

Writing still improves, though slowly; it is good in a large number of schools of all grades. Pen-holding and a proper posture receive more careful and vigilant attention; but a good many teachers either think attention to these details of trifling importance or fail to see that they have not the influence with their pupils that is needed for securing constant attention to them. I have good authority for saying that in writing and in neat and methodical arrangement the papers done by the Auckland pupils at the recent National Scholarship Examination were not surpassed by those of any other district of the colony.

Freehand drawing is, on the whole, very satisfactorily taught, and in many schools the exercises are well done. In the latter a higher type of exercise than that illustrated in the text-books authorised by the Minister is invariably undertaken, and proves much more interesting and stimulating. The geometrical exercises, the scale drawing, and the solid geometry are also in general satisfactory, more especially in the larger schools. I am of opinion that School Committees should be required to provide a supply of suitable sheets of drawing-paper, so that the tests in drawing at the Inspector's examinations might be done on paper in the Inspector's presence, and I would recommend the Board to take action accordingly. This plan has been followed in some parts of the colony for several years past with great advantage. Brush drawing has been taken up in some of the larger schools and occasionally in smaller ones, and in general fair initial work is being done. Books containing definite suitable courses of work for the guidance of teachers, and for use by the pupils in at least the smaller schools, would be of service in connection with this new form of drawing and colour-work.

In arithmetic good and frequently excellent work has been done in Standard III. and the lower classes. In the upper classes little or no improvement can be noted, and there are in some schools indications that the teaching of it in Standards V. and VI. is going back. In particular, problems are less intelligently dealt with than in the past. This is no doubt partly due to the very easy examination tests given of late years by the Department in Standard III. and upwards, and especially in Standards III., IV., and V. It is, however, partly due to faults of teaching, chiefly to insufficient blackboard drill in explanatory work, and to the giving of injudicious or unnecessary assistance in solving problems and typical examples. One cannot say with confidence what teachers usually do, but when Inspectors are about it is very common for them to keep their classes continually occupied in working sets of examples on slates, while they themselves move about the desks criticizing or giving helpful hints. To devote much of their time to this sort of work is surely to use it to little purpose. It were far better did they dedicate most of the time thus spent to taking a section of a large class, or, where classes are small, the whole of a small class, at the blackboard, eliciting and noting fully and precisely the various steps and the reasons for them. For desk supervision, a few minutes stolen now and then from the board drill, and a checking of answers at the close of the time, would amply suffice. When examples have been carefully worked out at the board, several pupils should be required to state concisely the steps taken in doing them. Were the procedure here recommended more generally adopted, and were pupils further trained in explaining fully how they would work out examples read out from their class-books, I have little doubt that we should secure a greater power in dealing with problems, and a better mental discipline as well. The class-books in arithmetic in general use do not answer our purpose as well as could be wished. They contain far too many examples, and it is probably the attempt to get over all of these that leads to the excessive amount of desk-work above referred to. In the higher rules the numbers employed in the examples are too often large and unwieldy, so that their working becomes primarily a tax on accuracy, and the training in reasoning and in clear methodical statement lapses into the background. It is to be hoped that the books prepared in connection with the new syllabus will avoid the fault of superfluity of matter as well as of unnecessary length and complexity in working. Drill in applying the simple process of arithmetic is best got by suitable examples in the simple and compound rules (money). In all the higher rules where reasoning and interpreting conditions form the chief difficulty of the exercises, simple easily managed examples are desirable, when much of the working could and should be done mentally.

As to the teaching of composition, Mr. Grierson notes a decided improvement in the schools of his district (the Southern). The other Inspectors find it on the whole satisfactory. In most schools little fault is to be found with the grammatical accuracy of the exercises, or the division of the matter into sentences, but in fullness and natural sequence of suitable matter, in clearness and force of statement, and in alternation of shorter and longer sentences there is still much room for progress. The lack of intelligence that shows itself in connection with the explanation of the language and matter of the reading lessons produces its effect in the sphere of composition also, and, of course, it is not a favourable one. It seems to me that many of our teachers have not given sufficiently serious thought to their methods of teaching this subject, and that they do not adequately avail themselves of the variety of exercises that are open to use. In Standard IV., for example, reproducing a story read to a class, giving in brief the substance of a lesson from the reading-books or the substance of a poem from the same, writing an exercise from brief heads supplied on the blackboard, or one without heads on some familiar subject, telling the story of a picture shown, describing an experiment shown in science, &c., are all open for a teacher to use, but only two or three of these types of exercises are commonly turned to account. In Standards V. and VI. in particular a good training in oral composition might be given by answering questions on the matter of the reading lessons, and giving in other simple language the substance of paragraphs from the same. The discipline may be a very valuable one, and it would pay our teachers to give it the large amount of attention that it receives in the elementary schools of the Mother-land. Mr. Mulgan agrees with me in tracing the weakness in composition of our older pupils to faults of teaching. This is what he says: "That we do not in Standard VI. more frequently meet with exercises distinguished by strength and clearness points, I think, to teaching which demands no