

employed and interested during their ordinary school hours, which, in my opinion, should never exceed two hours, including a short interval in the playground. In acquiescence with my recommendation, the infant classes at several of the smaller schools are dismissed, both morning and afternoon half an hour sooner than the rest of the scholars. A mischievous practice of allowing children to write with little scraps of pencil, sometimes not an inch in length, prevails in some schools. The evil effects of this practice are too well known to need repetition here. There is, moreover, no excuse for it, as slate pencils and pencil holders are supplied by the Board for use in this department, free of charge. The slates are frequently very badly and unevenly ruled, the spaces being either much too large or the reverse, with scarcely any two slates ruled alike. This is a matter that should not be left to the children or to their parents. All the slates should be ruled by the teacher to a uniform gauge, so as to fall in with the requirements of the First Standard.

THE NEW REGULATIONS.—I fail to see that the work of elementary school teachers has been materially lightened by the alterations made in the standard regulations. The placing of certain subjects under the head of class subjects may perhaps enable a teacher to gain a higher “percentage of passes,” but if the following remarks in the Minister’s last report are to be regarded (as, no doubt, they should be) as authoritative, the work of a really conscientious teacher will certainly not be diminished. The passage referred to runs thus (page vi., E.-1, 1886): “It is necessary, therefore, to say that it must be clearly understood that the class subjects are to be studied as thoroughly and examined as carefully as the ‘pass subjects,’ that a child cannot pass until he has been examined in the class subjects, and that a school will gain as much distinction by obtaining a high percentage on class subjects as by gaining a high percentage of passes.” The permission to group standard classes for the purpose of instruction in some subjects has only given an official sanction to what must necessarily have been a pretty general custom in schools having the full complement of standards taught by a single teacher; and in the larger schools it will, no doubt, be found advantageous to adopt the system of grouping classes for instruction in such subjects as vocal music, science, and drill. I subjoin a few remarks upon some of the standard subjects as treated in this district.

READING.—That there are fewer failures in this subject than in any other except writing is not altogether due to its being comparatively better taught, but partly to the fact that I thought it proper on this first examination under the new regulations to be rather more lenient in judging the subject than I intend to be in future. For instance, in numerous cases the voices of the readers were scarcely audible. This was naturally more common amongst the girls, and has frequently been referred to in my former reports. In future no instance of this kind will escape failure. In the higher standards I shall expect to be able to follow the reader without seeing the book, and shall not pass any reading that is not intelligible under this test. In the First Standard I provided myself this year with books not used in the schools, and tested some of the more fluent readers by causing them to read a few sentences out of these new books, and generally with satisfactory results. On the whole I am satisfied with this portion of the school work. The recitation, however, shows a falling off both in the number of pieces prepared, and (in some schools) in punctuation and expression. In the lower classes it is common to find children glibly repeating poetry without the faintest idea of its meaning. I often asked in vain for the meaning of simple words constantly in use, such as “linger,” “replied,” “chide;” whilst inattention to punctuation sometimes produces ludicrous nonsense. Two lines of “The Well of St. Keyne” were frequently recited,—

If the husband of this gifted well;
Should drink before his wife.

WRITING is in a satisfactory state, as a rule, throughout the district. That of the first class, on slates, is generally very good, though at a few schools the uniform ruling of the slates is neglected. Writing with pen and ink in exercise books is introduced at some schools as early as the primer class, and, being very carefully attended to, is really surprisingly neat and clean for such young scholars. The writing of the higher standards is always judged by the transcription exercise, and produces very creditable results—in some cases far better than the handwriting of the other papers would lead me to expect; but this is, no doubt, due to the necessary limitation of time for each subject, which certainly does not allow for an elaborate exhibition of penmanship.

ARITHMETIC.—Notwithstanding the large—in some instances excessive—amount of time occupied by this subject, it yields nearly the lowest percentage of passes. I am disposed to regard this not altogether as the result of inferior skill in teaching the subject at present, but to various causes, including defective early training. I fear, too, that some of the failures might be traced to the vicious habit of “copying” during the year, and others to the fact of arithmetic being sometimes regarded as a convenient means of keeping classes apparently busy while the teacher’s attention is engaged elsewhere. In some schools the children are permitted to work from text books containing the answers to the examples. This is a fruitful source of disappointment at the examination, and would never be tolerated in any good school. The most disheartening aspect of the case, however, is the very small practical benefit derived from the expenditure of so much valuable time. In the Fourth Standard comparatively few of the scholars were able to make out correctly a small “bill of parcels” or “invoice,” and if called upon to add up quickly a tolerably long column of figures, I fear there would be very few scholars in this district who would arrive at the correct total. I put this to the test at several of our best schools this year by giving the higher classes a long column of £ s. d. to add up, allowing them as much time as I required to add up the same column twice; and, although I am not particularly expert at this kind of work, there was scarcely a solitary instance of complete success. When the time was up some had finished, but were altogether wrong; a few only had the sum correct as far as the shillings. I believe this is the outcome of defective training while in the lower standards. The mere addition of numbers should be performed with little or no mental effort if a thorough drilling in the addition table has been received, and if the practice of counting on the