

A comparison of the results of this table with those of the corresponding table for 1905 shows a slight advance in the compulsory and a slight decline in the additional subjects. As a general rule the junior classes, Standards I, II, and III, did well in most of their work; but, owing to too easy promotion from Standard IV to Standard V and from Standard V to Standard VI, there was in these classes too often a long tail of weaklings that reduced the efficiency mark by a grade. We have no desire to return to the old vogue—namely, classification and promotion on the results gained in the Inspector's examination; but we are sure that the transference of the classification from the Inspector to the teacher has not made for thoroughness of work in the senior classes, and thoroughness of work is of the greatest importance in education. It is, we think, certain that a considerable proportion of pupils promoted from Standard V to Standard VI would have profited greatly by another year's work in Standard V, and that many who obtained the proficiency certificate and passed on to the high schools would have profited by another year's work in Standard VI. The pupils we are now sending to the high schools are greatly inferior to those of the days when the only avenue to free places lay through scholarships and the winning of 50 per cent. of marks in the scholarship examinations. Those sent up last year were superior to those of the previous year; for the Department, very wisely in our opinion, raised the standard of the test for free places; but the standard set is still too low as a test for fitness to enter upon secondary work. This is especially the case in grammar and arithmetic.

The number of schools presenting a Standard VII class fell from seventy in 1905 to forty-six in 1906, a drop for which we cannot certainly account; but we may, we think, venture to suggest that it is in part owing to the circumstance that teachers receive little encouragement to induce children to remain at school after winning the proficiency certificate, for a Standard VII class adds a great deal of work and brings with it very inadequate remuneration. If they do work of the same kind and quality as that of the district high schools, they ought, in our opinion, to be paid at the same rate per pupil.

Of the forty-six classes referred to above, four were absent on examination day, and nine had been instructed only in Standard VI work. The following table shows our estimate of the efficiency of the remaining thirty-three: Very good, 5; good, 9; satisfactory, 10; fair, 7; weak, 2. It is probable that had the absent classes been examined they would have found themselves in the category "weak."

Head teachers are required by regulation to draw up schemes of work in all subjects for the several classes of their school, to examine the classes periodically, and to record their estimate of the work done in the period covered by the examination. This requirement they do not all comply with as fully as they should. Moreover, they do not exact from their assistants a sufficiently detailed record of the work done day by day or week by week. In most subjects they have been exempted from the tyranny of the syllabus, but they have not realised that the exemption has brought with it the corresponding responsibility of careful arrangement and co-ordination, not only of the work of each class, but also of the work and methods of each class with those of the classes above and below. It is to his scheme of work and his time-table that we look to discover a teacher's conception of his responsibilities in this sense.

We now proceed to make a few remarks on some of the subjects of instruction. Reading is generally fluent, accurate, and expressive, though not seldom marred by indistinctness and faulty vowel sounds. The remedy for these defects has more than once been suggested in our reports. In deference to the teaching of the old saw, "Take care of the consonants and the vowels will take care of themselves," teachers belabour the consonants and pay scant heed to the claims of the vowels. The saw does not, we venture to say, express the experience of any careful observer. It is the vowel sounds that constitute the spoken music of a language; and if the vowels are well attended to the consonants will give little trouble. Still, judged from its elocutionary side, the reading of the majority of the schools is, for children, distinctly good. It is the intellectual side that is, except in a minority of the schools, wanting in effective treatment. How to train the child to realise mentally the images symbolised by the words, that is the difficulty. In the images themselves there is, in nine cases out of ten, little or no difficulty; for they have, in some way more or less perfect, come within the child's personal experience. Symbolised by words of the market-place, they would be mentally realised at once as old friends. It is their literary draping that is new; but their draping is precisely the draping with which the child must become familiar if the chief purpose for which he learns to read is to be realised. The teacher can do much to lessen the difficulty of reading with mental vision by keeping constantly before his pupils the fact that in most cases the images are the images of things that have come within their experience; and he can lessen the difficulties of language by using in his intercourse with his pupils less of the language of the market-place and the nursery and more of the language of literature, which is at bottom only the better sort of speech answering to the better sort of thought and fancy, and is therefore precisely the thing we have to make part of the texture of the child's mind if he is to learn to express himself with clearness and accuracy, and read with profit and pleasure. Language is primarily spoken speech, and therefore the spoken word should precede the written. Due recognition of this ought to suggest what should be the language of intercourse in the schoolroom. Little is gained and much is lost by talking down to children.

In arithmetic the mere working of examples occupies too prominent a place, foundation-work receiving too scant attention even in the best schools. The result is that children learn by dint of practice to work difficult examples without gaining a firm grasp of principles and without receiving adequate training in appreciation of reasoning. The attainment of facility in working examples is, of course, a proper aim; but it should not be placed before training in thought and expression. Indeed, to do so is in the long run but to retard the progress of the pupils, for it does not give them power, does not train them to do for themselves in unfamiliar cases. The general laws of arithmetical operations can easily be so illustrated as to enable children to realise that, even when dealing with particular numbers, they are dealing with principles that are applicable to all numbers alike. In every subject it is the general that should be kept in view, and no treatment of a subject that does not make ideas its ultimate aim is worthy treatment. The little text-books used by the pupils suggest and contain a large amount of experimental work in weighing and measuring; but, strange to say, this is generally