

The following facts are given for the consideration of parents and School Committees. We find that the "weak" and "fair" groups report for the year preceding the examination an average attendance of 70 per cent. of the roll-number, the "satisfactory" an average attendance of 80 per cent., the "good" an average attendance of 84 per cent., and the three "very good" an average attendance of 90 per cent. There is another aspect of the irregular-attendance evil that parents and School Committees should consider—the loss of teaching-power. A few more children in regular attendance would entitle several of our schools to an additional teacher—a sewing-mistress, a pupil-teacher, or even an assistant teacher. Two schools within six miles of each other presented at their last examination the same number of pupils: the pupils of one had had the services of two certificated teachers; those of the other, owing to irregular attendance, the services of only one. The average attendance for the district has fallen from 87.4 in 1897, the highest in the colony for the year, to 81.6, lower than the colonial average of last year.

Since the adoption of a syllabus of work for the class above Standard VI. the efficiency of the class has steadily improved, and the number in attendance has increased. The syllabus was only tentative, and might now with advantage be revised.

In reading there is less difficulty in connecting sound with symbol and sense with sound, and reading has gained in fluency and expression. Pupils who on leaving school cease to be readers we must reckon amongst our failures, passes notwithstanding. A pupil who has even slight difficulty in recognising newly presented printed words more readily ceases to read than one who has occasional difficulty in comprehending the force of passages. For this reason, as well as for the sake of comprehension in the later school course, we have urged that as early as possible strenuous endeavours be made to overcome the mechanical difficulty. Pupils should have, and should realise that they have, a practical acquaintance with the principles that govern the pronunciation of words. This practical acquaintance can best be made by constant discipline in word-building and word-analysis, and by abundant practice on new reading matter. The mental distraction caused by difficulties in pronunciation is fatal to expression, and in the middle and upper sections of the school full justice can be done to comprehension and expression. The new test applied to spelling brought down the efficiency mark of that subject from the lower margin of "excellent" to the upper margin of "satisfactory." The word-building and word-analysis which we recommend as aids to reading will prove helpful to spelling; and, as the governing principles are disclosed by the analysis, spelling rules should be formulated by the teacher and memorised by the pupils: reading and spelling should be made mutually helpful. The following extract from the *Educational Times* of the 1st January, 1898, embodies much of what we have been urging for years:—

"A circular to Her Majesty's Inspectors, issued by the Education Department, states that the teaching of reading aloud in elementary schools is often unsatisfactory. The reasons are probably—(1) the largeness of classes, and the presence of many classes in one room; (2) a premature and ill-judged regard for expression; (3) neglect to insist on careful articulation at all times; and (4) confusion of an expository or informative lesson with practice in reading aloud. The department holds that it is impossible to give sufficient individual practice in classes consisting of forty or a greater number of children, or, indeed, any practice worthy of the name 'in the midst of confusion and clatter.' With ordinary care, children can be made to read with all due attention to the precise rendering of final consonants—'of the highest importance in a language which throws its accents back and persistently slurs its final vowels'—and they can also be made to produce their vowels *ore rotundo*. Short 'pattern reading' is declared to be of doubtful value; and, with respect to careful articulation at all times, it is urged that in no circumstances should truncated or 'woolly' enunciation be permitted. 'No answer to a question should be accepted from a child (unless he is conspicuously lacking in self-confidence) which is not clearly heard by every member of the class.' Variation in procedure is valuable in the reading exercises, perhaps more than in any other part of the school curriculum, and a practice full of profit to every member of a class, including the teacher, is 'to make each in turn read exclusively to the ears of his comrades, and not, as is usually the case, to their eyes alone.' A copy of the circular has been sent to every training-college and pupil-teachers' centre."

The writing of most of our schools may be characterized as good. The written spelling and dictation exercises were examined for pass and efficiency marks; seldom, except in the case of impending failure, were the copybooks examined. In legibility writing is distinctly improving, but the rate of production by Standard V. and Standard VI. is too slow. Two styles of writing are competing for favour—the vertical and the forward-sloping. It is generally conceded that the vertical style has the better claim to legibility, but with regard to speed and beauty public opinion is still undecided. We accept without prejudice either the one style or the other, but backward slope or excessive forward slope we emphatically condemn. They are the results of imperfect discipline, and, along with all irregularities, militate against legibility. The writing-lesson, like the drawing-lesson, must afford discipline in observation as well as in manual dexterity; hand and eye controlled by will must act in unison in the effort to reproduce exactly the model placed before the pupil, and until freed from models pupils must be compelled to attempt exact copies. We are not satisfied with the manner in which the writing-lesson is usually conducted. We consider that the teacher is hampered and the pupil's progress retarded by the exclusive use of copybooks with engraved headlines. In the model at the head of each page there is usually material for several practice-lessons, and the page does not afford sufficient scope for them. The teaching is mainly individual teaching, and individuals, after writing a prescribed amount, usually a line, have to cease writing and wait their turn for criticism and direction by the teacher. Were blank copybooks, ruled like the engraved books, used for abundant preliminary exercises on the model at the head of a page of the engraved book, and finally the page of the engraved book written without pause, we believe that a distinct advance would be made in this important subject. The use of the blank copybook would make effective class-teaching practicable, and the pupils could receive the needed