

In determining the promotions in Standards I. to V., head teachers have generally insisted on a satisfactory standard of proficiency. In some of the small schools, however, pupils have been passed in reading and writing who do not seem fit to be promoted. In all schools, fluency, distinctness, accuracy, and a fair measure of intelligent expression should be considered indispensable for any pass in reading. Where these requirements are not met the Inspectors will exercise their right to substitute their own passes for those of head teachers.

A year and a half ago head teachers were asked to divide the year's work of each class in reading, arithmetic, geography, history, and science into as many suitable subdivisions as they intended to hold periodic examinations for testing progress and helping to determine promotions. Some considerable difficulty has been experienced in getting this not unreasonable demand complied with. Probably no teacher would prefer a haphazard subdivision of the year's work in these subjects to one that has been deliberately and maturely considered; and the failure to arrange this matter in a satisfactory way is no doubt due to a feeling that the head teacher might soon be removed to another school or another sphere of work. My object in making this demand was to avoid as far as possible overpressure towards the end of the year, and to secure an equable rate of progress with due regard to revision during its currency. The first plotting-out of the work will no doubt prove tentative and in some respects unsatisfactory, but a detailed scheme once sketched out can be easily amended, until in a very few years its crude features are eliminated, and a permanently satisfactory scheme is worked out. I attach great importance to this matter.

During the year satisfactory progress has been made in all the more important branches of instruction except grammar.

In a considerable number of the large schools the teaching is highly efficient, and it is satisfactory in nearly all of them. As in previous years, the efficiency of the urban schools at the Thames is hardly equal to that of the urban and suburban schools of the City of Auckland, but in them, too, considerable improvement has of late been made. On the whole, the reports on the village and country schools furnished to me by the Assistant Inspectors express satisfaction with the work of the year, and encourage the expectation of continued improvement. Many of the defects noted by them are due to conditions created by the too extensive and varied course of instruction now prescribed, to the frequent changes of teachers that are more or less unavoidable in a service that cannot draw freely on a reserve of qualified teachers, and to the necessity for employing in some small schools young teachers who have had no special training for, or opportunities of becoming acquainted with, the management and organization of schools of this class. The Board could do much to raise the efficiency of small schools by establishing in or near Auckland a model school of this type, to which inexperienced teachers could be sent for a short time to study the organization and the methods of work best suited to the circumstances of the schools they are about to conduct. I would earnestly urge the Board to provide a model school of this kind as soon as practicable.

In spite of the greater difficulty of the New Zealand Graphic Readers, more or less improvement in reading is noted by all the Inspectors. In this connection Mr. Grierson says, "I have been both pleased and surprised to find that most of the pupils appreciate and enjoy the more difficult reading-matter supplied by the New Zealand Graphic Readers. I had feared that in small schools the task of mastering these books would prove too heavy, but such has not been the case, and on the whole the reading and the spelling in the district (the southern) have during the past year been quite satisfactory." Mr. Crowe also observes, "During the early part of the year but little, if any, improvement (in reading) was noticeable. The schools examined during the last five months (all of them rural and village schools), however, showed in many instances much improvement." I have myself made systematic inquiry into the facility with which the new Readers are dealt with, and my conclusions are in substantial agreement with those expressed above by Mr. Grierson. The new books are for the most part as readily worked up as were the ones formerly in use, and the study of the Second Readers is found to be much easier. And I have no doubt that the wider training in reading that is now being given to the lower classes will in a year or two lead on to increased ease and intelligence in the study of the higher books. Writing of the schools of the north central district, Mr. Mulgan points out that "a considerable advance has taken place in the teaching of reading during the past year"; though he thinks "much improvement is yet possible." "Want of fluency, of clearness of enunciation, and of distinctness generally, was the commonest defect"; and he concludes that "the results in this subject are still disappointing." It must be clearly understood that these criticisms do not apply to the rural schools of this education district generally, and I regret that they should be true of a district that during the past three years has enjoyed the earnest and stimulating supervision of Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Mulgan as Inspectors. The truth seems to be that in the north central district irregular attendance, the claims of work in aid of the family, and other special local circumstances seriously interfere with efficient school-work. I hope that the improvement in reading that Mr. Mulgan notes will be continued and increased under Mr. Goodwin, who has now taken charge of the district. The unfavourable conditions that retard progress in the north central district obtain with nearly equal force in the northern district. Speaking of it, Mr. Purdie says, "In most of the schools reading is at least satisfactory. In some, however, it is very monotonous, and does not give the impression that the subject-matter has been understood. Generally," he adds, "pupils have to be told the pronunciation of new words. They do not attempt by syllabification to find out for themselves the approximate pronunciation." This stupid method of training children as if they were mere monkeys or parrots was incidentally referred to in my report of last year, and cannot be too strongly condemned. In nearly all the Readers now in use lists of the new and difficult words appear at the head of the lessons; and on purpose to facilitate this training in sounding simple syllables in combination, and in putting the accent on the proper syllable, the words are divided into syllables and