

course; rather, in view of the stress which the syllabus very properly lays on the importance of quality of work as compared with quantity, we think it may be of distinct advantage to him. And as to what would appear from the report to be the more serious objection—viz., “that the present length of the primary course postpones the beginning of the secondary school courses of our boys and girls to a higher age than is desirable”—desirable, that is, in the interest of those taking up the secondary courses—this, after all, may be a matter of opinion, more especially so, seeing that the course of the average secondary school is merely a preparation for Civil Service or Matriculation Examinations. In any case it must be borne in mind that the education of the majority of our youth finishes with the primary schools, and, until it is made perfectly clear that the interests of this majority are not going to suffer, we are not in sympathy with any attempt to shorten the time of the present primary course. If it is thought necessary or even desirable to begin secondary work a year earlier, this result should be attained, as we have said before, by a closer correlation of primary and secondary curricula, and not by a mere process of “speeding up” the pupil’s progress through the primary course as at present constituted.

STAFFING AND APPOINTMENTS.—The difficulties of management owing to inadequate staffing have hitherto been most acute in Grades V and VI, but the extension by the Department of some of the provisions of the Education Amendment Act, 1908, to schools in these grades will afford most welcome relief, and we confidently look forward to improved efficiency in organization and general work. There is a growing disinclination on the part of certificated teachers to offer themselves as candidates for country positions. The last list of vacancies advertised by the Board brought forth applications from fifteen certificated teachers for a position of £90 to £105 at Wadestown, while for a similar position at Fernridge there was not a single certificated applicant. It is very evident that some definite scheme of making appointments is necessary if the children in the country districts are to receive the benefits of the trained teaching capacity to which they are entitled.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES.—It is gratifying to note the improvement that has lately been apparent in the libraries of many of the schools. Committees and teachers have always recognized the importance of the library as a valuable adjunct to school work, but, as their main difficulty in establishing and adding to a library has always been want of money, the Board has declared its willingness to supplement funds raised in the district for the purchase of new books. At the same time, a list of suitable books has been published by the Board. Since the practice of granting subsidies was adopted, more than thirty schools in the country have availed themselves of the Board’s liberality.

ENGLISH SUBJECTS.—Reading, on the whole, is accurate and fluent, and, looking at the subject from the point of view of what, after all, is its most important function—viz., as an educational instrument by means of which the child is enabled to acquire information through the intelligent comprehension of written language—we are satisfied that good work is being done; but before we can hope to approach to the ideals in accent, modulation, and delivery which constitute really cultured reading, a higher standard must be set than the term marks of the average teacher would indicate. With the treatment of recitation we have little fault to find, so far as the memorizing of the regulation number of lines is concerned, but only in a limited number of schools do we find it reaching a standard of any elocutionary merit. We, however, attach most importance to it as a means of cultivating in the children some idea of literary taste, and some appreciation of what is really admirable in literary expression, and with this view we are including in our next issue of additional readers a series of poetry books which we hope will be found suited to the requirements of all standards. Composition as judged by the set essay is also satisfactory, and there is evidence of improved freedom of expression, more especially in the lower classes. We attribute this to the more rational treatment of the subject that the present syllabus has made possible. There is now less attempt to teach composition by mechanical grammatical formulæ, and a saner system is being adopted which recognizes that the real essentials for ready verbal expression by the child are ideas, and words with which to express those ideas. As an aid towards this treatment of the subject all junior classes, more especially the preparatory classes, have by means of the Government grant been supplied with varied selections of story-books and continuous readers. The results have been excellent, the teachers taking full advantage of this means of increasing their pupils’ vocabulary, and familiarizing them with model language forms from some of the best specimens of English literature. All this is in the right direction, but, as we point out further on, much more remains to be done before the teaching of English occupies that position in our education system that its importance demands. The efficiency mark for spelling is “good,” and for writing “satisfactory” to “good.” We are not inclined to accept excuse for pronounced weakness in either of these subjects, as we invariably find such weakness the result of defective discipline and careless supervision. Spelling is mainly a matter for the eye, and we have noticed instances where teachers have placed too much reliance on word-building, to the neglect of dictation and the training of the eye during the reading lesson. We do not wish this statement, however, to mean in any way a depreciation of phonics, the use of which we would like to see much extended, nor of word-building—an excellent language lesson and effective aid to the teaching of composition, especially in the lower standards, but it is hopeless to expect to deal with the inconsistencies and contradictions of English spelling by these means alone.

ARITHMETIC.—The condition of arithmetic shows no change. Up to and including Standard IV it is “satisfactory” to “very good,” in Standard V it is “weak,” and in Standard VI “fair” to “satisfactory.” We here again express our opinion that the excessive demands made in arithmetic by the ordinary school examinations not only seriously retard the pupil’s progress in other and more important subjects, but absolutely render impossible a rational treatment of the subject itself. In its “Suggestions to Teachers” the English Board of Education lays special emphasis on the danger to the effective teaching of arithmetic arising from undue attention to