

in giving the additional practice in reading which is so much required. In these old books the matter will be new for the pupils, and it is practice in reading new matter, not in re-reading familiar lessons till they are almost, if not altogether, known by rote, that will give the power of reading which the teacher must aim at cultivating. In one or two schools the lower standards have used two Readers during the year, the spelling test at examination being confined to one of the books. When the custom of having two or even three reading-books in every class becomes general, the advantage of this wider range of reading will be remarked in every subject that makes a demand on the intelligence of the scholars.

A great improvement has been brought about in handwriting during the past year. Those teachers who had introduced the "upright" style had taken special pains with this subject so that the results might justify their choice, and their efforts generally met with a commendable measure of success. Some who still adhered to the "sloping" style felt themselves on their mettle to show what their scholars could do; and the spirit of emulation thus aroused has been stimulating and far-reaching in its effects. It is a pity that every teacher has not felt its influence, for the advance which has been shown to be possible in so many schools will be followed by a demand for a higher degree of proficiency in all.

The test-cards used in arithmetic were again those issued by the Education Department. In Standard III. 83 children out of every 100 were right with a sufficient number of sums to pass in this subject, and a good proportion of the 83 had every sum right. In Standard IV. the percentage of those that passed fell to 72; and it was lower in Standards V. and VI. I think the requirements of many of the cards in Standards V. and VI. were in excess of what could fairly be expected from children of ordinary intelligence at thirteen and fourteen years of age, unless we are prepared to allow the teaching of arithmetic to occupy such a position in the curriculum as will make an adequate treatment of the other subjects an impossibility. If the test is generally regarded as too high, a feeling of hopelessness will be engendered which will dull the edge of industry, and damp the ardour of those whose best efforts during the year appear to end in failure. Complaints, which were not groundless, were rife as to the unevenness in the test in Standards V. and VI. To import the element of chance into what should be as nearly as possible a uniform trial of the skill of the teachers and the attainments of the scholars must have pernicious effects. It may happen that the most competent teachers find their year's labour apparently of little value when one of the stiffest cards of the series falls to the lot of their children; and, whatever sort of card the less skilful teacher's class has to negotiate, if success does not come he has an excuse ready to hand in the alleged unevenness of the test. We have all degrees of competency among our teachers, and with fairly-adjusted cards we should be able to arrive at a proximate estimate of their strength.

So far as the other subjects of instruction are concerned, I think we have good grounds for being fairly satisfied with their treatment generally. The quality of the work in the list of subjects that go to make up the full round of "pass," "class," and "additional" subjects varies greatly, but the good preponderates. The teachers as a body are earnest and capable, and give their best energies to their work. I have almost invariably found the children honest workers, respectful and pleasant to deal with in their classes, and in an increasing number of schools not wanting in those marks of politeness out of doors that give token of the spread of gentle manners.

I have, &c.,

JAMES GIBSON GOW, M.A., Inspector.

The Chairman, Education Board, South Canterbury.

OTAGO.

SIR,—

We have the honour to submit the following report on the schools of the Otago Education District for the year 1896.

Except the school beyond Lake Wanaka, all the schools of the district were examined and most of them were inspected within the year. Forty schools which were not examined in 1895 were examined early in 1896, and again towards the end of the year. By the second examination these schools were brought into line with the others, and their scholars received the opportunity, to which they were entitled, of passing upwards in the standards. Though the second examination was held within ten months of the first, the results obtained by most of the schools were of a creditable character.

The following table summarises the examination results gained by the schools in the pass-subjects:—

TABLE I.

Classes.				Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age.
Above Standard VI.				585	Yrs. mos.
Standard VI.				1,510	1,483	1,361	13 10
" V.				2,217	2,163	1,824	12 11
" IV.				2,946	2,875	2,361	12 0
" III.				2,962	2,881	2,517	11 0
" II.				2,769	2,731	2,629	9 9
" I.				2,599	2,575	2,525	9 1
Preparatory				6,792
Totals 1896				22,380	14,708	13,217	11 5*
Totals 1895				21,158	13,728	12,554	11 6½*

* Mean of average ages.