

In forming our estimate of the general efficiency of the schools in the district we have had regard to the fact that the past year has been quite an exceptional one in the matter of sickness, which has affected both children and teachers. In many places epidemics of scarlet fever, whooping-cough, measles, and influenza have succeeded one another without intermission. The loss of time and the disorganization resulting from this have naturally affected the work of all schools, but more especially those where the children have long distances to come over bad roads. Taking these circumstances into consideration, we have classified the schools as—satisfactory to good, 117; fair, 31; inferior, 11. The latter schools belong chiefly to Grades 0 and 1, and in nine out of the eleven changes have been made in the management.

EXAMINATIONS.—In anticipation of the new regulations to be issued by the Education Department, we advised those schools examined after June to delay the majority of their promotions until the end of the year. In those schools examined in the early part of the year the case of the proficiency candidates who failed to come up to requirements at the annual visit was met by a supplementary examination which was held in December. This arrangement, though unsatisfactory in many ways, has, we hope, done something to bring all the schools of our district into line, and now, with a few exceptions, the new year's work is beginning in January, 1908. A reference to the number of proficiency certificates issued at the annual visit shows a decrease when compared with 1906, but this is counterbalanced by the number issued in December at the special examination. While on the subject of certificates we once more take the opportunity of advocating the substitution of a leaving certificate for the certificates of competency and proficiency of Standard VI. A leaving certificate granted by the Inspector in the ordinary course of school-inspection and after consultation with the teacher, would in a measure safeguard our elementary schools from the perfect fever of examination which at the end of the year appears to infect every educational institution in the country. The Inspector's examination for certificates of proficiency is, moreover, overlapped by the Department's examination for free places. At the December examinations for Junior National Scholarships and free places, there were over two hundred candidates from this district alone, practically all of whom had already been examined for free places at their own schools, and the majority of them within a few weeks. One or other of these examinations is certainly unnecessary. The educational systems of America and Germany are continually being held up as patterns of excellence, and if in these countries the step from the secondary school to the university even, is free from the examination incubus, surely in our case the child under fourteen years of age can be passed from his elementary to his secondary course without having to undergo any special test. If the Inspector and the teacher, with their personal knowledge of a child's work and capacity, are not competent to decide on his fitness or otherwise for a secondary course, then they are certainly not competent to direct and control his primary course. One of the arguments advanced in favour of the examination test for free places is that otherwise there would be a certain number of children receiving the benefit of free secondary education who would make no return to the State for the money they cost. We do not think that this idea is in consonance with the higher ideals of education, and in any case, considering the extreme complexity of the child-mind and the various lines along which it may develop, it is a bold thing to say that, because a child may not reach a certain arbitrary standard in such a subject as, say, arithmetic, he is therefore to be debarred from the advantages that secondary education may confer.

ENGLISH.—While we confidently assess the reading of our district as satisfactory, we feel that many teachers do not appreciate its importance as an index to the child's general culture. Mechanical accuracy—excellent in its way—occupies too prominent a position with both teacher and pupil, for we must remember that practical power is only a means of intellectual power. Purity of accent, correct phrasing and intonation that denote an intelligent grasp of the author's meaning, must be the most real indications of the teacher's influence and the literary atmosphere of the school. What we have to say here, of course, applies not only to reading, but also to recitation, and more particularly to the ordinary speech of the child. There is no fact so vital to the teacher's work, as the fact that the mind can only grow as it has the power to express itself, and further (as Professor Laurie says) "It is round the language learned at the mother's knee that the whole life of feeling, emotion, and thought gathers" and finds expression. In this connection the influence of the teacher must often be pitted against that of the home and the street—influences ever present, and in many cases dominant over others operating in the schoolroom. We would again impress upon some of our younger teachers the fact that example is better than precept. Coming to matters of detail, we must here refer to a reproach urged with a certain amount of justice against our schools—the need for purity of accent. Failure to attain it appears to us to be due mainly to the following faults: (1.) Slovenliness of speech, as shown in *usulu*, *yestideh*, *las*, *supprise*, &c. Such mistakes cannot be a noticeable feature in a well-disciplined school. (2.) Failure to appreciate the value of the common vowel-sounds—e.g., *moine*, *laig*, *teown* (and more recent developments), *ut* for *it*, *plasuz* for *places*. Careful phonetic drill in the lower standards is the only effective means of coping with these faults. This whole question is intimately connected with spelling, with which, so far as its mechanical accuracy is concerned, we are well satisfied. When we come, however, to consider its effect on enunciation we feel that its influence is practically nil. We are unconventional enough to look forward to the time when such reasonable measure of spelling-reform shall be brought about as will not only relieve the child of much useless drudgery, but will also make spelling what it ought to be—a powerful factor in teaching language, both spoken and written. Are we not too often indifferent to the troubles of the little ones struggling with the harassing contradictions between the spoken and written forms of the same words? Apart altogether from our own judgment in the matter, may we not accept the assurance of such authorities as Professor Skeat and Dr. Sweet that the old bogey of a dethroned etymology has lost its terrors; that reform, while it remorselessly prunes unauthorised interpolations and excrescences, will do more than anything else to lead us back to the "well of English undefiled." Arguments