

*Standard VI Certificates.*—It has been felt for some years past that the standard of attainment demanded by a certificate of proficiency was, in general, not sufficiently high, and at a recent conference of Inspectors it was agreed that it was desirable to raise the standard. The possession of a certificate of proficiency implies, or ought to imply, that the holder has mastered the work of the primary school, has had his intelligence developed and powers of observation extended within the limits of primary-school influence, and is in a position to profit by that further training provided free of cost by the State. It follows, therefore, that a reasonably high standard of attainments should be demanded before these certificates are awarded, especially in view of the proposal to abolish ordinary scholarship allowances and substitute more widely distributed boarding-allowances. It should be borne in mind, however, that the free-place privilege carried by the certificate of proficiency is of very real benefit to a large number of pupils, so that to raise the standard of attainments in such a way as to shut out applicants whose primary-school training would warrant their receiving further instruction would be unfair to the pupils concerned and unfortunate to the interests of the community. By all means let us raise the standard of attainments required for the proficiency certificate, but let us also safeguard the interests of those who desire to take advantage of free secondary education. While therefore we are of opinion that certificates of proficiency should be reserved for the best products of our primary schools, we also maintain that the lower certificate in Standard VI—viz., the certificate of competency—should carry some of the privileges heretofore borne by the certificate of proficiency.

There is another matter in connexion with the award of Standard VI certificates to which we find it necessary again to draw attention. Some teachers are apt to think that the efficiency of the school is tested and the ability of the teacher gauged by the percentage of Standard VI certificates won by pupils. We refer, of course, to the smaller schools. Though we recognize the need for intelligence and skill on the part of those who successfully prepare pupils for examination, and though, as a rule, we think highly of the school whose pupils are able to acquit themselves with credit in examination tests, we submit that other parts of the school have equal claims on the attention of the teacher, and that these must in no way be subordinated to preparing pupils for Standard VI examinations. The efficiency of the school is estimated by the standard of work it is able to maintain throughout all classes, and no amount of proficiency in Standard VI can compensate for backward conditions elsewhere.

*Preparatory Classes in Smaller Schools.*—The case of pupils in these classes was dealt with in our annual report of last year, but as we still notice the existence of the matters there referred to we feel it necessary to emphasize what has already been said. In some of the smaller schools pupils in the preparatory classes are neglected—we use the term advisedly—the attention of the teacher being directed towards the instruction of those in the upper standards. It cannot be too often insisted that the ultimate success of the school must depend on the training given to pupils in the lower classes, for if the foundations of knowledge and training be not well and truly laid the superstructure cannot be expected to reach satisfactory dimensions or to endure. We regret to state that it is not an altogether uncommon experience to find in the preparatory classes pupils that have been attending school for three or four years and whose knowledge, equipment, and intellectual outlook leave much to be desired. We are forced to the conclusion, partly by the low level of attainments reached by these children and partly by an examination of the time-table and the teaching methods during our visits, that the amount of individual attention, direct and indirect, received by them is altogether inadequate. We find also that the amount of time they are required to devote to writing, figuring, drawing from line copies, reproducing conventional border-patterns, and to other similar work is out of all proportion to the importance of these tasks, and can hardly fail to have a most unfortunate influence on subsequent progress. To keep little children writing, figuring, or drawing on slates for several hours per day tends not only to discourage natural effort, to check originality, to dull mental activity, and to rob school routine of interest, but also to create and foster a very real dislike for school-work, and to promote habits of inattention and idleness. It is most necessary that suitable occupation be provided for these little people, and we would specially direct the attention of the teachers concerned to this highly important matter. A certain portion of each day should be devoted to the personal supervision of the work of these pupils, for whom short lessons at relatively frequent intervals are essential. Then again, games and various suitable manual occupations should be employed. These, being the means by which the pupils may “learn by doing,” invest school routine with life and interest. Some teachers still cling to the antiquated alphabetical method of teaching reading in its initial stages, instead of requiring children to acquire a knowledge of the sound-values of letters and gradually to apply these in interpreting the symbols that stand for words. The use of objects, pictures, and actions to give reality to the word-symbols is very commonly neglected, correct phrasing is still frequently overlooked, and the reading-matter itself often lacks variety and seldom takes the form of an exercise composed either by teacher or pupils and printed on the blackboard.

*Promotions.*—For some years past with monotonous regularity we have drawn attention to the danger attending hasty or ill-advised promotions from class to class, and we regret that it is still necessary to refer to the matter. It is difficult to overestimate the harmful results of injudicious classification. A pupil unfitted for promotion, if moved forward, not only acts as a serious bar to the progress of others, but is most unfairly dealt with in being required to undertake work for which he has not received the necessary preparation. The difficulty of coping with the work exhausts his energy, repeated failure leads to discouragement, the knowledge that others are making real progress and that he is not disheartens him, the net result being that his efforts tend to diminish, and the close of the year finds him but little advanced and with a growing disinclination to prolong his school life. We would again urge on teachers