

application and steady earnest work throughout the year. It may be against the letter of the new regulations for head teachers to take account of their periodic examinations in determining passes in standards and promotions, but it seems in accordance with their spirit, and I hope head teachers will not fail to take account in this connection of the year's work, as far as it is available.

The safeguards for securing efficient teaching under the new *régime* seem to me sufficient, and the future of elementary education in the colony need not wear any other aspect than a hopeful one.

Looking broadly at the state of education in the public schools of this district, I think it shows very noticeable improvement in several directions in the course of the last few years. Reading has become more fluent, distinct, and accurate, as well as more spontaneously intelligent, since the use of two reading-books has been made compulsory in all the standard classes. It is chiefly in elegance and expression that defects are now noted. Spelling has improved, not only in the special tests, but in the written answers generally. The harder words are worked up with great accuracy, and mistakes are mostly confined to mis-spellings in the dictation exercises. In arithmetic and writing there has been little progress, except in the former, in Standards I., II., and III., and in the Preparatory Classes. Drawing in all the larger schools is done with greater freedom and correctness, though this is much less apparent from book exercises than from the special exercises on slates that have been given, as far as practicable, in recent years. In composition there has been decided improvement in grammatical accuracy and in the division of sentences. The common faults in this subject—a very limited vocabulary, poverty of matter and thought, and a lack of logical sequence in the arrangement and development of the exercises—are largely unavoidable owing to the limited reading and the mental immaturity of the children. Where these faults are least in evidence, the fact seems due as much to family and social surroundings as to superior teaching in school. The teaching of science and object-lessons has also improved, though progress is slow and unequal, for thoughtful preparation of these lessons is by no means universal. Satisfactory progress has been made, too, in the study of the meaning of the language of the reading lessons; indeed, this is now a creditable feature in the instruction of a large and growing proportion of the Board's schools. The junior scholarship examinations afford additional evidence of the substantial progress in this direction, as well as of creditable advances in composition among the brighter of our younger pupils. The progress indicated shows, I think, that the teaching is growing in intelligence, and on the whole in breadth and thoroughness as well. There is less reason to feel satisfied that general improvement is being made in the care and neatness with which written exercises are done, though in many schools these are highly creditable.

A great deal of the improvement to be noted in the smaller schools must be credited to the earnest and energetic body of younger teachers who have in recent years taken service as head teachers. Their schools are usually superior, and often markedly superior, to those taught by teachers of much longer service, and, in spite of their rank as juniors, they will no doubt rapidly and deservedly secure promotions at the expense of their more somnolent seniors. As Mr. Dickinson says, "Steady progress is being made in our schools—improved methods of instruction are gradually coming into use. The future of our schools is assured, for an improved type of teacher is growing up amongst us, better educated, and more anxious to work on good models."

What are the chief causes that are acting here and now to retard progress?

In the first place, many of our older teachers have a low ideal of education. Their chief aim is to get pupils to pass, not to train their intelligence and their powers of observation, reasoning, and expression in the highest degree they can. The system, too, has constantly tended to make them value evident and tangible results more highly than the subtle growth of mental habits and aptitudes that educative methods well applied produce. Then there is considerable indifference to good methods of teaching; an evil fostered by the want of a practical test in teaching in connection with the teachers' certificate examination, and by the slight theoretical knowledge of the art which that examination demands, for the gate to the teaching profession is not sufficiently guarded by a strict and thorough examination in school method. The want of means of improving the practical training of pupil-teachers tells in the same direction. Teachers are not as a rule watchful enough to avoid falling into ruts; the fullest and latest works on school method in vogue in other progressive communities are possessed by very few; and visits to efficiently conducted neighbouring schools, to compare methods of teaching and the habits of study formed among pupils, are hardly ever made. The latter is a laudable practice, for which teachers might be granted two or three special holidays each year. It is quite a feature in the management of German elementary schools.

The want of adequate preparation for the smart, economical, and skilful teaching of lessons also does much to retard progress. For really efficient and rapid work habitual preparation of lessons is indispensable. The Inspectors would be glad to find more general evidence of its being made.

Again, the regular and rapid use of the blackboard for explaining difficulties, for enforcing illustrations and explanations, and for facilitating the revision of important points at the close of lessons, is practised less than is needful. This practice has indeed come into more general use, but its use should be universal, as it is of the greatest value as an aid to recapitulation and to thoroughness.

Greater smartness in dealing with all lessons that do not make great demands on the reasoning powers would do much to further progress. Occasional visits to smartly and efficiently conducted schools would do more to impress teachers with the importance of this desideratum than much criticism and well-meant advice. Most of the listlessness to be noticed during reading-lessons is directly due to want of life and spirit in their conduct. Mistake-hunting is often carried to a stupid excess, that bores the pupils, and wastes much time that should be turned to better account.