

At the beginning of the present year four of the Inspectors took charge of fresh districts, and their opinions about the work they have seen are of the nature of absolute judgments rather than estimates of progress. Mr. Purdie has been left in charge of the Northern district, which he took over not long ago.

In the larger schools the teaching in general reaches a high level of efficiency, and there are hardly any in which it is not satisfactory. At the Thames and the larger goldfield centres very satisfactory progress has been made. In the rural districts the state of the instruction varies much from school to school, but it is in the main satisfactory, and in a considerable number of cases efficient. The list of schools that are considered unsatisfactory by the Inspectors also grows smaller, though defects of professional training, the necessity for employing quite a large number of raw and inexperienced teachers, and the evil effects of frequent changes of teachers, must for some years to come keep a number of the smaller schools on the borderland of inefficiency.

The promotion of pupils in the larger schools is being made with due discretion and sound judgment, and most of the Inspectors' examination reports express satisfaction with the promotions and classification in all classes of schools. Mr. Grierson (South-Central district) adverts specially to this subject, and expresses the opinion that pupils in the lower classes are being pushed on too quickly and before they have gained a sufficiently firm grounding in the work of the classes from which they have been advanced. Improper classification thus frequently begins in the Standard I. class, and, as the promotions depend on the teachers, the evil once begun goes on year after year without any adequate check; for Inspectors cannot now directly control classification, while teachers of smaller schools are, he thinks, frequently too much alive to the presence of local opinion and parents' demands to check it themselves. None of the other Inspectors make any complaint on this score. Proper classification is, however, of vital importance, for where pupils in the lower classes are promoted before they are fit the evil effects of the blunder will often continue throughout their school life, and make their instruction uninteresting and discouraging to themselves and a source of worry and disappointment to all concerned. If we are to educate our pupils they must at every stage be readily able to assimilate the teaching given thereat; failing this condition we may cram, but we cannot educate. In dealing with promotions teachers must realise that they are intrusted with a very great and onerous responsibility, and that they will prove unworthy of their office if they fail to exercise it wisely. They can, I feel sure, rely on the steady support of the Board and the Inspectors in dealing with promotions in a firm and prudent spirit.

The teaching of reading is in general satisfactory, and in a large number of the most important schools it is good. In a small number it is backward, and in a few it even lacks fluency. Want of expression is still too common, and is specially remarked by Mr. Grierson and Mr. Mulgan (Southern and North Wairoa districts). The former considers that pattern followed by simultaneous reading is excessively used in his district. Teachers have little excuse for this abuse, for the limitations to which the use of pattern and simultaneous reading is liable have been repeatedly dwelt on in former reports to the Board. If pupils are properly classified and really fit for the reading-books on which they are engaged, this method should be but sparingly used or needed. Original power of reading comes only from much practice in reading without help or prompting, or at least with as little of these as possible. Inexperienced teachers must study to exercise a wise and firm restraint on their first impulses to help scholars over difficulties. To help unwisely or prematurely is to impair or, it may be, to destroy the educative effects which only self-help and original effort on the pupil's part can secure. Mere imitation is little more than parrot-work; we must often use it as a starting point, but the true teacher, using it as little and for as short a time as he can, rises above its aid and works habitually on a higher and more intelligent level, training the opening mind to grow and gain strength and flexibility by the daily exercise of its native powers. How far help and prompting are needed each teacher must judge for himself; but he can rest assured that if their ministration is habitually given or habitually needed he is cramming and not teaching, and that the classification of his pupils is radically unsound.

The comprehension of the language and subject-matter of the reading lessons shows some improvement, but has still much leeway to make up. In most schools this matter receives a good deal of attention, but the treatment frequently lacks skill, and is sometimes inaccurate and superficial. In the "Suggestions for the Guidance of Teachers," circulated by authority of the Board, I have explained in some detail how this subject may be dealt with. The need of habitual preparatory study of reading lessons both by teachers and by pupils, and the importance of habitually testing this preparation at the opening of each reading lesson, are there insisted on, and there is still occasion to insist on them. In the course of the year I have not found these Suggestions as carefully attended to as I could wish. The blackboard, moreover, is insufficiently used for noting points of difficulty with a view to testing whether their explanation has been assimilated. The neglect of such testing, that can be readily carried out orally, or preferably by writing on slates or paper, leads teachers and pupils to flatter themselves that they have dealt adequately with many a difficulty that is but vaguely and imperfectly apprehended or not understood at all. Systematic revisal questioning, verifying and verifying again, and nothing else, will truly gauge the assimilation of the teaching of this department of English. Were this more regularly used far fewer teachers would have occasion to offer lame excuses for the too frequent failure of their pupils to explain phrases and short passages of ordinary difficulty in the class reading-books. To secure satisfactory results, oral explanations must here be supplemented by frequent explanations in writing, and these must be carefully examined, and, if faulty, effectually criticized, so that the pupils will benefit by the criticisms.

Mr. Purdie thinks the written tests in explanation now given in the higher classes "have considerably aided in producing the improvement" he has noticed in his district. Mr. Crowe (South-eastern district) finds oral explanation "good" and written "moderate." Mr. Mulgan finds "a considerable number of schools where poorly expressed and inaccurate explanations are frequently