

assembled. These central examinations commenced on the 25th November, and so far as the attendance of the pupils was concerned were completed on the 2nd December. The certificates obtained were issued to the successful candidates before the closing of the schools for the Christmas holidays. In order to bring the work to be done by each candidate within the compass of an ordinary school day, ten days previous to the commencement of the central examinations we sent out to every school that had candidates freehand drawing exercises to be copied by the pupils and returned to the Education Office. The teacher attached his certificate that the drawings were done in the specified time and that they were completed by the pupil without aid and without previous trial of the exercise. Each pupil was required to bring for our inspection at the central examination the drawing-books used during the year, showing the amount and quality of the drawing other than freehand that had been overtaken. With the subject of drawing thus disposed of, the pupils were able without pressure to do their English and arithmetic papers in the forenoon and their geography and dictation in the afternoon of the same day, the reading and recitation of each pupil being taken during the progress of the written work, but not in the presence of the other candidates. On coming forward to read, each candidate presented his drawing-books for inspection, and the marks assigned were taken into account when we afterwards came to assess the value of his freehand exercise. The examinations, conducted in this way for the first time, were carried through with the utmost smoothness, and we have to thank teachers, parents, and the local newspapers for their co-operation and support.

We received applications for examination from 365 candidates, of whom only five were absent. Of the 360 that presented themselves, 180 obtained certificates of proficiency, 113 satisfied the requirements for Standard VI certificates of competency, and 67 failed. At eight small schools that were at an inconvenient distance from any of the selected centres or to which our annual visit was paid within a few days of the date of the central examinations, we examined the Sixth Standard pupils as in former years. These schools had 13 pupils in Standard VI, of whom 1 was absent, 2 gained certificates of proficiency and 6 certificates of competency, and 4 failed. The total number of certificates of proficiency gained was 182, and of competency 119—that is, about 49 per cent. of the 372 pupils examined gained the higher qualification and 32 per cent. the lower.

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, 28 schools, with 3,561 pupils; satisfactory, 25 schools, with 989 pupils; fair, 18 schools, with 534 pupils; moderate, 5 schools, with 111 pupils. Of a total of 76 schools examined, 53, with 4,550 pupils, are in a satisfactory condition, the remaining 23 schools, with 645 pupils, ranking below satisfactory. The corresponding figures last year were 54 schools, with 4,582 pupils, and 22 schools, with 567 pupils. With two exceptions the schools that failed to reach the satisfactory stage are single-handed schools. This is the class of school in which we have very frequent changes of teachers, and for which when a vacancy occurs the Board has the greatest difficulty in finding suitable applicants. For recent appointments we are pleased to note that a better class of candidate has been offering. Young men and women who served in our schools as pupil-teachers are returning to the district after spending two years at a training college and are now seeking employment. With their special training and equipment they should be able to render valuable service, and we hope the small schools that have had to put up for too long a time with the untrained and uncertificated may receive a share of this service.

In passing under review the kind of work done in the most important subjects of the syllabus we have first to deal with reading. With regard to the reading of those we examined for Sixth Standard certificates we are pleased to report that it was on the whole very satisfactory. The pupils in general read with fluency and ease, and a good many, with clear insight and keen appreciation of the author's meaning, revealed qualities of tone and expression that made it a real pleasure to listen to them. If the larger schools are excepted, this estimate of the reading does not hold good to anything like the same extent in the middle and lower standards. In these we frequently find the pupils reading in a most laboured fashion, without enjoyment to themselves and with positive pain to the listeners. Apparently some teachers think the remedy for this is to keep the pupils pounding away at the same lessons till they are word-perfect in them and blind to everything else. Since a cure has not been effected in this way in spite of all the energy that has been expended to make it a success, surely some other plan might be adopted, one which some of our teachers, though at first doubting the expediency of the experiment, have tried and are now entirely satisfied with. They give the children much more to read than formerly, not hard stuff nor necessarily instructive stuff, but such tales, simply told and boldly illustrated, as have always been the delight of children. For a few shillings a year every school might have a fine collection for the children to use, not as a distasteful task, but as a pleasant recreation. There is a wide field for selection, as the great publishing-houses vie with one another in putting on the market bright and interesting books suited to pupils from the infant classes right up through all the standards. The wider reading-course we advocate would do much to clear away many of the difficulties that beset the children in comprehending the language of the prescribed "readers," for it is an every-day experience that the child that reads most gives least trouble to the teacher in this matter.

In most of our schools we have found the spelling and dictation exercises very well done. A falling-away from accuracy in this subject, when the test is confined to one of the reading-books in use, must always reflect on the teacher's discipline and industry.

At one of the meetings of the local institute a lively discussion took place with regard to the merits of the "upright" and the "sloping" styles of handwriting. The paper that gave rise to the discussion was prepared by a teacher of great experience who strongly favoured writing slightly sloping in character, and his views found favour with the majority. One of the minority, who favours the "upright" style, produced at the meeting a bundle of specimens done ten or twelve years ago in the school of the reader of the paper who was then an apostle of the "upright." He was struck, as all were, by their excellence, and frankly confessed that had the same standard of