

so frequently as in New Zealand, definite help and guidance from the Central Department in these studies would be of high value, and I trust it will yet be made available.

In most of the Australian States an education journal or gazette is issued by the Department of Education, in which helpful and suggestive papers on many subjects of interest to teachers are published. Something of the same nature might, I think, be undertaken by our Central Department with no small advantage to the cause of education. It is true that the administration of elementary education is much more centralised in the Commonwealth than it is with us, but this difference does not seriously affect the matter under consideration.

During 1905 the public schools have in the main fully maintained the satisfactory level of efficiency reached in the last few years. In the large schools, with some few exceptions partly arising from unfavourable conditions of a permanent nature, sound work and satisfactory progress continue to be the rule, and the same can be affirmed of the vast majority of the schools with a staff of two or more teachers. The sole-teacher schools, though necessarily placed in less favourable circumstances, are in general satisfactorily taught, and a very considerable number of them are highly efficient. As the Inspectors have this year taken charge of new districts, they have had a good opportunity of recognising any general advance that may have been made since they were last conversant with the work of the schools again placed under their supervision. Mr. Grierson has thus renewed his acquaintance with the schools of the northern district, long reckoned a rather backward one in educational efficiency; and it is gratifying to find him able to point to a marked general advance in the work of the schools during the six years that he has been employed elsewhere. Bearing in mind the decidedly unfavourable conditions under which many of the schools are taught, he "cannot but feel admiration for the results achieved by the large majority of the teachers in the backblocks of our 'Never-never Land.'" The like praise can, doubtless, be truly given to a large number of the outlying schools in the other districts. The improvement noted by Mr. Grierson reflects great credit on the teachers of the far north, and on Mr. Purdie, who has worked earnestly among them for some years past.

The wider course of reading now used in the lower classes of nearly all our schools has greatly improved the readiness and fluency with which new lessons are dealt with, and has made the teaching of reading a more engaging exercise for both teachers and pupils. In a considerable number of schools of all grades I this year heard most or all of the standard classes read from detached pages of books not previously seen, but well within the range of their knowledge, and I was agreeably surprised by the fluency and accuracy of the pupils' performance. Some years ago the proposal to considerably enlarge the course of reading in the lower classes by using additional appropriate Readers was regarded with no small alarm by a large body of teachers, but few now fail to recognise the great benefit that has accrued from this policy, and some have desired authority to use a larger number of reading-books than appeared in the last list authorised by the Board.

In the Sixth Standard class in all schools the pupils have had to read passages from books not previously read, and the marks given were awarded on this test. Only a comparatively small number of pupils did poorly, the majority did satisfactorily, and a good many, in all classes of schools, read well. In the schools of the northern district Mr. Grierson reports that he "was well satisfied with the reading by Standard VI of previously unseen passages." Mr. Mulgan's experience was less favourable. Writing of the schools of the eastern district, he says, "In very few schools are pupils of the upper classes able to read with feeling and intelligence. This applies more especially to the previously unseen test in Standard VI, where ability to give a fluent and expressive rendering of the passage selected was very seldom seen. A 'pass' in this subject unfortunately does not in any degree depend on a knowledge of the meaning of the passage read, as tested by oral and written questions; hence the necessity of insisting on something more than the mere mechanical utterance of sounds. The main purpose of teaching reading is to enable pupils when they have left school to master the contents of written matter for their own information, and our chief efforts should be directed to this end." He suggests, further, that previously unseen passages should be used to test the reading of all classes, and points out that an examination of this nature would greatly tend "to discourage working up the class readers against the day of the annual visit." My own experiment, mentioned above, shows that there need be no difficulty in using a test of this kind in some or even all of the classes, at any rate in the smaller schools, and I believe it is quite practicable even in the largest. I would add that head teachers might well use the same plan at their later periodical examinations.

"In the lower classes," Mr. Goodwin (south central district) says, "the meaning of the language of the reading lessons is well understood," and this is true of the schools generally. It is less satisfactory in classes Standard IV to Standard VI, though in a considerable number it is well taught. Still, the comprehension of the language of all reading-lessons in the higher classes calls for more earnest attention from both teachers and pupils. Faithful preparatory study needs especially to be insisted on and to be tested daily, and pupils should be encouraged to ask their teachers for elucidation of their difficulties before the reading of a lesson is begun. In small schools some time might quite well be allowed for studying the language and thought of reading-lessons within school hours, provided the time is properly used.

The teaching of reading-lessons, it must be frankly allowed, is often a much more dismal and uninteresting business than it should be made. What interest can possibly attach to the "simultaneous reading" that has sometimes to be resorted to where undeserving pupils have been promoted into books they are unable to read? If the children were able to think the thoughts, as well as to utter the words, of the writer, all this might be easily changed, but really sound classification is an essential prerequisite. A skilful teacher of reading manages to invest the lessons with life and interest, and every teacher should resolutely strive to achieve this. Changes of reading-books every three or four years, and the use in each class of a variety of books sufficient to make the rereading of all but one short well-graded work unnecessary, would greatly help to make class-reading bright and stimulating. From