

*Writing*, as exhibited in the copybooks, appears to be taught in a satisfactory manner at most of the schools, but were it to be judged by the written work of the examination it would occupy a very different position amongst the pass-subjects. There are now three different sets of copybooks used in the district—namely, the “Southern Cross,” Whitecombe’s “Erect,” and Jackson’s “Vertical.” The upright style is becoming more popular, but I cannot find that anything is gained by its adoption. The schools that have always been remarkable for the excellence of their copy-book writing have remained constant to the sloping style, and in these schools the writing of the examination papers is always more uniformly satisfactory. The vertical system is certainly more easily learned by scholars who were apparently unable to master the sloping style, and in some cases it has been adopted on this account. There are two disadvantages connected with the vertical system—the tendency to slope backwards—indeed, some of the copies themselves are rather inclined this way—and the monotonous uniformity of the handwriting of the scholars who have adopted it. Possibly this last objection may not be a matter of much importance, the permanent characteristics of each individual’s writing being usually developed in after-life. There is, throughout the district, abundant evidence of the care bestowed upon this subject in the cleanliness of the copybooks, and, as a rule, the absence of blots, blunders, and other disfigurements.

*Drawing* shows a steady improvement in freehand and scale drawing, most of the failures in the upper standards being due to geometrical and model drawing. There is much indifference amongst parents with regard to this subject—an indifference which in some country districts almost amounts to hostility—but they cannot be aware of its educative value, nor of its practical utility (especially scale drawing) in almost every occupation in after-life. Nearly all the Board schools, and some of the larger aided schools, are now supplied with suitable drawing-charts, and to this, together with the impetus given to the subject by means of the examinations under the Wellington Technical School, the improvement may, in a great measure, be attributed.

*Arithmetic*.—For the low position occupied by this subject, as already referred to, it is not easy to assign a cause. The fact that a large proportion of the failures occur in the two higher standards of the larger schools must be as unsatisfactory to the teachers concerned as it is to the writer; but it is hoped and expected that this reproach will be removed at the next examination. The matter will be referred to again later on in this report.

*Composition*.—The smaller proportion of passes this year was caused principally by a pretty general weakness in the composition of Standard V., which was tested by the paraphrasing of a passage of poetry from the reading-book. At the end of each poem in the book there is a short summary of its contents, and not a few scholars contented themselves with simply copying this verbatim, for which, of course, they received no marks. Others fail through attempting to substitute words of a somewhat similar meaning, but without any regard for their fitness in association with the rest of the sentence. Some simply copy the exact words of the poem, but arrange them as in ordinary prose—that is, not in symmetrical lines. The author of a very useful little work entitled “Lower-grade English” (Nelson and Sons), speaking of paraphrasing, says, “A paraphrase resembles a ‘free translation,’ which, without following the original word by word, gives its pith or spirit in a new form. Paraphrasing of this kind is one of the most useful exercises in composition. It obviates the chief difficulty which young beginners encounter—the difficulty, namely, of finding material. In paraphrase the ideas are supplied. The pupil is required only to express them in his own words.” Dr. Fitch, too, writing on the same subject, says, “Exercises of this kind, though more often in writing, may often with advantage be oral, and should always be made the subject of conversation and questioning before they are attempted.” If these principles were kept steadily in view and acted upon the teaching of the composition prescribed for Standard V. would be more successful, and would considerably contribute towards success in the original composition required in Standard VI. In the Third and Fourth Standards the same old, old defect is still too frequently apparent—viz., the neglect of the period—the total absence, in fact, of short and intelligible sentences. Instances of composition exercises of ten or twelve lines, containing a series of statements connected by “and” or “so,” are of frequent occurrence; sometimes there are more “ands” than there are lines of composition. This defect has its origin at the very base of the school, in the practice of constantly accepting oral answers to questions without insisting on the answers being themselves complete sentences. If a child in Standard I. be asked how many pennies there are in a shilling, the answer “twelve” should not be accepted; but “There are twelve pennies in a shilling,” or “A shilling is worth twelve pennies,” or the like, should be insisted on. In this way the teaching of this subject—perhaps the most valuable in all the school course—would be constantly, though almost unconsciously, promoted in connection with every other subject of the syllabus. Doubtless these remarks are, or should be, quite unnecessary for the guidance of our older and more experienced teachers, but they may be useful to some of the younger members of the staff, and therefore require no apology for their appearance here.

*Geography* is the other subject spoken of in the earlier portion of this report as showing a falling-off from last year’s results—poor though those results were. It is certainly the least important of the pass group, and, personally, I should prefer to make it exchange places with grammar; but as long as it remains a pass-subject it must be taught and examined as such. I believe the failures are not altogether due to want of knowledge of the subject, but partly to the great extent of the ground covered by the prescribed course. It may be that a scholar fairly well acquainted with geography may yet be unable to give satisfactory replies to some of the few questions to which the examination papers are necessarily limited. Hitherto there has been no text-book prescribed for this subject, but in future I intend to confine my questions to the contents of the “Southern Cross” Geographies, which are now generally used in this district. In map-drawing from memory the requirements of the syllabus for Standards V. and VI. are also uncertain, and I propose in future to limit this part of the subject to maps of New Zealand and Europe (the whole or a part) for Standard V., and to New Zealand, Australia, and Asia for Standard VI. Very imperfect com-