

The examination of the pupils of Standard VI was conducted by us in the beginning of December, the examination being held at eight centres. In the case of two or three outlying schools, from which it would have been inconvenient to convey the candidates to any of the centres, special arrangements were made to allow of our examining for certificates at the inspection visit. Of the 382 pupils who entered for the examination 374 were present, 234 gained certificates of proficiency, and 88 gained certificates of competency, the percentage of passes for the higher certificate being 62·5 and for the lower 23·5. The corresponding percentages last year were 61 and 24. From the Roman Catholic schools 36 were presented, 35 were present, 20 gained certificates of proficiency, and 10 gained certificates of competency.

From the inception of the system of the central examination of Standard VI candidates the teachers have been almost unanimous in its favour; the scholars themselves, although they were not asked for their opinion, seemed, so far as we could learn and observe, better pleased to undergo their trial at a centre than at their own schools, the nervousness naturally felt on such an occasion, and not infrequently intensified by the hovering anxiety of a highly-strung teacher, giving place in a large measure to the pleasurable excitement of the outing; and the few parents who at first protested against the innovation have altogether ceased to agitate for a return to the older system. In one respect only it is probable we may introduce a change. At Timaru, Waimate, and Temuka, which are the centres to which the largest number of candidates are drawn, we have found it too burdensome a task within the time allotted to hear all the candidates read, recite, and answer oral questions given to test the power of the pupils to give expression in their own words to the thought of a portion of the passage that has been read. In the case of pupils of the large schools this part of the test for the proficiency certificate we may arrange to take at a special visit at some time immediately preceding the examination in written work. With regard to the drawing-test, we have found the following plan a very satisfactory one: A week or so before the central examination the candidates do their freehand-drawing test in their own schools, the exercise set being sent out to every school from which entries have been received, and the drawings are returned to us with the teacher's certificate that they were done in the specified time, and completed by the pupil without aid and without previous trial of the exercise. In addition to this, each candidate brings to the centre for our inspection the drawing-books used during the year, showing the quantity and quality of the drawing other than freehand that had been overtaken, and the marks for this are added to the marks assigned for his freehand exercise. Our chief aim in respect of the central examinations is so to arrange matters that each candidate will have the opportunity of doing himself justice, since so much depends on his success or failure.

We find great differences in the quality of the reading as we pass from school to school. In some of the small schools local peculiarities of intonation and modulation prevail to such a degree that a new teacher finds the reading strikingly disagreeable to the ear, and at first makes a vigorous attempt to show the children a better way. In some cases, we regret to say, the children prove the stronger in the struggle, and in time it would appear as if the sensitiveness of the teacher's hearing had become blunted. The introduction to one of these schools of a new pupil who reads naturally and pleasantly has sometimes proved of the greatest advantage, for in some subtle way the children feel themselves impelled to try to do well what they see one of their own age can do, while they would have remained stolidly indifferent to the charm of the teacher's style. Out of school many of the children read so little that the free use of supplementary reading-books in school has been most helpful. We still find a large number of the scholars slow to comprehend the language of the reading-lessons, and halting in their attempts to tell in their own words what they have been reading about. In the Sixth Standard examination, where the pupils belonging to a large class were being examined, this was noticeable even with pupils whose fluency and correctness left little room for adverse criticism, and whose expression, though it seemed the outcome of their own appreciation of the author's meaning, must in reality have been an unconscious trick of the imitative faculty, a simple question or two from the examiner revealing an astounding absence of insight on the pupil's part.

Seldom, except in a few of our weakest schools, is the usual spelling test badly done; but there is need for constant watchfulness by the teacher to save his scholars from coming to grief in the spelling of certain words of common use that over and over again trip up the unwary. In a fair proportion of the schools handwriting is good, the copy-books in use being Vere Foster's Medium and Jackson's Upright; and it was from one of the large schools using the latter series that the best specimens in Standards V and VI were received, a result due, however, not to the style adopted, but to the care bestowed on the teaching. In several schools, that for some reason had fallen off in the quality of the writing, it has been clearly demonstrated that great improvement may soon be made when special and systematic effort is put forth, and care is taken to see that the pupils sit properly and hold their pens in the right way.

It is gratifying to report that in no subject has greater progress been made within the last few years than in English composition. Both in form and matter, many of the exercises done in the Sixth Standard are creditable in the highest degree, and right through the classes, from the lowest to the highest, there is abundant evidence of increased facility in narration and description.

In the popular estimate a primary-school teacher's reputation has been largely made or marred by his success or failure in the teaching of arithmetic. Throughout his training and career this has been so prominently in the teacher's thought that it is little wonder the subject has received so much attention; and, as a result, many have developed great skill in its treatment, and only a few fall short of doing work that is satisfactory. As in past years, the pupils of Standard V, as a general rule, have not done so well in arithmetic as those in the other classes.

Better work in commercial and political geography has been done during the past year than for some time past; and the treatment of physical and mathematical geography, making as it