

of the next higher class, and more especially reading, with reasonable readiness and intelligence. Unless pupils are really prepared for taking up the more advanced work of a higher class in the spirit here indicated, they should not be promoted, for the kind of work they can do will be so mechanical as to be practically barren of educative effect. Our system of elementary education no longer holds out any stimulus to premature promotion, and the mechanical and unintelligent work that is its almost unfailing consequence should become more and more rare. Under the new regulations for the inspection and examination of public schools, their efficiency will depend on judicious promotion in the classes below Standard VI. more largely than on any other factor. That head teachers will use a wise discretion in this important matter I have little doubt, but it may still be well to insist on the weight of the responsibility resting on them,

During the year the public schools have fully maintained the satisfactory level of efficiency reached in recent years, and in several directions very fair progress has been made. Most of the larger schools are efficiently conducted, and in a good many the management is highly creditable. The conditions prevailing in schools of this class are by no means as favourable as at first sight they might seem to be. The flow of pupils through them shows a surprising amount of migration, for something like a third of the entire roll number enter every year, while the newcomers are often not on a level with the classes they join. The smaller schools, having a staff of two to four or five teachers, are also in general successfully, and in a large number of cases well, conducted. The appointment of a mistress in the considerable body of schools having an average attendance between 40 and 50 has placed them in a position to do much more satisfactory work, and the improvement secured has been very noticeable. Of the smallest schools—those taught by a sole teacher—a large and growing proportion show satisfactory work.

While improvement in the teaching of reading is noted by most of the Inspectors, some of them remark a deficiency of expression as the commonest failing. This is especially true of the smaller schools, and it seems to be in great part due to an ill-directed and sometimes to an excessive use of simultaneous reading. It is time that public-school teachers recognised that failure to train pupils to read with fluency, accuracy, good phrasing, and reasonable expression is evidence of unskilful teaching. If pupils are to read with expression, the habit must begin in the lowest classes, and be continued right through the school course. Once let them acquire a mechanical and monotonous style, and endless trouble in correcting it must ensue. A bad start in reading is now quite unusual, being rarely met with except in the smallest schools, where changes of teachers are frequent and inexperience is too common. In recent years all the pupils of Standard VI. have been heard read a passage of English prose that they had not previously seen. A great majority of them showed that they had gained a satisfactory command of reading their mother-tongue. About a quarter of them failed to meet this test with reasonable success. These frequently found difficulty in saying longish words of regular pronunciation that they had not seen before. I think more might be done during the school course to make our older pupils ready readers, as will be explained below, and in particular to give them a continuous and sound training in making out by their own efforts the pronunciation of the many new words that occur in successive reading lessons. These new and hard words are usually arranged in lists at the head or the foot of each reading lesson, properly divided into syllables and accented, ready for giving the training needed. But if they are pronounced by the teacher and repeated after his pattern by the pupils, as is sometimes done, the training in self-help and in gaining the power to grapple with and master the ordinary difficulties of pronunciation is of necessity sacrificed for mere imitative cram-work. The practice of good teachers in dealing with lists of new words is to require the pupils, singly or together, to say the syllables distinctly, and then to say the words as wholes with the accent-emphasis on the proper syllable. This practice should obtain in all schools.

In the higher divisions of the primer classes and in Standards I. and II. more reading than is now done might be overtaken with advantage, and the Board should authorise the use of additional Readers for these, and indeed for the higher classes too, as a wider course of reading can be occasionally overtaken in the latter. It is undesirable to go over any reading-book twice in the primer classes, and in the standard classes it would certainly be better to read through two supplementary Readers once than to read one twice over, as is now commonly done. We should thus secure more continuous interest in the reading lessons arising from their novelty, and pupils would gain confidence and readiness by extended practice in reading easy words in ever new combinations. It is no easy matter to maintain lively interest and good attention in dealing with stale reading lessons. I am of opinion that it would be a great gain to real education if the chief reading-books in the higher classes were changed every three years. It is a mere bogey to suppose that this change would involve any serious extra expense to parents, for the life of an ordinary school Reader seldom reaches three years. Even were some extra cost involved, it would be amply compensated by the educational gain. Improvement in the comprehension of the matter and language of the lessons in the New Zealand Graphic Readers continues to be made, but there is still much room for progress. The teaching of this aspect of English is, indeed, one of the weaker points in our schools, and it is seldom that the Inspectors find it readily dealt with by pupils or even skilfully handled by teachers. Though a good deal of time is devoted to it, the results are not commensurate with the effort put forth. Practice in paraphrasing difficult phrases or short sentences of prose in writing would help on improvement, and so would the more frequent and indeed the habitual use by the older pupils of a good dictionary in finding out the meaning of uncommon words; but it is mainly by lively and stimulating oral work that the defect here noted is to be amended.

Spelling is, on the whole, well taught, and mistakes in spelling easy and familiar words in written exercises other than dictation tests are becoming less prevalent. These mistakes are usually due to mere carelessness, and are indications rather of indifferent discipline than of indifferent teaching.