

Recitation, we notice, is apt to consist of mere memory-work and unintelligent repetition, and too often we have had to express disapproval both as to treatment and choice of subjects. Many teachers do not appear to be alive to the importance of recitation as a means of improving enunciation and expression in reading. In other words, the two subjects are not co-ordinated. Recitation, moreover, if properly taught, should not only be the first step in the study of literature as an art, but should also be a training of the mind of the child in comprehension and appreciation of higher thoughts and aspirations. To a certain extent the wretched selections in the class reading-books are responsible for the faults we have mentioned, and we strongly recommend the use of the Globe Poetry Books (published by Macmillan and Co., price 6d. each). The teacher will find in this series selections from the best poetry in our language.

Singing, which of recent years has always been good, if not excellent, in our town schools, is making very fair progress in the country districts. In the good work now being done in this subject the Board is reaping the benefit of the singing classes which were established some years ago under the able direction of Mr. Robert Parker, and we consider it a matter for great regret that through the discontinuance of those classes our pupil-teachers have been thrown entirely on their own resources so far as instruction in vocal music is concerned.

The sewing report is good. There is some diversity of opinion as to the relative merits from a teaching point of view of the specimen as compared with the regular garment. Some teachers maintain that more effective instruction can be given by working with specimens, while others again are of opinion that the full-sized garment gives the more satisfactory result, as children take more interest in work which they know will be put to some practical use. We approach the subject with considerable diffidence, but in our opinion the time at present taken up in sewing by hand long seams and hems might be more profitably employed in cutting out and fixing garments, and in giving instruction in the use of the sewing-machine.

With regard to the schools individually, we have, both in our examination and in our inspection reports, given full particulars as to their condition and circumstances. The substance of these reports is embodied in the efficiency marks which have been awarded to each school. We think it unnecessary to recapitulate at any length the suggestions made and the instructions given to teachers during the year. We wish to place on record our appreciation of the loyal and earnest desire manifested by the teachers as a body to adopt any measures calculated to remedy such weaknesses and defects in the school-work as have come under our notice. We should like also to express here the hope that the cordial spirit of co-operation between Inspector and teacher for which this district has for so long been noted will continue to exist, for we are convinced that the best interests of education are served less by treating the teacher as an object of everlasting criticism than by co-operating with him in his honest efforts and by sympathizing with him in his many difficulties. Of these difficulties there are two—the overcrowded syllabus and irregular attendance—which call for more than a passing notice. The urgent need for reform in the syllabus is now so universally recognised that it is unnecessary to reiterate here opinions and arguments which have been so often expressed in previous reports. The time has come when “not the pruning-knife but the axe” should be applied with an unsparing hand. Of the many hardships calling for redress, we would especially emphasize the case of the sole teachers, more especially the case of those in charge of schools with roll numbers ranging from thirty to fifty. The necessity for a separate syllabus for use in schools of this class is apparent, and we are convinced that no syllabus that exacts the same requirements, or practically the same requirements, from the sole teacher as it does from the teacher of a single standard can do anything but perpetuate the most mischievous tendencies of the present system. Our experience leads us to the conclusion that a reasonable syllabus and an intelligent method of examination will result in reasonable and intelligent methods of instruction. Teachers with high ideals and high endeavours are not wanting, but too often “their nature is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer’s hands.”

The average attendance for the whole district is 82·5 per cent. on a total roll number of 15,254; that is to say, 2,600 children daily absent themselves from the schools in this district. This is a serious matter, and we are concerned to think that such ineffectual steps are being taken to remedy it. It is mainly in the small country schools that the evil is most rampant. Time and again we are asked to excuse unsatisfactory work on the score of irregular and unpunctual attendance, and we ourselves confess to finding the greatest difficulty in estimating the work of a teacher in a school where the half-day attendances of the scholars average barely 200 for the year. Is it reasonable to expect ground to be covered in a week of three days when regulations prescribe a week of five days? The amended Act of last session provided what was apparently most effective machinery for enforcing attendances at the public schools, but in this district the local authorities show little inclination to put the machinery in motion. Some months ago the Board issued a circular to local Committees giving full particulars as to the working of the new Act, and offering to send a member of the office staff to conduct prosecutions. All that the Committees were asked to do was to make out the preliminary notices and see that they were served, but we are not aware that any Committees have taken action in the matter.

The lectures on paper-folding, brush-work, plasticine and cardboard modelling held in the Technical School last year under the direction of Mr. Riley were attended by a large number of teachers, who showed a great interest in the work. Some schools have already applied for recognition for work under the Manual and Technical Instruction Act in all classes, and others for work in classes up to and including Standard II. There is no reason why the larger schools should not obtain recognition of such work as is laid down for Classes P–Standard II., for in most of them the work has been carried on for years in the preparatory classes, though perhaps in not as systematic a manner as is now prescribed. In the work laid down for classes above Standard II. practically nothing has been done except in a few schools. In the syllabus handwork is allowed to be substi-