

We have lately amended the science syllabus, and adopted more suitable text-books for chemistry and botany. The programme is extended by the introduction of domestic economy in conjunction with physiology, the combination forming a course especially intended for classes of girls in large schools. Longmans' "Domestic Economy Readers" are now very largely used as class-books by the girls, and Blackie's "Young Chemists" by the boys; and this arrangement, if carried out with necessary experiments, appears calculated to lead to still further improvements in the teaching of science. The chemistry taught in all our large schools, and the domestic economy taught in the Clyde Quay School, are very satisfactory. Science without experiment is nothing; and the more pupils can perform experiments themselves in any subject, the more scientific the instruction. As one or two large schools, including Mount Cook Girls' and Thorndon, have so far attempted to teach domestic economy without experiments, we wish to point out that the little knowledge of cooking at present required can be taught with the help of a kerosene stove and a few accessories, costing about £1. By adding to this a small oven, the whole programme can be covered.

Manual instruction in the use of tools and in wood-carving is carried on at the Technical School, Wellington, at Mauriceville West, and at Paraparaumu. Mr. Joplin at Mauriceville devotes his skill and energy to a class which has worked with keen interest and great success.

The passes in scale and model drawing this year were less in number than those of the previous year, but there was an increase of those in freehand and geometry. This does not necessarily indicate any falling-off in the work; and, as a matter of fact, we find the certificates now held by the children, which include former passes, are greater in numbers than they have ever been. The following table shows the late examination results:—

| | | | Freehand. | Geometry. | Scale. | Model. |
|------|-----|-----|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| 1896 | ... | ... | 819 | 1,063 | 1,006 | 418 |
| 1897 | ... | ... | 962 | 1,177 | 848 | 380 |

We notice from the reports of other Inspectors that there is a general expression of opinion that the syllabus needs amendment in some particulars, and in this we concur. In late reports we have pointed out the need of an amended arithmetic course, and in our leaflets issued last year such a course was sketched out. We also agree with the Canterbury Inspectors that a modification of the grammar syllabus is necessary; although we are of opinion the change should not altogether follow the form suggested. Whilst we are more than doubtful as to the wisdom of the proposal to make geography a class-subject, we think the geography syllabus might be made more useful and interesting. And further, we have always advocated the adoption of a seventh standard, and practically made one, by re-examining all children who have previously passed Standard VI. in harder work. There are now 392 pupils attending school in the class above Standard VI., and perhaps as many more attended a considerable part of the year after passing Standard VI. If Standard VII. were instituted, then all these pupils would have more incentive to work, and more inducement to remain at school, for most of them are only thirteen or fourteen years of age.

As this district was the first by nearly two years to introduce the standard system into the colony in 1874, and as we have carefully watched the working of the system from the start, it may not be out of place if we suggest that the time has come for considerable modifications in the method of promotion, which, as now carried out with a complex syllabus, involves too much waste of energy on the part of the Inspectors. Their time is now wholly taken up in passing candidates from standard to standard, and the much more important office of overseeing is being set aside. We know the standards have been most useful in bringing school work into system; but now that is fairly accomplished, we contend the standard system is only useful in so far as it may enable a teacher to classify his scholars according to that recognised standard, and suggest to him what is the broad outline of his work. If the promotion of the scholars is left to the head-teacher, then his scope of work is enlarged, and he works with greater freedom, throws into his work more individuality, and can afford to give his class work, as well as his standard work in all subjects, equally fair consideration. It will, of course, be always necessary for an Inspector to satisfy himself that the promotions made by the head-teacher are deserved; and the Inspector would probably always re-examine in Standard V. and Standard VII., assuming that Standard V. be the standard for exemption, and Standard VII. the highest. He would also check some portion of the other passes; and if he had occasion to suspect that promotions had not been earned, it would be his duty to re-examine the whole school. But in a large district like this, in which there is no training-school for teachers, and, when an inspection of a school may be of so much use in inquiry into methods of work, discipline, the staff, accommodation, and more especially in practical teaching, it is a work of supererogation to examine for promotion only, when that can be well done by the head-teachers. The examination of a school for promotion in standards should be made as the present examination in Standards I. and II. is now made, about a week before the date of the Inspector's visit, and the results should not be declared until they are approved by the Inspector. With this proviso, there is no reason to our minds why the promotion in standards should not be left to the head-teachers. In Britain, the Department of Education have gone even further than this, standards are practically abolished, and the whole work of the Inspector is in overseeing, testing here and there the teacher's methods, and making suggestions as to improved methods of work or as to school requirements. It is contended that the schools profit more by the assistance given at the inspection than they did by the previous examinations; and the teachers impress their own individuality more upon their work, and are afforded greater scope for their energies.

We have, &c.,

ROBERT LEE,
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The Chairman, Wellington Education Board.