

## CLASS-SUBJECTS: COMPARISON OF SCHOOL GROUPS (2).

| Subject.                   | Total Number of Schools. | Number of Schools in which Subject was valued highest. | Number of Schools receiving Mark 50 per Cent. and upwards. | Number of Schools receiving 50 per Cent. and over. |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                            |                          |  |  | Town Schools (28).                                 | Of Intermediate size (79). | Single-handed Schools (93). |
| Grammar ... ..             | 198                      | 49   | 63   | 10   | 26                         | 27                          |
| History ... ..             | 198                      | 85   | 102  | 23   | 42                         | 37                          |
| Geography (S. II. only)    | 188                      | ...  | 161  | 27   | 78                         | 56                          |
| Science and object lessons | 200                      | 91   | 107  | 25   | 56                         | 26                          |
| Mental arithmetic ...      | 200                      | 30   | 43   | 12   | 19                         | 12                          |

NOTE.—(a.) A town school is taken to be one with at least three adult or certificated teachers employed in it. In defining "single-handed" schools a sewing-mistress is not reckoned. (b.) In reckoning highest value geography is not included, as it is a class-subject in Standard II. only. In twelve single-handed schools there was no Standard II. class, and consequently no entry for geography as a class-subject.

Among the subjects of instruction in our schools, reading, arithmetic, and composition, in virtue of their importance, naturally take a leading place. The last subject we have already dealt with in connection with grammar (and incidentally with geography) in a memorandum recently forwarded by the Board for the information of the Hon. the Minister. We there advocated a return to the older practice of treating grammar and composition as a single pass-subject, but with a programme in grammar greatly modified on lines suggested, and we trust that the Department of Education—since we by no means stand alone in the matter among the Inspectors of the colony—will see its way to entertain favourably the opinions expressed. Meanwhile, so far as the existing syllabus of instruction will permit, we purpose adjusting our examinations in grammar to the suggested modifications.

On the subject of reading we have little to record beyond a general impression that this feature is improving. In point of "comprehension," too, we think we can recognise an advance, though the progress made in this respect against opposing obstacles may be but slow. When the new readers recently authorised come into use, "comprehension" must, with the better explanations provided, and with less to comprehend, prove much more generally satisfactory. With the introduction of shorter readers in the upper classes we trust the necessity of extending by means of supplementary books the amount of reading covered in a year will be kept fully in view, and we earnestly urge parents and School Committees to support the teachers in any effort they may make in this direction. For ourselves, where one reader only is used, we shall find it necessary to be a little stricter in regard to the reading and spelling than we should otherwise be, though we are not yet prepared to go the length of substituting in such cases an unseen book for examination purposes, as has already been done, with success, we believe, in another large district.

In arithmetic the principal tests used in Standards III. to VI. during the last three or four years have been those issued by the Department of Education in the interests of a uniform standard throughout the colony. The tests supplied during the past year have been much more even in character than before, and the sums have generally been recognised as of an improved type. In the Fifth and Sixth Standards, however, and especially in the Fifth, the arithmetic has not been well done in quite a number of schools. In such cases it has at times been very difficult to see why the pupils should not have made more successful attempts, for repeatedly quite legitimate sums of a typical character, of which numbers of specimens must have been worked throughout the year, proved to be stumbling-blocks. The defect has arisen, we believe, as much from limitations of intelligence as from any other source, and we can scarcely be far wrong in saying that the more practical the illustrations of the application of arithmetic to commercial dealings have been, the more the limits of intelligence and experience have made themselves evident. Up to the Fourth Standard the child passes in the subject on work that is too purely mechanical in character, and even in that respect with too much facility as regards Standard III.: his mental training is consequently found insufficient when he reaches a higher stage at which nearly every example entails more or less of a process of thought. In Standard IV. the balance might probably with advantage incline more in the direction of the concrete as against purely mechanical processes involving a good deal of figuring; in Standard III. there is good reason to believe that a harder test would be fully appreciated by teachers, as enabling Inspectors to make a better classification of their children. On mental arithmetic we should be glad to see greater stress laid, in schools at least of the larger size, as we are convinced much more may be made of the advantages the practice affords than is generally presented to our notice. In very small schools, where half an hour daily of direct teaching in arithmetic, distributed over several classes, is often all that the time-table will permit, not much in this direction can be expected.

Writing in the schools is a subject that occasions generally little trouble to teacher or Inspector. It is usually good enough to merit readily a "pass," but we are afraid that very seldom is real excellence attained. There has been growing up too much of a laxity of notions as to posture and method of holding the pen, the result partly of a general unsettling of ideas as to the type to which good writing should conform, and partly of a reluctance to enforce a constraint when the natural tendency is not in the required direction. In the relation of writing to drawing we have frequently reason to wish that the essential difference in the use of a single-pointed instrument, the pencil, and of a double-pointed instrument, the pen, were better appreciated. In