

elapse between the date on which the school resumes after the New Year vacation and that on which it closes down again for harvest. This period is often a period of marking time so far as school-work is concerned. The duration of the harvest holidays may vary from two weeks to six weeks. Even if all the pupils were prepared to return to school at the end of the period fixed by the Committee, the loss to the school would still be great; but the mischief is aggravated by the fact that the pupils do not return *en bloc*; they dribble back for weeks after the school is nominally open, and seriously retard the progress of all. That harvest holidays are simply traditional, and not absolutely necessary, is shown by the fact that many schools situated in the heart of agricultural districts do not now observe them.

Education has been defined as "the provision of an environment," but the material aspect of the conception does not seem to have been generally seized. We have constantly endeavoured to impress upon teachers the importance of doing what lies in their power towards brightening the interior of their schools. A schoolroom nicely decorated with good pictures, diagrams, growing and cut flowers, furnishes an unobtrusively effective object-lesson tending to inculcate habits of neatness and order and a love for the refined and beautiful. In many cases teachers, we are glad to say, have recognised the value of cheerful school surroundings, and have, at practically no cost to the State, embellished the walls of their schools with judiciously selected, well-arranged pictures, &c., which, besides adding to the brightness of the school, are made to assist materially in the ordinary routine of instruction. And, in this matter, we are pleased to note, teachers frequently have the co-operation of parents.

But we have also with us, in too large numbers, the cheerless schoolroom, with its bare, dust-begrimed walls, innocent of ornament, except, perchance, the monotonous map, its shelves and table untidily littered with books and papers, its floor perfunctorily swept and scrubbed, and its whole atmosphere dismal and depressing.

In most districts there is at least one school concert a year, the proceeds of which, as a rule, go towards providing prizes not only for such pupils as have honestly earned them, but also not infrequently for all the pupils of the school. Without now expressing any opinion on the question of prize-giving, we would earnestly urge on Committees that, in the interests of the children, they devote at least a portion of the concert-money towards providing our young people with an environment which silently, though not the less powerfully, must influence them for good.

All examinations are, at best, but necessary evils, the outcome of the limitations of human wisdom. However skilfully conducted, they frequently fail to reveal, with any degree of accuracy, the best that is in a candidate; with unfavourable circumstances they may, indeed, show him at his worst. We have pleasure, therefore, in recording the fact that this year the Department has been able to initiate a system under which, on a report from an Inspector on the work of pupils in district high schools, the examination for Senior Free Places in these institutions may, in certain cases, be either wholly or partially dispensed with. A most commendable feature of the new arrangement is the fact that it takes into fairly adequate consideration practical work in science and in manual instruction, the value of which, obviously, could not well be ascertained by written examination.

On two occasions during the year the Board co-operated with the local Teachers' Institute on the question of revision of the list of approved text-books, and again (in open conference this time) on the vexed question of promotion of teachers. In the first instance, the voluntary labours of a large committee of experienced teachers of all grades lightened very considerably the task of choosing suitable text-books. In the end the recommendations of the Institute were practically adopted. In the second instance, a conference was arranged by the Board, at which the Institute was very ably represented. Though it is perhaps to be regretted that complete unanimity of opinion on the question of promotion was not reached, it was felt by all, we believe, that the conference had resulted in much mutual enlightenment, and renewed the good feeling which in this district fortunately prevails between the Board, its Inspectors, and its teachers.

A report on school libraries, submitted during the year commended itself so much to the Board that it was communicated by resolution to the Press for publication. It is to be hoped that by this time every teacher in Southland has carefully read and considered this report, is fully alive to the immense possibilities of a well-selected school library, and is in a fair way (if it has not already been done) to establish and maintain one for the benefit of his own school.

We are fully persuaded that the *School Journal*, properly used, is an educational instrument of no mean value. Replete with intellectual matter well suited to the requirements of those for whom it caters, it arrives each month with the glamour of novelty as an additional recommendation to its usefulness. If the teacher, while this glamour is still upon it, make novelty the spur to application, he will have done something substantial towards the intellectual betterment of the child. Interest in literature once kindled may grow into a healthy flame, which, burning more soberly as the years bring wisdom, may yield an added zest to life.

Brief notes on some of the main subjects of instruction follow:—

**READING.**—In most of our schools the mechanical art of reading is fairly well mastered, with the exception that distinctness and articulation are occasionally neglected. The power to recognise new words would be increased, as we have had occasion to remark before, were more attention given to word-building in the higher standards. The other aims of the reading lesson—to foster the love of literature, to strengthen and build up character, to endow the child with adequate means of self-expression, &c.—are too little recognised.

**WRITING.**—In too large a number of our schools this subject is receiving insufficient attention. In many cases in which the writing of the school was careless we observed an utter absence of care on the teacher's part as to the posture of the writers—a lapse of duty discreditable both from an educational and from a hygienic point of view.

**SPELLING.**—This subject is, on the whole, satisfactorily taught. Where gross carelessness is shown both in spelling and writing, we are inclined to suspect lax management or want of application on the