

Standard VI. physiography is the best form of the subject, and it falls in well with the science instruction. In reporting on the latter subject (science) we find the teaching of chemistry still further advanced in several schools, and generally satisfactorily taught, and we are pleased to note that arrangements have been made whereby experiments can be performed by pupils individually. As this is the only true way in which science can be well taught, it is hoped the practice will become more general.

Our reports set little value on much of the grammar taught in the smaller and in some of the larger schools, inasmuch as the work is reported to be done unintelligently; but, as a matter of fact, it is a question whether, with such a full curriculum, the teaching of formal grammar should not give place to more useful work. Would it not be better to train children to speak readily, and to correct their common errors of speech? I notice in all the new Home schemes of instruction which have come under my notice that oral composition is the latest feature, and everywhere teachers are invited to correct errors of speech in children, and to encourage them to express their ideas in simple language correctly. Of the reported weakness in grammar and analysis, therefore, I do not think there is much to be sorry for, unless it is the waste of energy on the part of the teachers. There is also some misdirected energy in the teaching of history, with the poor result, in many schools, of a few disconnected facts being learned. It is now generally admitted that the intelligent use of a historical reader is satisfactory for primary instruction in the subject, and that the old-time memory work is valueless.

The infant-school work continues to make satisfactory progress, and this progress is marked in the Rintoul Street School, in which the extent and character of the kindergarten teaching now more nearly approach the work of the Mount Cook and Thorndon Schools. Brush-work, paper-flower making, and playground exercises, with suitable songs, are special features of the best schools.

In the eight Roman Catholic schools 1,112 children were presented for examination, of whom 659 were classed in standards, and of this number 558 were promoted. As compared with last year's returns for these schools, there is an increase of seventy-four on the rolls, and of twenty classed in standards; but there is a small decrease of eighteen in the number promoted. This is balanced by the classification of twenty-one in Standard VII., as compared with eleven last year. All the eight schools have made progress, some more marked than others, and they all evince a desire to come up to State requirements. Reading, writing, and spelling receive fairly due attention. Arithmetic is distinctly improved in several schools; sewing and singing are good features; but, for the most part, in science, geography, and subjects mostly taught orally, the class-work is in a backward condition. Kindergarten teaching is begun on satisfactory lines. Accommodation is improved in three schools, and further improvement is contemplated in others. Generally speaking, the schools are fully staffed, and the teachers are painstaking, diligent, and possessed of good control.

The financial difficulties which have overtaken the Board will have a far-reaching effect on the educational progress of the district, and I fear the present year will be marked by the complete or partial collapse of three important services lately introduced, which, under careful management, promised to become useful institutions.

I refer, in the first place, to the system of battalion drill, which was put into practical form by the late capable drill-instructor—Mr. McDonald. The first parade was held at the beginning of the year, when three hundred cadets attended from the city schools, some companies in full and others in partial uniform, all under their respective officers of different ranks, and accompanied by an organized cadet band. The drill was gone through in a creditable manner, and the scheme commended itself as an excellent disciplinary training in military exercises and rifle-practice—a training which, in the present order of things, may soon be demanded as an essential part of every man's early education, for the theory set up that such a training engenders in a nation an undesirable spirit of militarism is now quite exploded among educational authorities.

In the second place, I refer to the cookery classes, which also are of recent formation. Unfortunately they came into existence too hurriedly, and were launched on lines so expensive that the charge has become a serious one, and their existence is in danger. The instructors are not only good cooks, but also capable class-teachers, who have done excellent work. I think it quite possible to reorganize these classes on a much less expensive plan.

In the third place, I refer to the classes for the instruction of teachers in singing, held by Mr. R. Parker in the two chief centres of the district. The impress of an able specialist and class-teacher cannot fail to be of the highest value to school-work, and the loss of the instruction in and direction to the teaching of singing, in order to effect a saving of £100 a year, surely can only be warranted by very straitened finances.

I do not think any of these contemplated drastic measures are good or even necessary. They appear to me merely harsh expedients for tiding over a crisis. The way out of the financial difficulty will be best seen by looking at the way into it. The income of the Board is at all times a prescribed and known quantity; the salary and main expenditure is also a known quantity, prescribed by staff and salary scales, which are so constructed that the expenditure is allowed to increase only as the income rises, and it decreases also automatically with any fall in the income. Nothing but repeated departure from the working of these scales can involve the finances in difficulty, unless, of course, there is extravagance in other parts of the service. If, then, a retracing of steps be made to the old road, and adhesion to rules and regulations be insisted on, the financial equilibrium will right itself in time. It does not usually fall in my province to touch upon financial affairs; and, though I fear there is danger ahead unless some change is made in the administration, I can only hope the Board will see its way out of the present embarrassment without sacrificing the good work already done in drill, cookery, and singing.