

the teacher's efforts in the case of the smaller schools may during the later months of the year be concentrated on S6, to the neglect of other classes, and in the case of all schools on the teaching of English and arithmetic, to the neglect of the remaining subjects. We are fully alive to these dangers, and shall do our best to cope with them.

During the past year the lady teachers of the town and suburban schools formed a class to study the Montessori methods, and we desire to place on record our appreciation of their enthusiastic and self-sacrificing efforts. A complete set of material was imported by the Board and placed at the disposal of the class. Late in the year a member of the class, Miss Birss, undertook to submit the system to a practical test, and a room in the Invercargill Middle School was set apart for the purpose. The assistance of an additional probationer in the Montessori class has enabled the ordinary staff to carry on the work according to the new methods. Final consideration has been postponed till the end of the present year, and the result will be awaited with keen interest. Some adaptation of the system might also be tried in a sole-teacher school. Anything in the direction of securing brighter conditions for the infant classes of these schools would be an improvement on the present system of forced neglect, under which far too much time is spent by the little ones in scribbling on slates and other rather aimless occupations, with insufficient supervision.

The proficiency examinations were held at thirty-one centres (two more than last year) during the months of November and December, and at eighty schools in remote districts on the occasion of the Inspector's annual visit during the months of October and November. Thus the pupils of 111 schools were examined for proficiency at their own schools, and proficiency candidates from the remaining seventy-five schools were required to travel to the nearest centre to be examined. The following table shows the results in the public schools compared with those of 1914 :—

Year.	Number examined.	Proficiency.		Competency.		Failed.	
		Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.
1914	754	545	72·3	145	19·2	64	8·5
1915	792	586	74·0	127	16·0	79	10·0

The improvement noticeable in the English and arithmetic of S6 is reflected in the slightly higher percentage of proficiency certificates gained. On the other hand, some of the remaining subjects in which proficiency candidates must qualify are distinctly less satisfactory, particularly history and elementary science. Indeed, so marked is the falling-away that we are forced to conclude that some teachers have concentrated on English and arithmetic under the impression that these two subjects alone qualify for a proficiency certificate. That such a policy imperils the chance of success in the examination a reference to our proficiency schedules will show.

Reading.—The number of teachers who give instruction in accordance with modern and approved methods is steadily on the increase. The best teachers of the lower classes make good use of the black-board, and many of them show considerable skill with coloured chalks, and associating symbol and object in the infant mind. In the upper standards of the better-class schools, which include a number of sole-teacher schools, the subject has gained in breadth of treatment and ability to express intelligently the content of the passage read. As a consequence, the giving of meanings of words isolated from their context has lost its prominence in the reading-lesson and its place in the home-work books. The number of schools, however, in which the reading and speaking are monotonous or indistinct is unfortunately too large. If teachers give close attention to the reading-lesson, instead of occupying themselves with other work during its progress, the pupils will rapidly acquire skill in the art of intelligent reading. Good reading lies entirely in the hands of the teacher; he cannot throw the responsibility on the pupils.

Recitation.—In a fair number of schools, in which the poetry had been embedded in the memory by thorough revision, due regard was paid to meaning and rhythm. The somewhat common failure to memorize a poem correctly forced the Inspector to assume the role of prompter to enable the pupils to pass from one verse to the next. It is evident that some teachers leave the poetry till late in the year, thus making the recitation lesson an unpleasant task, and sympathetic rendering or appreciation of the language impossible.

Spelling.—The spelling taken from the prepared books was usually well done, and the subject might be reported as very well taught were it not for the contrary evidence furnished by the composition exercises. As a general rule word-building, which forms an essential part of the work in the lower classes, is not continued in the higher classes, where the pupils learn to spell by the memorizing of isolated words.

Writing.—In a small number of schools this subject is carefully and systematically taught, from the lowest classes up to the highest standard, with commendable results. But a somewhat common experience is to find that the good writing of the junior division seriously deteriorates in S3 and S4, making a partial recovery in the highest standards. The actual teaching of writing should not stop after the initial work has been done; the change from pencils and slates to pens and paper, and the need for perfecting the muscular co-ordination of the undeveloped child, necessitate careful attention at this transition stage.