

Of the forty-six pupils in Standard VI present at our annual visit fourteen gained certificates of proficiency and twenty-four certificates of competency. The roll-number in these schools is decreasing. In 1897 it was 731, and since then it has steadily declined.

In our report last year we took some trouble to make clear the distinction between the two grades of certificates obtainable by pupils of the Sixth Standard, the higher certificate being now known as the certificate of proficiency and the lower as the certificate of competency. At the same time we drew attention to an amendment of the regulations defining the standard of attainment for the certificate of proficiency, the purpose of which was to raise the standard, and, as we anticipated, in consequence of this change the number of certificates of proficiency obtained under the new conditions has been very appreciably reduced. In 1905, out of 378 pupils examined in Standard VI, 235 gained certificates of proficiency and forty-eight certificates of competency, whereas during the past year, out of 398 pupils examined, 182 gained certificates of proficiency and 145 certificates of competency. It is hoped that those who have this year qualified for the certificate of proficiency will be better prepared to take full advantage of a course of instruction in the classes of the secondary schools or of the district high schools, in which the possession of this certificate entitles the holder to a free place.

Our classification of the schools, according to the degree of satisfaction with which they are fulfilling their proper functions, is as follows: Good to very good, twenty-one schools with 3,181 pupils; satisfactory, thirty-three schools with 1,401 pupils; fair, nineteen schools with 499 pupils; moderate, three schools with 68 pupils. Of a total of seventy-six schools examined, fifty-four with 4,582 pupils are in a satisfactory condition, the remaining twenty-two with 567 pupils ranking below satisfactory. On comparing this general estimate with that of last year we are pleased to report that it indicates a gratifying measure of improvement; and we affirm this in spite of the fact that the number of schools ranking below satisfactory seems sufficiently large to arrest attention and to demand an explanation. The schools in this group are nearly all sole-teacher schools; there has been great difficulty in procuring teachers for such schools; the teachers employed in them are in many cases uncertificated and usually of very limited experience; and in more than half the number there has been a change of teacher during the year.

As in past years we have found the majority of the pupils in the larger schools and in a fair number of the smaller schools able to read with fluency from the books they have used during the year. But with this fluency there was not always a corresponding degree of intelligence and expression. In a recent novel this is the description of the reading in a small country school: "The familiar sing-song monotony of the reading-lesson was gone, and in its place a real and vivid picturing of the scenes described or enacted. It was all simple, natural, and effective." We are told of this teacher that she was accustomed "to arrest the attention of the class with the question 'What is the author seeing?'" and "How does he try to show it to us?" Reading to her consisted in the ability to see what the author saw and the art of telling it, and to set forth with grace that thing in the author's words." This teacher had not been a pupil-teacher, a point worth pondering when we set ourselves to discover why we so seldom find the reading natural and effective and why the children so often fail to set forth with grace what the author has written. Wherever it is the custom to keep the children reading and re-reading from one or two books during the year till all the freshness and interest of the lessons have been threshed out, we shall look in vain for the development of the finer qualities of reading. Nor shall we be likely to awaken in the children the desire to read for their own enjoyment, and so acquire that facility in silent reading which makes the companionship of books a never-failing pleasure and furnishes them with the key that opens all the treasure-houses of literature. It is simply astounding to find how great is the number of children in our schools who have read little or nothing beyond what they have been compelled to read in their school-books. Most Committees spend yearly very considerable sums on books to be given as prizes or as gifts to the children before they disperse for their summer holiday. The practice has much to recommend it; but if a little of this money were held in reserve to purchase for use in the school the story-book readers that are now specially published to suit the pupils at all stages of their course, we are convinced their action would be appreciated by the teachers and would be in the best interests of the children.

The state of matters with regard to most of the subjects of instruction varies so little from year to year that it is unnecessary to go into details in every annual report. We desire again, however, to impress upon the teachers the very great importance pertaining to one form of handwork that stands a chance of neglect in the alluring pursuit of newer devices for the cultivation of accuracy of hand and eye and for the development of intelligence through the special forms of exercise adopted. We refer to handwriting, the attainment of excellence in which must always be a matter of supreme concern in the primary school. We have some schools where excellent specimens of writing are produced, but we have no doubt that with more skilful methods and untiring supervision a very great improvement might be made in many schools, the teachers of which show too much complacency with work that in its production has cost little concentration of effort on the part either of teacher or of pupil, and in its result is devoid of any features of merit. We would also point out in connection with the programme of English as set forth in the syllabus that, simplified as the demands in grammar have been, teachers must not come to the conclusion that the teaching of grammar has now no place in the scheme of instruction. Treated in the right way it has a very real place, and rightly so, not only for the fine intellectual training it supplies, a most desirable thing in itself, but also for the indispensable aid it affords in composition or essay-writing in the case of those children who are unaccustomed either in the playground or in the home to the correct use of their mother-tongue.

Some form of handwork is now practised in the majority of our schools; in the lower classes plasticine-modelling, brush-drawing, paper-folding, and carton-work finding most favour, and in the upper classes cardboard-modelling and more advanced brush-work. The Board employs a specially qualified teacher of cookery for the training of the girls of the Fifth and Sixth Standards in the larger centres, and purposes appointing a second teacher to cope with the increased demand for such classes. An instructor in woodwork is also employed in conducting classes for the boys of the same standards.