general work, Standard VI. showed a decided advance, especially in arithmetic, spelling, and composition. We are pleased to be able to record that this year, for the first time since the Education Department took upon itself the task of setting the arithmetic papers, the percentage of failures in each standard has fallen below 50. In other words, for the first time in four years more than half the children in each class have been equal to the tests applied.

Writing.—There is no doubt that “vertical” copybooks have advantages for the million in producing a clear legible hand, and that by their use much slovenly and sprawling writing has been quickly reformed. Yet it is questionable whether the freest and speediest writing cannot be produced under the old system. At any rate, much that is stiff and cramped in appearance is now being turned out with detrimental effects upon the writers. Three years ago we published a warning to the same effect, and we regret that we now find it was not unnecessary. In future we shall expect more attention to letter-junctions, roundness, and freedom, and we hope that teachers, if we wish to retain in use a style which has found so much favour with them, will do their best to prevent the abuses which make it suffer by comparison with a sloping hand.

Drawing.—Neat and well-kept books containing the year’s work in freehand, geometric, and scale drawing are usually shown us, but very few of our teachers yet appear competent to teach model-drawing well. We hoped that the examinations held by the Wellington Technical School would afford a stimulus to teachers to make themselves proficient, but scarcely any have yet availed themselves of them. Pupils from Toi Toi Valley, Westport Boys’, and Nelson Central Schools have competed successfully, chiefly in freehand and scale drawing, for first-grade certificates. In our Fifth Standard examinations the ground plan of a room to be drawn to scale was set as a test, but we were disappointed to find that but few had worked it correctly.

Geography is a much more satisfactory subject now than it used to be, though there is still a tendency to keep in one groove, questions off the beaten track and those involving merely the thoughtful application of knowledge already acquired being seldom attempted. Evidently the great trade routes are not always realistically taught before a globe or map of the world, the children depending too much on verbal memory. For instance, when a class has been asked to describe the route taken by a sailing-vessel from New Zealand to England the children have repeatedly given a careful description of towns, &c., on the overland route *via* San Francisco. Descriptive power is little cultivated, as may be judged from the feeble accounts given of the mountain or river systems of a country, physical geography, like mathematical, being too often irrationally treated.

Composition.—The children in the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Standard classes are usually able to write a neat letter or to reproduce with intelligence a short story read out to them by the Inspector. The Fourth class have also been more successful in dealing with the exercises in sentence-making, but the paraphrasing of poetry by the Fifth, although improved in a few instances, still leaves much to be desired. This exercise is defined in the syllabus as “the rendering of the sense of a passage of easy verse into good prose.” Special care was taken this year to select passages of easy verse, but the prose renderings were too often characterized by a certain want of freedom, and in many cases by a disregard for the rules of grammar.

Class-subjects.—The following table shows approximately our opinion of the efficiency of our schools in those subjects known as class-subjects, which do not affect the individual passes, and are for the most part tested by oral examination.

	Weak. Schools.	Fair. Schools.	Satisfactory. Schools.	Very Good. Schools.
Grammar	63	28	14	1
History	19	39	28	19
Geography of Standard II.	13	29	29	33
Object-lessons and science	13	33	30	28
Mental arithmetic	28	36	45	3

Additional Subjects.—These subjects, which include recitation, drill, singing, and needle-work, are not insisted on in the smaller schools, although any neglect of them in the larger schools is declared by the framers of the syllabus to be a ground of reproach. The foregoing remarks should therefore be borne in mind when reading the following comments:—

Drill, physical or military, which we would like to see much more common, is taught in thirty-seven schools. The training was considered satisfactory or commended in twenty schools, and marked “very good” in nine.

Singing has been taken up in some form or other in thirty-eight schools, but in a great number of instances nothing was presented beyond a few simple melodies taught by ear. We are far from undervaluing this humble attempt to brighten the lives of the children and to vary the necessarily monotonous routine of school work, but we think that more than this might reasonably be expected, especially in our larger schools. Regular instruction might be given in the reading of musical notation, and rounds and part songs might be added to the usual selection of simple melodies. Besides the ordinary lessons appointed in the time-tables, an opening and a closing song might be sung with good effect on the spirits of the children, and at a small expenditure of time. Marching to music is also a favourite exercise with children. In any case we wish it to be understood that the lessons should be spread over the whole of the school year, and not merely put in hand for a few weeks with a view to making a display at the examination, a practice which savours too much of show to be at all satisfactory.

The time-honoured custom of giving the children an annual treat, including a “tea-party,” with outdoor games, and concluding with the magic-lantern and a few songs and recitations, has of late developed into what is now more ambitiously styled the “School Concert.” To this a great deal of time is devoted which might be better employed. In some instances, we fear that the regular school course is seriously interfered with, and, for a time, practically set aside to make room for the elaborate preparations now considered necessary for this annual celebration. We feel assured that the frequent evening rehearsals, leading, as they often do, to late hours, must be detrimental