

Mr. Grierson notes insufficient oral drill in tables in the preparatory class as one of the chief faults in his district, and I have found the same defect in several of the smaller schools. It is the easiest thing in the world to ascertain if pupils have mastered the addition of simple numbers, and, if it is not sufficiently known, the routine needful for learning it should be diligently practised. The objectionable practice of teaching multiplication tables side by side with addition is still to be met with in a good many schools in the north.

The change of copy-books during the year has been attended by a disturbing period of transition, but the Inspectors are all impressed by the improvement noted in the writing since the change was made. Mr. Mulgan remarks on this subject: "Further improvement cannot be hoped from the copy-book alone. The writing is best in those schools where pains are taken to secure the pupils' best effort in all written work." This is a truth of cardinal importance.

An indifferent handling of composition in Standard IV. is noted by several of the Inspectors. In this class very brief heads, one or two words under each, were supplied during the year to suggest material for writing about. These heads were purposely made full that pupils might select what they knew best, and develop these topics at some length. This they were not very prompt to do, and a very prevalent fault was dealing with the heads seriatim, giving a short sentence about each. The method used is, I think, a suitable one, but it is evidently handled with little skill and success by a good many teachers. I agree with Mr. Mulgan's remark, that the notes or heads used in the habitual teaching of the Standard IV. class give the pupils too much help, and leave but a subordinate and comparatively mechanical part of the exercise to be done at first hand by the pupils. Mr. Grierson observes that composition is taught with very varying skill, and that in a few of his schools the exercises of Standard III. were absolutely better than those of Standard IV. in others. I give Mr. Dickinson's observations on this subject in full. "Composition is steadily improving. In most of our schools the exercises are free from gross blunders. It has been my opinion—growing for some years—that what is needed is: (1) More practice in oral composition in the lower classes; and (2) more real instruction in the higher. This is shown by want of continuity and coherence in many of the exercises, and the limited stock of particles and minor phrases possessed by our children. How few of our teachers keep a note-book for recording the most important and instructive errors. In a fortnight, what fine material might be collected for a real lesson in composition or sentence-structure."

The answering in geography has this year improved in accuracy, and in many cases in fulness, but physical and especially mathematical geography shows little and often no improvement. In not a few of the smaller schools it looks as if these branches of the instruction were deliberately neglected, at least by the pupils who expect to gain marks enough on the other questions to earn a pass. I am glad to see geography now ranking as a class subject in Standards II. to V. In these classes the examination will for the future be taken orally, and the time allowed for teaching the subject should be reduced to an hour and a half weekly at most.

In the arithmetic of Standard IV. Mr. Crowe notes "a general improvement." Mr. Goodwin has "found some improvement in the large schools, but this subject is still in an unsatisfactory state in many of the small schools, particularly in the higher classes.* Questions involving thought and not readily answered by rules were but poorly dealt with." Mr. Dickinson observes, "Arithmetic is still a weak subject in Standard V. and Standard VI. It is taught in too many schools merely as the 'Art of Computation.' It is an exercise in getting so many sums right, instead of an exercise in reasoning. We need more 'demonstrative' and less 'commercial' arithmetic. The pupil should be required to give clear and accurate reasons for all he does, and the mere working of examples should not be accepted as sufficient. In schools where Standard V. and Standard VI. have been trained to give plenty of written statement before working their exercises I have invariably found the most accurate arithmetic."

The inequality in the arithmetical work of the same classes in the majority of our schools is very noticeable. To get rid of it we need more oral drill at the blackboard of small sections in large classes, and of the more backward pupils in all. Three-quarters of the teacher's time during this lesson should be devoted to giving this blackboard drill and practice. By drill and practice I do not mean the teaching of new rules—teaching which will be directed to the whole class—but the doing of a series of examples at the blackboard by a suitable section of the class, the work and reasoning being contributed by the pupils as selected, and being recorded on the board by one of their number under the teacher's direction. When such examples are finished every pupil in the section should be able to describe shortly how the sum has been done, giving the steps clearly and in proper order. The mere marking of answers in the larger schools takes up far too much of the teacher's time. It should be done quickly at the close of the lesson by mutual correction or on some such plan. This applies especially to the work of Standards III. to VI.

Throughout the year the pupils in Standard VI. have been tested in reading passages of fair difficulty which they had not before seen. Mr. Goodwin alone refers to the result of this test, and he says: "The pupils of Standard VI. were able to deal satisfactorily with the unseen passages from strange books presented to them." I cannot report of this test in such favourable terms. In the large schools not more than three-fourths of the Standard VI. pupils read the previously unseen test satisfactorily, and in most of the smaller schools not more than a half of the pupils did so. The great majority of those who dealt poorly with this test gave a very satisfactory rendering of the lessons in the class reading-books. It was with great difficulty that numbers of these pupils attempted the pronunciation of words they had not met with before, and the art of splitting such words up into syllables and correctly sounding these in combination evidently needs to be more carefully cultivated in teaching the higher classes.

* Mr. Goodwin here refers mainly to the Hokianga and Bay of Islands group of schools. He was not able to undertake the examination of the other small schools of his district.