

the schools such means of recreation as the swing and horizontal bar. In some cases we have noticed that the playground is somewhat small for the number of children—a state of affairs that should be studiously avoided in future by the Board's securing large sections for school sites.

*Tone of the Schools.*—During the year we had but rarely to comment adversely on the tone of any of the schools. In several instances we have noticed a distinct improvement. Whether the tone of a school is good, bad, or indifferent depends almost entirely on the vigilance of the teacher, who should accordingly make it a matter of conscience to be unremitting in his endeavours to prevent, and steadfast in his determination to check, any conduct that would tend to bring discredit upon himself or his pupils. In this connection we may be permitted to refer to the question of corporal punishment, which has been much agitated of late. We have hitherto avoided any reference to the subject, not from want of interest in its bearings, or from a failure to appreciate the grave issues that hang on a correct understanding of the principles of punishment, but partly because it has not come prominently under our notice; and partly, we suppose, on the convenient maxim *Quieta non movere*. We had recently the honour to submit to the Board a memorandum on the subject, which we hope may be of some service to young and inexperienced teachers.

*Subjects of Instruction.*—Taking the standard subjects first, we note, with respect to reading, that the pressing difficulty is to get the pupils to take an interest in the subject sufficiently great to result in their acquiring a habit of reading. The difficulty, we think, is due partly to the subdivisions of time at the teacher's disposal, resulting from a multiplicity of subjects, and partly to the character of the reading-books, which is necessarily determined by the provisions of the syllabus. The earlier stages of a pupil's progress in reading must, of course, be largely occupied with the overcoming of mechanical difficulties—a sorry business if it is not accompanied by an occasional interesting story read by the teacher. The earlier and the better the mechanical difficulties are overcome in the lower classes the more time will, of course, be available to get behind the language to the train of ideas in the upper. The chief objections to our modern reading-books are that they are largely made up of extracts, and contain but little or nothing of current literature. It follows that the reading-lesson frequently consists in nothing but a scrap of a scrap, and too seldom in anything that stirs the minds of men at the present day. We do not seek to disparage the reading-books—in their way they are excellent; but they are incomplete, and must remain so until they are to a less extent made up of extracts, and until they to a greater extent incorporate such matter as will bring the children's minds into contact with the events, questions, and points of progress of to-day.

The upright system of handwriting has not taken root in this district. Success in the teaching of writing does not depend on the merits of any particular system; it depends on the manner in which the principles of the system chosen are treated. If these are carefully and consistently taught throughout the school the results may safely be left to take care of themselves. At the annual examination our first impression of a pupil's writing is gained from an examination of his copybook, but our final judgment as to his fitness for a pass is reserved until we have seen how he has written his dictation and composition exercises.

The department's tests in arithmetic were, on the whole, fairly and squarely met by the various schools. At the beginning of the examination period a slight flutter was created among the teachers when it became known that sums were being set in decimal money. The decimal system of reckoning, we may note in passing, notwithstanding its immense advantages, does not appear to be making rapid progress towards universal acceptance. We were glad to notice that in a number of schools the teachers had posted on the walls of the class-room, for the benefit of their older pupils, various commercial documents, such as cheques, bills of exchange, promissory notes, share and price lists, and quotations from the London money and produce markets. We should like to see in every school examples of various measures made by the pupils themselves—e.g., lineal measure in thread, square measure (as far as the square yard) in paper, cubic inch and cubic foot in wood, and so on. Speaking generally, the subject of arithmetic is well taught throughout the district. There is, however, especially on the part of young teachers, a tendency to hurry through the various rules, regardless of method. It should be ever borne in mind that, in the long-run, neatness makes for accuracy and good order for speed.

We sometimes find that too much time is given to spelling, occasionally indeed as much as is given to reading. When it is remembered that there are important indirect aids to a knowledge of the subject—transcription and composition, for example—and when one further remembers that though of great practical it is of low educative value, one can account for the large amount of time devoted to it only on the supposition that a determined effort is being made to secure a standard pass. Here, as in much else in school work, what appears to be the longest road is really the shortest; the teacher should rely on the blackboard, the pupil on his eyes.

Geography continues to be handled in an increasingly intelligent manner, and in many schools it is taught by methods that leave little to be desired. We have noticed on the walls of some of our schools maps or charts of places presently engaging public attention. These, we are told, are brought to school along with explanatory paragraphs by the children. In some schools physical geography does not receive the attention that the interest and importance of the subject warrant. It takes the pupil away from the beaten track; but, if the truth must be told, some of the teachers are but blind guides.

At the annual examinations we gave a practical test in drawing, chiefly freehand, to each pupil in the standard classes. The results were, on the whole, good beyond expectation. During the coming examination period we propose to extend this mode of examination to the other parts of the subject. Many parents, and some teachers too, regard this subject as being somewhat of the nature of a burden laid on their shoulders by an inconsiderate State. It has, however, become a *sine quâ non* in modern primary education, lying as it does at the root of all progress in the acquisition of a knowledge of the manual and mechanical arts.