

There are twenty schools at present making use of the North Dunedin and the South Dunedin centres for manual instruction. Most of these schools send as many as two classes from S6 and S5, and some are able to send three or four classes for each of the subjects woodwork and cookery. The result is that some city classes are deprived of the opportunity of obtaining instruction in a very important branch of education. The immediate remedy is the establishment of a third centre in Dunedin; but even this will not be sufficient if manual work is to assume an important position in our syllabus. If the best results are to be obtained from practical work every large school should have facilities for carrying on this work.

*S6 Proficiency.*—Owing to the influenza epidemic the schools in this district were closed early in November, 1918, and the proficiency passes recorded in this report are to a great extent granted (without special examination) after a consultation with the head teachers. The percentage of passes recommended (nearly 80 per cent.) is slightly higher than that of last year, but we think that the percentage would probably have been reduced if the school year had not been interrupted and if a written examination had taken place in December as usual. In those schools which were visited for the second time between the 1st September and 11th November we had already examined the pupils of S6 for proficiency, and of those 33 per cent. failed to reach proficiency standard, the Department's arithmetic tests proving slightly more difficult than those of former years. Though as a result of the altered system a higher percentage of passes has probably been gained, we feel that—under the special circumstances—it was better to err on the side of leniency. We must, however, note two points in connection with the examinations held by head teachers. Firstly, we note that the marks given by many head teachers for mediocre work are much too high. This note refers especially to English composition, comprehension, reading, and recitation. As a consequence of the low standard set in English especially a large number of pupils gained over 500 marks out of a possible 600. We find that, as a general rule, only those who are destined to take a good place in the Junior National Scholarship Examination gain over 500 marks in the examination for proficiency in S6. We again urge the necessity for using some well-considered and easily understood system of marking in English composition. Such a system would probably have two results: In the first place the marks gained would be greatly reduced and a definite and higher standard would be set for the pupil to aim at; and, secondly, the pupil would know by a study of his corrected paper *why* the marks had been reduced. Secondly, we regret to notice that some teachers have interpreted the word "examinations" in the regulations as meaning that only *two* examinations are to be held in the course of the year. As a result we were compelled in some cases to base our recommendations for proficiency certificate on the result of one examination held early in the school year. In such cases we should have been quite unable to make any recommendation had the headmaster's results not been supplemented by periodical examinations conducted during the year by the class teacher. We hope that in future the head teachers here referred to will understand that the plural "examinations" means *two or more*. Where, besides superintending the work of the school, a head teacher has to teach two or more classes, two examinations may be as many as he can conveniently hold; but where the staffing of the school permits the headmaster to give the whole of his time to organization and supervision we hold strongly that at least three examinations should be held yearly.

We cannot leave the subject of proficiency examinations without referring to an aspect of the matter that causes us some uneasiness. In all the Otago schools the number enrolled in S5 is 2,276, and the number enrolled in S6 is 1,588. In Dunedin and suburbs the numbers are—S5, 1,042; S6, 768. The discrepancy between the totals enrolled in S5 and S6 respectively is due to many causes, some of which are unavoidable. To one important cause, however, we wish to draw attention. There has grown up in Otago a strong tendency among parents and school authorities generally to judge the efficiency of a school by the percentage of proficiency passes in S6. (S6 competency is, we regret to notice, looked on almost with contempt as a modified form of failure.) As a result of this false notion most head teachers are too exacting in making promotions from S5 to S6. When there is a doubt as to the promotion of a S5 pupil we fear that the teacher of S6 too often gives his vote against promotion, and the head teacher, sometimes against his own better judgment, does not promote, though in many cases the mental stimulus obtained by working in a higher class is just what the boy needs. The outcome often is that the pupil remains in S5, loses ambition, and leaves when he reaches fourteen years of age. We do not, of course, suggest that a pupil should be promoted to S6 who, in the opinion of both head teacher and class-teacher, would certainly fail to obtain competency in S6, but we trust that where there seems to be any reasonable prospect of success in S6 head teachers will see that the S5 pupil is promoted to S6.

*English.*—(1.) Reading: In the great majority of our schools reading is well taught, and the pupils of the higher classes are able to read passages, formerly unseen, fluently and accurately. The least pleasing feature of the reading of pupils in the Dunedin schools especially is that many whose articulation and expression are excellent mispronounce the vowel-sounds. In a few schools it is a pleasure to listen to the vowel-production in reading, recitation, and singing, but in too many of our town classes the pronunciation of "plate" approaches "plyte," "home" is "haome," and "how" is "haow." Systematic practice in the production of pure vowel-sounds is a matter of the greatest urgency if we are not to allow the speech of our children to degenerate into what has been called a "colonial drawl" that is too much in evidence everywhere. A few years ago great improvement followed regular exercise in vowel-production, but we regret to notice that, of late, regular practice in phonics before and during each reading-lesson is a custom "more honoured in the breach than in the observance." We regret to notice, also, that these objectionable "colonial" vowel-sounds are characteristic of the reading, recitation, and speech of too many of the young teachers (especially of the young men) who leave our training colleges. We suggest that great improvement in this important respect would result—(1) If no training-college student