

In the papers set by us to Standard II. failures were numerous; but in Standard V. the figures quoted show improvement, the proportion of those who succeeded in doing their work correctly being higher than we have ever previously recorded. The work now is much more nearly uniform in quality, the collapse of all classes in a school being now a rarity; but it is not entirely satisfactory to find that only two-thirds of the scholars are equal to the test applied. In some cases more orderly arrangement and setting out are required, but more commonly it is the solution of problems that presents the chief difficulty. To quote Mr. Petrie, "Problems form the best, if not the only, test of intelligent teaching." Methods, we think, are improving, but the examiner must have patience amounting to disease who can follow the mass of figures shown up by some scholars who have ill-digested the unitary system. In many small schools more blackboard practice is required to give greater mental facility, and accuracy would be helped by training all to form mentally approximate results.

A reduction in the syllabus is now looked for. The weights and measures demanded from Standard IV. might well be limited to the minimum required in ordinary business life; but at the same time the requirements of Standard I. might well be raised, as at present they are not proportionate to the amount of reading and spelling expected, nor do they form a sufficiently strong groundwork for after-training.

In spelling we find the greatest difference between the estimate of the teacher and that of the Inspector, and in some few cases the divergence was quite unaccountable. Standard I. children found very great difficulty here, more failing in this subject than in any other, though this was not the case with Standard II. In the higher classes one out of every four scholars failed in spelling, the proportion being very nearly the same as that previously recorded, Standards V. and VI. showing better, Standards III. and IV. worse, results than those of last year. In setting tests in each class from at least two books we are perhaps maintaining a high standard, which makes this as a pass-subject the most difficult, next to arithmetic, in every class except Standard VI. So long as the present regulations hold, passing an examination carries with it a certificate of competency only, without even the necessity for promotion, or, in case of failure, for refusal of promotion; so that there seems to us to be no need to lower the efficiency marks in any subject, but rather to uphold them, so that the desire to obtain a certificate may continue to afford a stimulus to education. In Standard VI. we propose in future to set for dictation previously unseen tests, containing, of course, nothing unusual, words being selected as hitherto from prepared Readers.

In composition, which was much better this year, especially in Standards IV. and V., we often met with careless misspellings of common words. Wherever, as in the case of "there" and "their" or in the misplacing of an apostrophe, they could be regarded as grammatical errors they were treated as faults, and marks were deducted accordingly. In Standard VI., in addition to the reproduction of a narrative, an essay, or in the case of a small class the description of a picture or photograph, was usually required. These tests, which gave more scope for originality, were often well answered.

Writing is generally satisfactory, and often, in well-disciplined schools, good. When weakness in this subject prevails it is much more common in the lower classes than in the higher, unevenness, irregularity, and carelessness being the result of weak discipline and of the lack of a high ideal in the junior teacher, a common failing in regard to this subject. In the higher classes, in which the vertical writing is in vogue, great advantage to freedom and the acquirement of a running hand has been gained from the use of Jackson's Nos. 11 and 12 or Corresponding Style.

We have little to add to former reports in regard to the class-subjects. As a rule, with the exception of grammar and handwork, they are all satisfactorily taught. Sole teachers have long been looking for a reduction in the number of these and of the additional subjects, or permission to make a restricted choice, though the opportunity to substitute handwork for one of the former has not yet been generally taken advantage of.

The year has been an eventful one in many ways, especially in the encouragement given by the Department to manual training and to secondary education. At the Inspectors' Conference in January liberal subsidies for the establishment of district high schools were announced. In consequence of these the Westport District High School has been converted into a free school, and another district high school has been established at Motueka and will shortly begin work. Early in the year, too, special grants were made for the encouragement of manual and technical training. Instructive lectures were given at three different centres by one of the organizing Inspectors, and classes for the instruction of teachers have, at the expense of the Department, been carried on in Nelson. The difficulty of procuring apparatus and the uncertainty as to where the responsibility for the initial outlay should rest have so far deterred several teachers from undertaking favourite branches of work, but different school classes in the following subjects have, before the close of the year, been authorised: Kindergarten manual exercises, modelling, brushwork, dressmaking, cookery, ambulance, and swimming and life-saving—and almost all are now in operation. For each of these, except the cookery class for girls in Nelson City, the instructor is the class or school teacher who was previously in the service of the Board. The teaching of sewing has been considered satisfactory in seventy-eight schools, the reports describing it as good in thirty-two, and excellent in sixteen. In six small schools up till the time of examination sewing had been neglected, and in eleven others, in which there were no female teachers, such instruction could not be expected.

We regret that the colonial scale of salaries, in spite of many advantages, makes no provision for sewing-teachers. Other marked defects of the measure are, we consider, the meagre capitation allowance to Boards, especially those in small districts, the want of provision for relieving teachers or for retiring-allowance, and the absence of fitting recognition of a teacher's qualification or length of service.

Singing has been taught in thirty-four schools, the instruction given being considered satisfactory in twenty-five.