

It appears from the above table that the two weakest subjects are arithmetic and geography. In arithmetic forty schools ranked higher and eighty-two lower than satisfactory. In geography, thirty-seven were above and sixty-four below satisfactory. A comparison with the table for 1906 shows that there has been a falling-off in the quality of the arithmetic, but an improvement in geography, composition, and nature-study.

TREATMENT OF CERTAIN SUBJECTS.—Paving the way for some remarks on the treatment of some of the objects of instruction, we may state that during the year, in addition to the information supplied by the Inspectors' reports on individual schools and the Inspector's monthly report, leaflets dealing with these and kindred topics have been sent out to the schools as occasion might require. There is a double advantage in this; the Inspectors' views are disclosed to the teacher without delay, and the Board is saved the rehearsal of a large amount of detail, which, though in its place necessary, can hardly make interesting or edifying reading. While gladly acknowledging the great amount of good work that has been done, we shall here confine ourselves to one or two salient defects. The subject, then, calling most loudly for remark is arithmetic. From the table previously given, it is clear that the quality of this subject has deteriorated. The reasons are to some extent evident. Pupils are now freely promoted who would previously have been made to master the subject as a condition of promotion, and there is in many cases a lack of that thorough and methodical teaching which can alone secure success. If the three branches of the subject, practical, mental, and formal, were properly taken in hand from the beginning, there is no doubt that much better results would be achieved.

Referring, secondly, to the group of subjects coming under the designation of "English," we note that the improvement in the quality of the reading of the pupils recorded last year has been more than maintained. Satisfaction was expressed by the teachers when it was announced that the Board had reverted to Vere Foster's style of handwriting, and general improvement may in consequence be expected. In some schools, a go-as-you-please policy rules with respect to spelling. In the better schools the subject is uniformly good, though even in these more might be done, as was pointed out last year, in the direction of familiarising pupils with the correct spelling of the terms used in connection with the nature study, geography, and elementary-science lessons, especially as the Inspector is willing to include a selection of these in his tests. The subject, however, that we wish particularly to comment on here is English in the specific sense, which embraces written composition, and formal composition by which is meant the analysis and synthesis of sentences. Written composition—the expression of thought on given topics—is uniformly good throughout the district; at a number of schools it is indeed exceptionally good. Our observations lead us to believe, on the other hand, that there is, unfortunately, on the part of some teachers, notwithstanding its great educational value, an indisposition to tackle with serious intent the subject of formal composition. The simplicity of the subject as set out in the syllabus has proved a snare to the unwary. It has been assumed by such that the study of formal grammar may be entirely overlooked, whereas it is the experience of thoughtful teachers that to the extent to which grammar is neglected the foundations of composition in all its forms are sapped. A liberal amount of time is given to the teaching of composition; it is therefore not unreasonable to expect that it should be subjected to thorough and comprehensive treatment.

From the table showing the quality of instruction given in the various subjects, geography appears to be somewhat weak. We have been glad to find that in an increasing number of schools less dependence is being placed on the text-book as a means of teaching the subject; still, the practical work which ought to form the basis of the methods of teaching is not yet given the prominence it deserves. It is a fatal mistake for a teacher to allow his pupils to memorise descriptions or explanations furnished by himself, or found in a book. Only when a child describes and explains a phenomenon in his own words can we be certain how much or how little he really sees and understands. Yet we have frequently heard teachers accept stereotyped answers which served to conceal the pupils' ignorance rather than reveal their knowledge. Thus children often use quite glibly technical terms and phrases which they but faintly understand. Only by questioning his pupils most minutely can the teacher ascertain whether or not he is making his lessons of real educative value. This year we hope to see in all our schools carefully kept notes on all the observational work it is possible to do in connection with the subject. In the appendix will be found some records which show that the scientific method is not everywhere neglected.

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.—In the appendix will be found a statement of the kind, amount, and quality of the work done by the secondary departments at the district high schools. There are now seven of these departments in the district. To five of them there are attached a laboratory, woodwork-room, and cookery-room, and to the other two there will presently be attached a laboratory and a cookery-room. When suitably staffed, these departments do work of the highest educational value. They furnish to some of our boys and girls, who have successfully finished their primary course, a sound practical training which may be turned to immediate account when they leave school; and to others they afford the means of passing those public examinations which are in large measure the gateways to public occupations and professional careers. We believe that it would be better for the individual and the community if the practical ideal were more and the examination ideal less realised; but we would not be understood to disparage the mental discipline and upbuilding that follows from legitimate preparation for examination. Below is a statement of the scholarships taken and the examinations passed by the pupils from the various district high schools.