

in the very small schools now so numerous in this district. The accidental presence of even so few as three or four dull-witted or backward children in a school numbering in all hardly a score of pupils would materially alter for the worse what are conventionally termed the "Results," however ably such a school may have been conducted.

Wherever I have satisfied myself that there were good grounds for attributing a part or even the whole of the non-success of a school to faulty teaching or training, I have endeavoured to indicate my meaning with sufficient clearness in the detailed account of the state of each establishment.

I am again able to report in favourable terms as to the discipline of our schools and the good behaviour of the great majority of the scholars, both when within and without the school walls. The orderliness and good humour of the school children whom one passes by, either in the streets of our towns or on our country roads, together with the infrequency of foul language, cannot well escape the notice of even a careless observer.

Something too much has been made of the multiplicity of subjects now embodied in our complete school course. It is undeniable that by adding to the number of channels the total volume of a stream is not increased; but no reasonable being ever expected that it would be, and an examiner who knows his business will always make allowances in proportion to the quantity of additional matter exacted. A school course that should include only three or four subjects, succeeding one another in an unchanging and unchangeable round, would be found intolerably tedious by young children, few of whom can fix their minds intently on anything for many minutes. It would seem that variety of food for the mind is as essential as a varied diet for the body. Four of the most popular subjects among our children are those which have assumed only lately a prominent place in the public schools of Nelson—drawing, elementary science, vocal music, and drill. The evident relief with which children who have been poring over sums welcome a singing-lesson, or exchange a lesson in grammar, where words only are dealt with, for a lesson in common things, speaks volumes in favour of retaining these cheering variations in the programme. Nor should it be forgotten that all these matters, in one way or another, largely help forward the general conduct of the school. Drill, for example, in addition to its admitted physical uses, gives habits of prompt attention and orderliness; while drawing, independently of its intrinsic value in after life, does much to help the handwriting by training eye and hand.

Reading, which until the last two years was the least satisfactory portion of the school work, now stands, as it ought to do, at the head of the list. It is not too much to say that the reading in many of our schools is at present excellent, in the majority good, and in no instance distinctly bad. There are still, however, one or two points in which the methods of teaching employed might be bettered. Simultaneous reading, useful in its way as an adjunct, has been allowed to usurp too prominent a place in the reading lesson. It also too frequently precedes, instead of following, the individual reading of each member of a class. The art of reading at sight will not be readily acquired if children with retentive memories have the opportunity of hearing a whole passage read by the class, with the corrections of the teacher, before attacking it for themselves one by one. It is a hopeful sign that an alternative reading-book, so long recommended in vain, is at last being brought into use pretty generally.

Good or even fair handwriting is still far from being as common as it ought to be. On inspection visits one misses the active minute supervision of the teachers and the constant use of black-board writing as an exemplar, without which really good work can hardly be looked for. Much slovenly, misshapen writing is to be found, where it is quite unpardonable, among the copybooks of even the older scholars. Remonstrance having so far proved ineffectual, several specimens of moderately good writing, taken from our own schools, will be brought round at next examination for the purpose of comparison. Those whose copybooks fall distinctly below the standard thus set up, especially in the two highest classes, may lay their account in being summarily rejected.

In face of the fact that at least twice as many scholars break down in arithmetic as in any other subject, it may seem paradoxical to affirm that this important art is very well taught in most of our schools; but arithmetic, especially in its higher branches, is intrinsically difficult, and habits of unerring accuracy, as well as the faculty of looking all round a knotty question, do not, as a rule, come to children until the ordinary school life is nearly over. I find that in this subject, beyond all others, young pupils, however carefully and skilfully they may have been trained, habitually disappoint—though they occasionally exceed—the expectations of their teachers. Again and again it has been found that a whole class will break down miserably, while the classes immediately above and below it, who have received precisely the same kind of training, will answer correctly and with ease every question on their paper. Even our picked scholars, who have solved readily the hardest papers set at the ordinary annual examinations, too often give but a sorry account of themselves when tested by not dissimilar work at a scholarship examination.

The substitution of a set of papers in which some knowledge of common idioms, and of the meaning of words in daily use, is required, for the mere formal parsing that has hitherto made up the staple of the grammar papers, proved a sore trial to the older scholars, for whom it was intended. Comparatively few could explain "what was wrong, and why it was wrong," in such phrases as "They saw both you and I," and "Neither James nor John were wrong." The meaning of such words as "renowned," "restitution," and "absolve" also presented quite unexpected difficulties to some otherwise well-taught scholars. On the other hand, the English composition was, for the most part, creditably done.

Elementary science continues to be carefully and successfully taught in most of our schools, though in a few the teachers evidently thought that it could be treated as an optional subject, and therefore ignored it altogether. This is a mistake that cannot be too speedily rectified.

Time would be saved if the teaching of geography were more intimately blended with that of history. These two matters are so closely related that there are many occasions on which they