

In many schools the singing was wanting in taste. Not much work had been done, and insufficient attention had been given to voice-training. In some the subject had, we fear, been neglected during a considerable portion of the year. Of incidental singing—a verse or two of a song two or three times a day to relieve the monotony of the literary work—there had been very little, and a similar remark applies to physical exercises.

The needlework continues to reflect great credit upon the female teachers.

In the majority of the schools the discipline, tone, and manners were distinctly good.

We have, &c.,

P. GOYEN,	} Inspectors.
W. S. FITZGERALD,	
C. R. RICHARDSON,	
C. R. BOSSENCE,	

The Secretary, Education Board, Otago.

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Invercargill, 31st January, 1898.

We have the honour to present our report on the primary schools of this district for the year ended the 31st December, 1897.

During the latter half of the year all the schools were examined, and during the earlier half, but for accidents of weather and other contingencies, all would also have been inspected. We believe that from end to end of the district the teachers are, with but few exceptions, doing their work heartily and well, and that, if a sufficient criterion be afforded by what we see during our visits of inspection and examination, there is in the schools generally a well-marked rise in the standard of efficiency. As is customary, we submit some remarks on the subjects of instruction.

Reading.—In our last year's report we had something to say of the place and function of reading in primary instruction. This matter, the Board will be pleased to know, is exercising the minds of teachers, several of whom have taken the initiative in the direction of improvement by introducing into their schools a much wider range of suitable literature than has hitherto been considered adequate. At the recent examination of the town schools members of two large classes were given an unseen test in reading, with surprisingly good results. On inquiry we found that the pupils had read at least twice as much as other pupils ostensibly at the same stage of advancement. Next to the school itself the most powerful agency for the dissemination of a love of reading is the school library, an institution that the Board might, by the grant of a small subsidy, very well take directly under its own wing.

Writing.—The upright system of handwriting has been adopted in several schools, but, except as to slate-writing in the lower classes, with no very promising result. The style most in favour conforms to the golden mean in the matter of slope, and is simple, clear, bold, and well proportioned. Such a style affords ample scope for the instillation of correct principles, and for the acquirement of those habits which should be second nature to the pupil when, in early manhood, he develops his characteristic "hand."

Spelling.—This subject is, on the whole, well taught. Much, however, remains to be done in the way of word-building in the lower classes. Young teachers especially can hardly pay too much heed to this phase of the teaching of reading and spelling. The word-building exercise produces in the minds of young children the idea of uniformity, and calls into requisition two qualifications eminently to be desired in the young teacher—readiness of resource, and freedom in the use of the blackboard.

Arithmetic.—Arithmetic continues to hold a high place in the estimation of the majority of the teachers, who appear thoroughly to realise its power as an instrument of mental discipline, and its serviceableness in the computations incident to every-day life. Absence of method in the setting-out of sums is happily becoming a thing of the past: where it remains, it is an indication that the teacher needs to reconsider the elements of his profession. The arithmetic test-cards supplied by the Education Department met with the general approval of the teachers, some of whom, however, thought the tests for Standard III. too easy. In these respects we are in entire agreement with the teachers.

Composition.—On the whole, we have reason to be satisfied with the teaching of this subject. The exercises done at the annual examinations were uniformly good, both as to matter and as to form. The fruits of the teachers' labour in the teaching of this subject were very apparent in the large number of excellent essays written at the recent scholarship examination. The function of composition in the school is twofold. Primarily taught as a means of enabling the pupils to put into intelligible shape their thoughts on any given subject, it becomes in the hands of a skilful teacher the means also of enabling them to gather up and put into harmonious relation portions of knowledge gained from many different sources. So far as the teacher is successful in systematizing and co-ordinating knowledge just so far will intelligence become a characteristic attribute of his pupils.

Drawing.—We have hitherto generally determined a pupil's claim to a pass in this subject by an inspection of his year's work so far as it has been embodied in his drawing-book. For the future, we propose to set at the annual examination a practical test for every class in the school.

Geography.—Manifest improvement has been made in the teaching of this subject, and in their methods of treating it many teachers leave little to be desired. To the mere number of places dealt with we do not attach much importance, but we hold it to be of vital moment that each place brought under the pupil's notice should be so studied and reviewed as to become a centre round which is aggregated a cluster of interesting facts and from which, through its environment, he can intelligently make his way to other regions of the world. It is difficult to understand the repugnance with which some teachers view this subject. Their aversion is perhaps the result of a pitifully wrong point of view; the view, namely, that the study of geography is a senseless