

and give promise of further efficiency in the near future. There are, however, a few (among them some certificated teachers who have in recent years re-entered the service) regarding whom we have no such hope, and whose tenure of office under conditions of keener competition for employment would not be secure. The importance of gaining departmental recognition in the form of a teacher's certificate is urged upon those who have not yet qualified in this respect. Some, by private study, and by using the opportunities which Saturday classes afford, will probably find little difficulty in gaining the coveted "parchment." Others, whose education has been less liberal, might look to a period of normal-school training as their ultimate preparation for the ordeal of examination. The services rendered by the teaching staff in the bulk of the Board's schools are still worthy of warm appreciation, and we note with much satisfaction the growing tendency on the part of the State to recognise more generously than in the past the fidelity to duty and the spirit of self-sacrifice which have long animated this section of its workers.

On the forms presented herewith will be found the usual statistical information. We supplement this by adding that the number of pupils enrolled in private schools examined by us was 1,233, and that 1,074 of these were present. Of the 432 children returned as Seventh Standard pupils in the public schools, 361 belong to the various district high schools, and of these 340 were examined. Out of 1,383 pupils in Standard VI we found 1,346 in attendance. Of these 705 were awarded the proficiency certificate, 433 qualified for competency, and 208 failed to gain any certificate.

The following paragraphs bring under review in more or less detail some salient features which seem to merit special attention :—

ENGLISH.—Of the subjects comprised in the "English" group, reading naturally claims first attention. On the whole the attainment in this subject may be regarded as satisfactory. In only a few schools is the quality of the reading open to serious objection through lack of fluency, while in several of the better class schools a high standard of merit is reached. In too many cases, however, it would appear as if fluency had been gained at the cost of intelligent comprehension of the language, and reading of this character has no claims to commendation. An improvement is noticeable in the direction of more intelligent treatment of the reading lesson, and a further stimulus would be given were written tests on the language and subject-matter of the reading-books more frequently employed. It is to be apprehended that many of those who have passed through our schools have failed to acquire the habit of reading, or of applying themselves to the acquisition of knowledge, unaided by their teachers. Such a defect may largely be attributed to want of self-help and self-reliance, qualities the development of which would to some extent be fostered by the silent perusal of continuous readers, by more frequent practice in the use of the dictionary, and by the more general establishment of school libraries. Owing to the recent improvements in the mechanical art of printing, and to the enterprise of various publishers, well-printed cloth-bound volumes of a wide selection of suitable authors can be procured at a cost of from 4d. to 6d. each. The introduction of such books for the purposes of silent reading, whether at school or at home, would tend to the enlargement of the pupils' vocabulary and ideas, to the acquisition of the habit of continuous reading, and to a more interesting and attractive condition of school life. In some cases the book selected as the second Reader in the upper standards has been open to objection. It should be borne in mind that a mere text-book in such a subject as history, as distinguished from an historical Reader, does not satisfy the requirements of the programme in English.

In all but a few schools the amount of poetry prescribed has been carefully memorised, and, generally speaking, a satisfactory knowledge of the language of the poems was displayed. We would repeat a suggestion made in our report of last year—viz., that teachers should not restrict their choice of poetical passages to those contained in the reading-books. In some schools the same poems are presented for repetition year after year, while a pleasing variety and freshness might be imparted by an annual change of programme, and by drawing more freely on the wealth of simple and beautiful poetry available in our national literature.

In spelling and dictation the formal tests set have generally been well satisfied. Increased attention has been given to word-building in the lower classes; in the upper classes the orthographical value of a knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and some easy derivations might be more commonly recognised.

The quality of the slate-writing in the lower classes of most schools points to careful teaching; but to be of permanent value the instruction in this subject should include careful training in the holding of the pencil, so that a good habit may be acquired before the pupil attempts writing in copybooks. When a faulty method of holding the pen and a careless posture in the desk have become habitual at the early stages there is need of much vigilance and a steady application of will-power to remedy these defects. Good writing goes hand-in-hand with good discipline, hence the acceptance of a low standard of work in this respect is assumed to indicate some weakness of control.

Under the guidance of those teachers who have intelligently interpreted the spirit of the new syllabus a forward step has been taken in the teaching of composition. The time available for this subject is greater now than in former years, and a stimulus has thereby been imparted to its treatment, with the most satisfactory results in those schools where due appreciation has been shown of the value of the mental discipline attendant on a course of lessons on grammar in its direct bearings upon composition. At the elementary stages the claims of oral composition have received wider recognition, and the beneficial results of this preliminary training are beginning to manifest themselves in the written exercises of the middle classes. This subject shows to least advantage in the two upper standards of the less satisfactory schools in our district. We occasionally receive composition papers from pupils in Standards V and VI which, in regard to ideas and construction of sentences, show very little advance on the work of Standard IV.

The treatment of the composition lesson affords wide scope for the individuality and versatility of the teacher, and in several of the schools it has been gratifying to note the skill displayed in this direction, and the thought and judgment exercised in the selection of topics for short themes or essays.