

ARITHMETIC.—Last year there was some falling-off in this subject. This year it shows great improvement. I seldom find notation any difficulty in the lower classes; and in several schools Class Primer II. has done the work of Standard I. very well. The slates used in Standards I. and II. are often much too small, causing sums to be crowded, and creating trouble and perplexity for the examiner. I am often told that parents object to purchase larger slates. Economy is commendable, but also sometimes mischievous. The number of schools which give due attention to mental arithmetic is increasing, and the effect is apparent in the written work. Standards V. and VI. should do a great part of their work on paper. A mistake on the slate being easily erased, the habit of carefulness is not promoted as in paper work. Standard V. is the only class which shows any particular weakness. The papers set were not of more than ordinary difficulty; and the cause may possibly be found in the advancement of scholars from Standard IV., who have just managed to secure a pass, but would benefit by remaining in that class another year. A little more severity as to passes in Standard IV., I believe, would have a salutary effect. I have been careful not to exceed the requirements of the syllabus as to problems, but they still present insuperable difficulty to a large proportion of the scholars. This shows the necessity for more extended use of mental work. No school can do really good work in arithmetic where this important branch of the subject is neglected. The papers in this subject are generally very carefully and neatly done, and show that habits of carefulness and tidiness are inculcated. As a relief in posture likely to be physically beneficial, I would recommend that scholars be allowed sometimes to stand whilst working in this subject, and be enjoined to hold the slates well up.

GRAMMAR.—This subject also shows considerable improvement generally, but there are greater contrasts than in any other subject. In some schools the whole work is done admirably, composition being exceedingly well taught; in others the composition is well expressed, but spoiled by want of punctuation, bad spelling, and indiscriminate use of capital letters, or their absence altogether where necessary. The parsing generally is very well done, and is, in some cases, beyond programme requirements. I should like to see the reason for classification more often given. Standard IV. was weak in the inflections of the noun and pronoun. Analysis was very unequal, some schools doing very good work and others showing little knowledge of the subject. In the Greymouth School simple analysis is begun in Standard III., a practice I should like to see general.

WRITING.—There is no falling-off in this subject, but no improvement can be recorded. There has been very considerable improvement during the past four years, and the slate writing of the lower classes on the whole is very good. Copybooks are used in Standard I., excepting in those schools which are too crowded to allow desk-room for the purpose. In the majority of schools great care is taken with the copybooks, and their condition was very creditable. In a few cases careless supervision had resulted in poor work and untidy and dirty books. In one or two schools I found that the rule that the scholars in Standards I.—III. should not write on a single line had been disregarded, with the inevitably unfavourable result upon the work. I hope to see strict compliance with this rule, whether in copybook or exercise-book. The difficulties in connection with the position of the scholar and the manner of holding the pen have materially increased since the introduction of drawing into the syllabus, and I am inclined to think that the best way to meet the difficulty will be to introduce the “upright” system of writing, which allows of the posture of body and the manner of holding the pen being the same as for drawing. Notwithstanding my often repeated injunctions concerning the use of short pencils in the lower classes, it still too often occurs that a class is found at work with pencils altogether too short for satisfactory work. There is no excuse whatever for this, as pencils and pencil-holders are supplied by the Board without charge. In some cases the condition of the exercise-books indicates the possibility of deterioration in the writing. No matter how carefully the work in school may be supervised the acceptance of careless work in the exercise-books must affect results injuriously. Scribbling in these books should be strictly prohibited.

DRAWING.—Freehand drawing shows improvement. The syllabus has not been very strictly observed, owing to various causes. The cost of the necessary material is practically prohibitive to geometrical drawing, and model drawing languishes for want of models. The work done has, generally speaking, been very well done. The drawing-books in the majority of schools present a very creditable appearance.

GEOGRAPHY, ETC.—The cause of a comparative failure in this subject has been already partly accounted for. The results in Standard IV. are not encouraging as to the further creation of class-subjects. Standard II. does much better, and has greatly improved since the introduction of the Geographical Readers. In this class, especially, the use of the Geographical Reader has created greater interest in the subject, with beneficial results. A good set of readers based upon our own syllabus would be of great service. Map knowledge is on the whole fairly good, but mathematical and physical geography are poorly taught. It is quite an ordinary event to find the scholars' ideas of latitude and longitude very mixed. The location of places is pretty well known, but very little attempt seems to be made to connect them with events of interest and importance. No subject requires wider reading on the part of the teacher, and no subject can be more interesting, than geography if properly handled. History should be associated with it as much as possible, for the two combined are mutually helpful. A zinc tray filled with sand would be of great service in the lower classes, for the scholars can acquire correct notions of the various divisions of land and water much better by the practical exercise of forming them in sand than by mere description or the exhibition of diagrams and pictures. Standard III. in some schools failed altogether in the spelling of geographical names. This is strong evidence of carelessness, and the fault should be remedied.

Hughes's Science Readers are still used, and are well adapted for school work. Sufficient effort is not made to give a practical direction to the work, and the same may be said of object-lessons.