

closing of schools and seriously interrupted the work of instruction. There is room for much doubt as to whether the means adopted was at all effective in checking this epidemic.

It is evidently advisable that every school should receive an unannounced visit, if for no other purpose than doing justice to its staff when the period for grading teachers comes round. On the other hand, the number of inexperienced teachers in the district is fairly large, and it seems our bounden duty to assist them practically to as great an extent as possible. We have therefore during the year exempted from full examination six of our higher-grade schools, and devoted the time thus gained to two-day visits to twenty-three of our weaker schools. The teachers thus benefited have not been slow to express their sense of the value of our assistance. It seems certain that this course will be necessary for some considerable time yet.

War conditions have almost depleted our schools of unmarried male teachers; the calling-up of the Second Division will involve us in almost insuperable difficulties. The position is now acute alike as regards the appointment of permanent, temporary, or relieving teachers. A moderate proportion of the staff in our larger schools should be male teachers; at present Invercargill South, with a roll of 841, has only one male assistant. In the case of Grade I schools it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain even female teachers with satisfactory qualifications.

The strict conditions of attendance at teachers' Saturday classes have practically eliminated abuse of the benefits afforded by these classes. If the results do not seem commensurate with the expenditure, this is due largely to the time lost and the fatigue incurred by many of the students in travelling, and to the unfavourable conditions of study in their lodgings.

The number of male applicants for the positions of pupil-teacher and probationer is very small, and the proportion of candidates with the higher qualifications is much smaller than it is in districts with better facilities for university education. The extent to which leave of absence is granted to young teachers and their low average literary standing impel us to the conclusion that both physically and intellectually entrants to the teaching profession are inferior to those of former years.

There is possibly nothing which impedes the progress of education in this district more than the frequent changes of teaching staff. This is no new evil induced by war conditions, but has been in evidence for many years. There were 108 such changes during 1917. The evil is in some measure due to the great extent of the district, many teachers, particularly the uncertificated, being so remote from central classes as to render their advancement in status and their promotion matters of the utmost difficulty. A teacher is required, under the present rules of the Board, to remain at least one year in a position before again seeking appointment: it would be better for our schools, and in few cases detrimental to the teacher's interests, were the period two years instead of one.

Towards the end of the year we had much pleasure in conferring with the Teachers' Institute on schemes of work in history, geography, spelling, &c. The labour involved on both sides was considerable, but will be fully rewarded, we believe, by improvement in the treatment of these subjects in our schools. Should time allow we should be glad to give similar help in regard to other subjects which present much difficulty to our inexperienced teachers—nature-study, drawing, handwork, &c. As regards elementary science, some of the schemes presented last year were almost wholly made up of work properly coming under the headings of instrumental drawing and arithmetic; while the programmes of science in rural schools without a garden were, generally speaking, unsatisfactory. In all these cases we are asking that amended schemes be submitted to us for approval.

In the case of schools managed by uncertificated teachers we examine and classify all pupils at as late a period in the year as possible. Generally speaking, unwarranted promotion is a more frequent fault than undue retardation; the latter failing affects the infant classes principally. We have had in a good many cases to protest against "provisional" classification—i.e., promoting a pupil into a class for which he is not fit, to see if in time he will prove fit. In nine cases out of ten he proves unfit. The practice of subdividing S6 into upper and lower sections, the lower containing pupils fitter for S5 than for S6, has been practically discontinued: it was quite indefensible.

The results of the proficiency examination are given below. It is to be noted—First, that composition has greatly improved; second, that some teachers failed to notice the increased importance attached to composition by recent amendments of the syllabus; and, third, that a few teachers concentrated their efforts on English and arithmetic alone, their pupils in some cases fulfilling all the conditions in these two subjects, yet failing to gain proficiency.

—			Presented.	Examined.	Proficiency.	Competency.	Fail.
Public schools	..	..	812	806	527 (65.4%)	142 (17.6%)	137 (17.0%)
Private schools	..	..	40	40	19 (47.5%)	9 (22.5%)	11 (27.5%)
All schools	..	..	852	846	546 (64.5%)	151 (17.8%)	148 (17.5%)

The corresponding percentages for 1916 were—

			Proficiency.	Competency.	Fail.
Public schools	...	...	68.8	15.6	15.6
Private schools	...	...	52.2	18.2	29.6
All schools	...	...	68.0	15.7	16.3