

are frequently handled in the most feeble manner. Under such circumstances it is, of course, vain to expect intelligent reading. As a rule the pupils do not appear to gain any ideas or information from the books they read. The subjects given for composition are invariably selected from the lessons read during the year, and it is marvellous how little the majority of children can write; and in not a few cases, if unable to recall the words of the book, they can write nothing at all. The facts and statements of the lessons have never been effectively questioned into them, and naturally they have little but words to offer. The art of questioning into the minds of children the ideas and statements of an author in such a way as to give them firm lodgment there is a very difficult one; nevertheless it is one that every teacher ought to try hard to gain a fair mastery of. In the junior class sufficient attention is not paid to the natural grouping of the words of the lessons read. Many teachers have no class-books of their own, and have to borrow from their pupils to conduct their lessons.

Spelling continues to be good. The excellent spelling of this district is, I believe, largely owing to the practice of causing the children to write the words as soon as they are able to do so without undue waste of time in forming the letters. Writing is generally taught with care, and in many schools with skill. Many teachers appear to follow Mr. Fitch's dictum, "That there is no harm in allowing different modes of holding a pen or pencil so long as the writing produced is good," for nine-tenths of the children hold the pen anyhow, and sit at the desks in very slovenly attitudes. In the classes below Standard I. a great many children are allowed to write with blunt pencils about the length of one's thumb-nail, and to cover both sides of their slates with the poorest imitations of the copy set on the black-board, before their work is looked at by the teacher.

In arithmetic the results attained in the middle and senior standards are not an adequate return for the large amount of time consumed in the study of it. The mechanical operations are in most cases well performed. Tell the children to add, subtract, multiply, or divide, and notate the numbers for them, and they will do it readily and accurately; but state the sum so that they have to discover which of those processes has to be employed, and a considerable number of them are sure to go wrong. This is especially so in the Third and Fourth Standards; and, unless some serious attempt is made to familiarise the pupils of the Third Standard with the meaning and application of common arithmetical terms, as well as to train them to think out easy money problems, and much more attention is given in the Fourth Standard to the practical bearing of arithmetic upon every-day business transactions, I confess I do not see how we can reasonably expect much improvement. It is surely folly to keep the Third Standard hammering away at mechanical examples from the beginning to the end of the year; yet this is what is done in a great many schools. It must be mentioned, too, that the methods employed in the solution of problems in the Fourth and higher standards are often mechanical and but little calculated to develop the intelligence of the pupils. I have been much pleased during the past year to see Hamblin Smith's excellent arithmetic gaining a place among the teachers' books. The study of this book and the key to it cannot but have a good effect upon the teaching. The addition and multiplication tables are not got up so thoroughly as they ought to be in the junior classes.

Though there is a slight decline in the general percentage gained in grammar, the method of teaching this subject has certainly improved. It is now more widely recognized that the learner must think out the function of the word, phrase, or sentence before attempting to assign it to its proper class; but the fact that the function of a word or phrase depends upon its meaning in the sentence in which it is employed, and that if the latter is not understood the former cannot be determined, does not receive due recognition. As might be expected, in those schools in which the meaning of the language and the sense of the lessons of the reading-books receive adequate treatment children experience no difficulty in the grammar exercise. It is easy to predict the result of the examination in grammar after testing the reading and comprehension.

A considerable improvement has been effected in the teaching of geography and history in the Second and Third Standards. In the higher standards history is, as a rule, well got up by the pupils from the text-book, and political geography from the text-book and atlas. Physical geography is on the whole poorly known.

Object-lessons are regularly given in a fair proportion of schools; but the regulation respecting elementary science is more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Singing is well taught in a few schools, but in the majority it receives no recognition; and a similar remark applies to drawing and drill. Sewing is generally well taught.

The Daily-Attendance Register is faithfully marked, and generally found fully written up; the other registers are, however, frequently found considerably in arrears. Again I would suggest that the department should provide a register from which the quarterly returns could be readily compiled. The present "Weekly Register" is not suitable.

The discipline and tone of our schools continue to be good. One or two cases of excessive harshness came under my notice during the year, but as a rule the government is mild. One of the most pleasing features of the examinations is the independence and self-reliance of the pupils. Here and there an examiner has to be on the alert to prevent copying and prompting, but in the majority of schools the children do not evince the slightest desire either to know what their neighbours are doing, or to give or receive any assistance. Class-movements, though in a good many schools performed with the maximum of speed and minimum of noise, are in too many noisy and slow. A good deal of time is wasted in this way. Three or four minutes lost now and three or four then amount to a considerable total in the course of the year, to say nothing of the injurious effect produced upon the habits of the children by such dawdling and disorder.

Before closing this report I should like to say a word or two about the over-pressure craze. It is alleged that the syllabus exacts greatly too much work, and that the effort made by the children to get it up and pass a standard every year is highly detrimental to their health. No attempt, however, is anywhere made to accomplish the whole of it. Singing, drawing, and elementary