

estimating the value of the work accomplished. The number varies from 229 at Port Underwood to 354 at Te Awaite, the average for the district being 302. Assuming a proportional attendance for the other quarter of the year, it would appear that our schools were open on the average about 200 whole days in the year. In other words, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays absorb 45 per cent. of the year, leaving 55 per cent. for actual school work. If we take the school year to consist of 261 days—that is, excluding Saturdays and Sundays—the average would give about 23 per cent. of the year for holidays and 77 for school work. The extraordinary prevalence of sickness and wet weather has necessarily reduced the number of school meetings, so that the average duration of the holidays this year—eight and a half weeks—may be regarded as exceptional.

The number of scholars marked as liable to exception in the event of failure was 148, or about 10½ per cent. of the number presented in standards. The attendance of children below Standard I. is probably even more irregular, so that we may safely assume that in this district upwards of one-tenth of the children supposed to be receiving the benefits of the education system are really throwing away one-half of their school life. This is without considering the relatively large number who escape “exception” by only a few days more attendance. Neither does it appear that this has been an unfavourable year in this respect, as 11 per cent. were “excepted” in 1891, and 10 per cent. in 1892.

The summary of results in pass-subjects shows the extent to which, in the district as a whole, the work of those subjects has fallen off from last year's results. The only subject which exhibits any improvement is composition grammar, and this is chiefly due to the placing of formal grammar, in all standards for which it is prescribed except the fourth, among the class-subjects. The falling off is not serious, taking into consideration the unusually adverse circumstances of the past year: neither is it general in the district. An examination of the details for each school will show that some schools far exceed the average given in the summary in all or most of the subjects.

The Order in Council excusing girls from geometrical drawing was promulgated too late to afford any relief this year, as the examinations were half over when it reached this district. Had it been notified at the beginning of the school year the falling off in the results this year would probably have been considerably less than it is.

I am pleased to be able again to report favourably on some of our small aided schools, several of which have passed all the scholars presented. These little schools enjoy one very great advantage over ordinary schools in having an absolutely regular attendance; and when to this are added the efforts of really skilful, conscientious, and energetic teachers, supported by the authority of parents alive to a sense of their responsibilities and to the importance of making the most of the advantages they have secured for their children, it is not surprising that a large measure of success should be the result.

I shall now offer a few remarks upon some of the more important subjects as taught in our schools.

*Reading* on the whole is fairly well, and in some schools admirably, taught. As a rule it is fluent, correct, and given with a reasonable amount of expression in the upper classes; and in the lower standards the subject-matter is generally understood.

Of *Recitation* I cannot speak quite so favourably. In some cases the pieces learned were “few and short,” nor did quality compensate for lack of quantity. Want of time, and the very meagre and unsatisfactory selections given in the reading-books, are, with some justice, urged in extenuation of the fault. As regards the latter objection, I have expressed my willingness to take recitations from any source chosen by the teacher, provided that they are suited to the ages and intelligence of the scholars.

The want of a second reading-book has frequently been pointed out, and would have been supplied long since but for the objection so often urged, that parents cannot afford so many books. This objection might be met by the Board supplying each school with one set of books for use only in school as reading-books. Two or three different sets might be obtained, and if carefully used these might be interchanged from time to time, thus giving all the schools the benefit of a greater variety of reading matter than could be afforded in any other way at so comparatively small a cost. The only obstacle to the immediate adoption of this plan is the financial one, which I hope will not prove insurmountable.

*Spelling and Dictation*.—Seventy-nine per cent. of passes in this subject does not seem at first sight very satisfactory, but when the nature of the tests employed is explained it will, I think, be admitted that the results are little, if any, less satisfactory than those in reading and writing. In the four lower standards the test consisted of twenty words taken from the reading-book in use, with the addition in Standards III. and IV. of some half-dozen lines of dictation. The pieces given for dictation in Standards IV., V., and VI. were all “unseen” passages from books similar to those in use in the several standards, and longer than the dictation tests of the lower standards. Twenty-four words were also given in Standard V., and thirty in Standard VI., these being taken from the reading-book in use.

*Writing* is well taught at nearly all our schools; some of them present almost faultless copy-books for inspection. A preference is becoming manifest for the perpendicular style of writing, which certainly presents several advantages; and some teachers have asked me to supply “upright” copy-books. While not wishing to offer any objection to their introduction I am convinced that it matters little what copy-book is used—it is the teacher, not the book, that really makes the good writer. The most successful teachers of writing I know of are those whose own writing—especially on the blackboard—is neat, well shaped, and easily legible. Teachers sometimes forget that they are virtually “setting copies” every time they write anything on the blackboard, and that if they do this in a careless, slovenly, half-legible style they cannot expect their scholars to attach much importance to qualities their teacher seems to think unnecessary. The blackboard is before the eyes of the children all day—their copy-books for half an hour.