

As usual, we give a short criticism upon the way in which the different subjects in the syllabus are being taught.

Reading.—We have little to add to what we have written in former reports on this matter. We are generally well satisfied with the enunciation and voice-inflection, and comprehension of the language is rightly receiving more attention. Preparation is becoming more thorough, but it runs in too narrow a groove, little encouragement being given to general reading. When it was thought necessary, previously unseen tests were applied, and we are bound to confess that the results were better than we anticipated. Very few schools, however, are supplied with extra Readers, and we have not yet found that our suggestion *re* silent reading has anywhere been acted upon.

Spelling.—The spelling is not so accurate as it should be. It is true that the tests given to the higher standards were rather more severe this year than formerly, and this may partly account for the failures in this subject being more numerous, and far above those in any other subject except arithmetic. The training is, in many cases, even more narrow than that in reading, being confined to the repetition of selected "hard words" to the neglect of word-building and derivation, which can so often supply the key to difficulties, and which afford much more interest and instruction than mere rote-work. Accuracy of observation should, of course, be continually encouraged, especially in connection with the words in the reading-lessons. Writing from dictation is mainly useful for examination purposes, and should never take the place of teaching spelling, although the exercise is invaluable when used for the purpose of testing the children's knowledge of a prepared lesson.

Writing and Drawing.—These subjects are almost invariably of such a nature as to satisfy the requirements of a pass examination, but we fear that really good writing is becoming rare, and must look for a better average quality in future if the high standard that has hitherto prevailed is to be maintained. We note that Mr. Hill, the Hawke's Bay Inspector, recommends, in addition to the ordinary copybook, the use of a class copybook, in which each member writes a copy in turn, so that the book represents the quality of the writing for the whole class. It is to be regretted that very little interest was shown in the first- and second-grade drawing examinations held by the Wellington Technical School in September and December last, Appleby being the only school to send up candidates.

Arithmetic.—The results in this subject have shown a steady improvement year by year. We again record, for the sake of comparison, the percentage that the number of passes bears to the number present in each class:—

				Standard VI. Per Cent.	Standard V. Per Cent.	Standard IV. Per Cent.	Standard III. Per Cent.
1898	...	...	...	60	60	75	75
1896	...	...	...	31	44	63	74
1894	...	...	...	31	39	45	61

Last year we were able to report for the first time that over half the number in each class were able to work the sums satisfactorily, and this time the proportion has increased to three-fifths. More attention is being paid to addition tables in the preparatory and Standard I. classes, but deficiencies in this respect are still too common.

Geography.—In this subject we are glad to note some improvement, the children generally being able to answer questions in topography and in political geography, but the physical and mathematical departments, which offer less facilities for getting up the work by rote, were, as in former years, not so satisfactory. In Standard III., where the programme is minutely laid down, very good work was the rule, and in Standard II., where geography does not affect the individual pass, there were rarely any signs of the neglect of this interesting subject. In all classes above the third the children were expected, as usual, to draw a map from memory, and in some of our best schools the maps handed in were really beautiful. When it is remembered that a bare hour was allowed for the whole paper, of which the map forms a part, the neatness of finish and fullness of detail were worthy of the highest commendation. In this connection the Motueka School deserves special mention.

Composition.—The work of Standard III. in this subject, though generally marked by grammatical correctness and tasteful arrangement, often shows evidence of being a literal reproduction from memory of prepared exercises, and consequently wanting in freedom. The children are taught to write essays on certain well-rehearsed subjects rather than to cultivate the power of expressing their ideas in their own language. This is especially noticeable when the choice of themes is, as still too often happens, unduly limited. Those preparing for Standard IV. seemed to us weaker than before in the exercises in amalgamating sentences; nor was this compensated by exceptional skill in reproducing a story from memory—a test set to this class this year for the first time. In Standard V. a larger proportion of sensible paraphrases were handed in, and some few of these made really pleasant reading. We still find, however, a great deficiency in the comprehension of very plain English words, a result, probably, of imperfect training in general reading. The following are glaring instances: "He gave the tar a piece of gold," when rewritten with its context, made utter nonsense, in the midst of which "a piece of tarred gold" was conspicuous. "They then brought out the best of cheer" was several times interpreted, "They gave a loud hurrah," or "They gave three cheers"; while "The stern advance of the men in red" was once ingloriously rendered, "The soldiers came on stern first." In Standard VI. a story was as a rule reproduced with considerable skill; but in the other exercises, especially in correcting faulty sentences, far less ability was displayed. If the mistakes were rightly pointed out, reasons for the alterations were seldom given, and, if given, were almost invariably the wrong ones. Though the quality of the composition as a whole is not yet so high as we have a right to expect, marked improvement is apparent in the teaching of this subject, especially as compared with that of five years ago.