

it remembered that all branches of natural science are based on facts slowly and patiently accumulated by experiment and observation, truth having been sifted from error, but gradually and sometimes with great difficulty ; and it is unreasonable to suppose that the results of the prolonged labours of innumerable inquirers can be properly brought home to and usefully assimilated by untrained workers in a few short hours. Experience shows that they are not."

In some schools there was a tendency to divide the work unnecessarily, and subjects like arithmetic, algebra, and geometry were in the hands of different teachers. English language, literature, and composition were separated, and the translation, prose, and grammar of a foreign language were assigned to different teachers. Specialization is no doubt necessary in teaching some of the highest branches of study, but it is surely carrying this principle too far when closely associated subjects as the branches of mathematics commonly taught in our secondary schools or the language and literature are in the hands of different teachers. To separate subjects in which the interdependence and close connection is so great as in the instances referred to must result in a loss of efficiency in the teaching-power of the staff. There is such a large number of cross-references in most of these subjects that the work in one could not fail to be of mutual assistance to the other.

In the best schools the blackboard is recognized as an indispensable adjunct to effective teaching, but cases are too common of neglect of this excellent ally. A small sketch or drawing, especially if coloured crayons are used, will prove much more effective than the finest word picture. A short summary of a good oral lesson will add considerably to the success of the lesson. Most teachers are alive to the assistance afforded by blackboard illustrations and make the fullest use of the facilities afforded.

The success of a lesson depends in large measure on the teacher's skill in questioning ; and it is a matter of regret when a good oral exposition is weakened by a lack of ability to put suitable questions, either during the progress of the lesson or at its conclusion. Good questioning usually awakens the interest of the class, and is calculated to secure the active co-operation of each pupil. It is therefore obvious that simultaneous answering should be eliminated. Questions ought to be directed to individual pupils or else out forward for the consideration of the class as a whole, with the clear understanding that some one will be called upon for an answer. To allow the first pupil who gets the answer to reply is a direct incentive to the shirker, or a positive discouragement to the pupil whose mind moves rather slowly to the answer.

Whether there should be home lessons is a matter on which there is considerable divergence of opinion among educationists, and much has been written from both points of view. It is generally admitted that if home lessons are given care should be taken to confine them in the lower forms to the preparation of work bearing on topics which have been dealt with in school. As a rule new ground should not be broken by the pupils. If this were done and the amount set were quite reasonable, probably much of the complaint against home lessons would disappear. It is when pupils are asked to deal with matter which is entirely new to them, and work involving hours of preparation is given, that strong protests are raised. From inquiries made at the time of inspection there does not appear to be much justification for the charge of overstrain due to excessive home-work. Most teachers limit the work from an hour to an hour and a half in Form III, from an hour and a half to two hours in Form IV, and from two hours to two and a half hours in the upper forms. This appears to be the average time set apart for home preparation. Of course, in the case of clever pupils the time would be shorter, and with dull pupils correspondingly longer. As far as can be gathered, the common practice is to lessen the work when parents complain that home-work is prejudicial to the health of their children.

Nearly all the principals of the secondary schools utilize the privilege of recommending junior-free-place holders for senior free places when they are satisfied that their pupils' progress justifies the State in continuing their secondary education for a further period. The power which has been placed in the hands of the principals has been used with commendable discrimination, and the change adopted by the Department eight years ago has been eminently successful. It is based on the fact that promotion from grade to grade in the school should be determined by those who are best qualified to judge, and not on the results of a single outside examination, however wisely it may be conducted. "A certificate, to be of value, should certify not only to the attainments of a scholar at one critical moment, but it should testify that he has lived the school life, and should by its comprehensive character take account of the entire school record." There can be no doubt that this method places great responsibility in the hands of our secondary-school teachers—a responsibility to which they have nobly risen, for they have recognized that it gives them an opportunity of introducing improved methods of teaching and of providing to the fullest extent for initiative.

The physical education of the boys and girls receives considerable attention. In addition to the organized school games, swimming and life-saving are taught, the boys have military drill, the girls receive instruction in first aid, and practically all have recognized periods of physical drill under qualified instructors. The provision made for the physical well-being of the pupils is highly satisfactory.

It affords me very much pleasure to testify to the disinterested manner in which the teachers carry out their multifarious duties. No sacrifice seems to be too great where the well-being of their pupils is concerned. Any suggestions made to secure a higher standard of teaching efficiency or any improvement in the organization of the schools receive the utmost consideration. My visits to the schools year by year have strengthened the opinion I formed eight years ago, that the Dominion has every reason to be pleased with the conscientious and capable men and women to whom the secondary education of its boys and girls has been entrusted.

T. H. GILL, Inspector of Secondary Schools.

The Director of Education, Wellington.