

employed, and every facility should be afforded to render such visits valuable to himself and helpful to the teachers. Even now the condition of the exercise-books at a few of the best schools affords some evidence of the efficiency of such schools; but, in view of the fact that at present the promotion of scholars by the teacher is liable to revision or alteration by the Inspector, it is imperative that a more systematic use of exercise-books throughout the district should be insisted upon, and what is (to a certain extent) the practice at some schools should be compulsory in all. In order to bring about an improvement in this respect I propose to issue a circular strongly recommending a systematic use of exercise-books in all standards above Standard II. These books should contain exercises on each subject taken by the class in regular periodic order, and with a frequency proportioned to its importance, such order to be noted on the time-table. Each exercise should be dated by the scholar (this of itself being an exercise of practical utility) and initialled by the teacher after examination. All errors should be distinctly marked in coloured pencil, and in the Fifth and Sixth Standards exercises in composition, grammar, analysis, &c., should be rewritten as corrected on the opposite page. Bearing in mind that it is not the mere quantity of these exercises, but the care with which they are examined and corrected, in which their value consists, the expense to the parents would probably be little or no more than it is at present (for exercise-books are used, after a fashion, in all schools), and in the rare cases of real inability to provide books they should be supplied free of charge. These exercise-books might also contain the written work of the periodical examinations that are, or ought to be, held from time to time by the head teacher. If proper attention were paid to cleanliness and neatness of writing and arrangement of the work in these books, the use of copy-books in the upper standards might almost be dispensed with.

I now offer a few remarks upon the treatment in this district of some of the subjects of the syllabus.

Reading is, on the whole, fairly well taught, and gives rise to a very few failures. I think that in some schools the second reading-book supplied by the Board to provide more practice is not so much used as it should be, and at the next "annual" visit I intend to use both books in testing this subject. At some schools the preparatory classes were set by the teacher to read a book which was far beyond their stage of progress, while in others the children in this and the First Standard class evidently knew the lessons "by heart," and could "read" as well with the books closed as open. Among authors who have lately wrestled with the intricate and complex subject of school management, Messrs. Collar and Crook consider that this ability to say off the whole piece without the book is by no means to be deprecated, as it "may be generally regarded as a proof that the child understands the sentence." I cannot say that my experience points in this direction, and am glad to find the authors recommending an increased supply of reading-books as a remedy for this tendency. In the upper preparatory classes, and in Standards I. and II., a third book might advantageously be used, as is the case now in several districts. The quantity of reading-matter in the books used below Standard I. is very small, and three could easily be employed to advantage. The three sets of books, though containing entirely different lessons or stories, would not include very many new words, as there is a narrow limit to the number of words of one or simple words of two syllables; so that, while affording much additional practice in reading, the increased difficulty with regard to spelling would not be so great as might be supposed, and, by judicious selection on the part of the teacher or examiner, might be reduced to a minimum. As might be expected, the reading at the small schools is often better than at the larger ones, this being no doubt the result of the much larger amount of practice that it is possible to give to the smaller numbers attending them. The overabused and equally overpraised method of teaching this subject by the aid of simultaneous reading would, in the hands of a strong vigilant teacher, be advantageous to large classes, as giving them far more practice than they can possibly obtain otherwise in the limited time usually allotted to this portion of the syllabus; and, on the whole, with the proviso given above, its advantages, in my opinion, outweigh its disadvantages. There is heard occasionally an outcry for the adoption of one set of reading-books for the whole colony, but I am by no means in sympathy with this proposal; indeed, I consider that it would be in every way an unmitigated calamity if such a course were adopted. That every child in New Zealand in any given class should be compelled to read the same lesson, on the same very limited number of subjects, set forth in the very same words—even if the best of all possible books were selected—would be carrying the craze for uniformity to an absurd and mischievous extent. A large majority of the children attending our primary schools have little inclination and less opportunity for reading outside the school walls, and the effect of the suggested system would be to reduce a large proportion of the youth of the colony to one dead level of ignorance of everything not touched upon in the reading-books selected. The only argument in favour of such a proposal that I have heard is based on the expense to parents who move from one education district to another; but, in my opinion, this is a much overrated objection to the present arrangement. Although the number of complaints may be considerable, the cases of real hardship from this cause are, comparatively speaking, very few. In my experience, extending over a quarter of a century, I have found that the greatest grumblers at the cost of books are frequently better able to afford it than others who cheerfully provide all that is needful for their children's progress, the former frequently consuming in self-indulgence and on unnecessary and unwholesome expenditure on their children's appetites sums that would provide them with books many times over.

Writing in copy-books, on the whole, leaves little room for complaint. It is, however, not uncommon to find two or three different kinds of copy-books in the same school, and even in the same class. The last is probably caused by children, moved from one school to another, bringing with them the book they had been using in the former school. This must interfere considerably with the satisfactory teaching of the subject, and is somewhat embarrassing to the Inspector at the