

the whole, with the result. I have before recommended the practice of affixing the date at the end of every writing lesson, and I again urge the adoption of this, which is itself a useful habit for children to acquire, and would show at a glance the amount of each day's work.

*Composition.*—This subject shows signs of improvement, which would be more general if greater attention was paid to what is now generally called "oral" composition. The importance of this as an aid to the teaching of the subject is rightly emphasized by nearly all modern educational authorities, and it is, indeed, the natural method. The strongest proof of its value is to be found in the fact that children whose social surroundings are such as to familiarise them with the conversation and letters of well-educated persons require far less instruction, and benefit far more by it, than those less fortunately situated. These last, indeed, are constantly receiving at home and in the streets lessons in oral composition which they too readily assimilate, and the unlearning of which is one of the chief hindrances to even moderate proficiency in this important department of primary education. A few generations back the formal teaching of (English) composition was almost unknown, the art being acquired naturally and unconsciously through constant intercourse with well-educated persons and through some acquaintance with the works of the best authors of the day—before the advent of the sensational novelist. The composition of Standard V., which was generally tested, as prescribed in the syllabus, by the rendering of passages of poetry in the reading-book into prose, was, on the whole, rather disappointing, and would seem to indicate that this plan of supplying the scholars with material for exercises in composition had been to some extent neglected. Certainly some of the poetry in this book is not very suitable for the purpose, and any one who would compile a volume consisting of numerous examples of simple poems, and extracts from poems, suitable for Fifth Standard composition exercises would confer a boon on teachers generally. On the whole, the subject is fairly well taught throughout the district. The average percentage of passes in this subject was 83.3, and of the twenty-five largest schools seventeen were above and eight below the average, while several of the smaller schools passed all that were presented.

*Arithmetic.*—This permanent puzzle of the standard examinations is as inexplicable as ever. Notwithstanding that probably one-fifth of the whole school year is devoted to the subject, and that the tests now supplied by the Department certainly do not, as a rule, err in the direction of undue difficulty, the amazing fact is once more evident that the results of all this teaching, so far as can be ascertained at the annual examination, are by far the lowest amongst the "pass" subjects, certainly in Marlborough, and probably in most other districts. Taking the five pass subjects of Standards III., IV., and V., and the same subjects of Standard VI., I find that, while 97.6 per cent. passed in reading, 70.2 per cent. in spelling, 95.4 in writing, and 83.3 in composition, only 49 per cent. passed in arithmetic. Ten very small schools (presenting from one to five scholars in these standards) failed to pass a single scholar in arithmetic.

*Class Subjects.*—The class subjects, on the average, were fairly well treated. Taken all together, 4 per cent. were marked good; 28 per cent., satisfactory; 35 per cent., fair; and 33 per cent., moderate.

Taken separately, grammar was the least satisfactory (although several schools showed marked improvement on last year's work), and in twenty-four schools is described as "Inferior."

History is very little better; in fact, history "as she is taught" (or, at all events, learned) in this district is of absolutely no value whatever, educative or otherwise, but the cause of a lamentable waste of valuable time. The most hopeless confusion of events and persons prevails.

Elementary science and object lessons remain much the same as in past years, nor can any great improvement be expected until the chief schools are provided with some amount of scientific apparatus. As regards the teaching of science, I have repeatedly remarked on its comparative worthlessness when unaccompanied by actual experiment, and nothing but the want of the necessary apparatus prevents many of your teachers from producing results equal to those in any similar schools in other districts. To provide suitable appliances for this purpose for the larger schools only would involve an expenditure which is far beyond the ordinary means of the Board.

This year several teachers, with my approval, substituted the study of "Nature in New Zealand," and the time thus occupied will certainly have been more profitably employed than if it had been spent by the scholars in more or less unsuccessful attempts to store in their memories bare statements of scientific facts, learned by rote, and without any experimental confirmation.

Singing is taught in ten schools, and of these one was marked excellent; three, good; one, satisfactory; and five, fair. In the Blenheim Boys' and the Renwick Schools a fair acquaintance with the theory of music was exhibited.

Modelling and plasticine has made considerable progress, and was particularly well presented at the Blenheim Junior Division, and at Grovetown, Havelock Suburban, Marshlands, Renwick, and Spring Creek.

Physical drill, to meet the requirements of the Act, is practised for a few minutes morning and afternoon at all but the very smallest schools, and in the larger a certain amount of military drill is also undertaken, while at some the girls have wand and dumb-bell drill.

*General Supervision.*—An indication of the amount of real lively interest the teacher takes in the welfare of his scholars, apart from the actual work of teaching, may usually be found in the appearance of the school grounds and premises. In some cases there is ample evidence that playground-supervision, although "provided for," is very imperfectly performed. The mere presence of one of the teachers in some part of the premises is not all that is required, and the large amount of wilful damage to the Board's property outside, and even to the furniture within, points unmistakably to reprehensible neglect of this part of the teachers' duties. Another unsatisfactory feature is the untidiness of some of the playgrounds, frequently caused by the accumulation of old lunch-papers, which, carelessly thrown down, are blown backwards and forwards by the winds. This last complaint may appear trivial to some, but nothing is trivial that in any way serves to encourage, both by precept and practice, a regard for cleanliness and tidiness amongst the