

instruction was inaugurated under such favourable circumstances, and that it furnished the occasion of what may fairly be regarded as the most successful gathering of teachers in the educational history of Southland. Provided that teachers exercise the necessary intelligence and discretion, we are convinced that the exercises, taken sytematically, will make both for the health and the happiness of the pupils attending our schools.

*School Libraries.*—As regards school libraries, it is with pleasure we record the fact that during the year voluntary local contributions were received to the total amount of £29 4s. 6d. from twelve school districts, as against £3 10s. from three school districts in the preceding year. Thus, taking the subsidy into consideration, £58 9s. will be available for the establishment of new libraries or for the better equipment of libraries already established.

There is not wanting evidence that the school library movement is creating and fostering a taste for reading among our pupils, who show a wider range of information and a better acquaintance with books and authors than was previously the case. Now that literature suited even to very young children is easily procurable, teachers should have little difficulty in making a suitable choice of books for any class; while freshness of interest may be maintained by the constant addition to the library shelves of good, wholesome, inspiring literature. But if the library is to be successful and is to accomplish the end for which it is instituted the teacher must be a leader and a counsellor in the matter of reading. More should be done than is now the case in the matter of exchange of books between neighbouring schools.

*Certificates of Proficiency and Competency.*—The results of the proficiency examinations held towards the close of the year, as well as the corresponding results for 1912, are shown in the following table:—

— —				Number examined.	Proficiency.	Competency.	Failed.
1912	..	..	..	636	469	63	104
Percentage	..	..	..	..	73·7	9·8	16·5
1913	..	..	..	634	462	67	105
Percentage	..	..	..	..	72·9	10·5	16·5

In determining the centres of examination we endeavoured to utilize to the utmost our fine railway facilities; at the same time we selected a sufficiently large number of centres (twenty-three) to secure that as few as possible of the pupils unable to avail themselves of the railway should have to travel more than ten miles to the examination. Candidates from remote schools are usually examined at their own schools. Your Inspectors endeavour to arrange their work so that the second (announced) visit of inspection to these schools takes place in November or December: if this is found to be impracticable the pupils are tested as early in the following year as possible. Though every request for local examination has our most sympathetic consideration, it is clear that the plan described is not capable of indefinite extension. The figment that children examined at schools other than their own lose their heads through timidity has been exploded time and again.

In connexion with these examinaitons we have much pleasure in reporting a very considerable improvement generally. The answers to the questions set were not only fuller and more accurate, but were set down more neatly and methodically than in previous years. Spelling, writing, and composition were much improved not only in the papers specially set to test their quality, but in all the papers throughout the course of the examination. Arithmetic remains the chief stumbling-block to candidates, but in this subject also preparation was this year more thorough and systematic than before.

*Manual Instruction, &c.*—[See E.-5, Report on Manual and Technical Instruction.]

*Reading.*—The oral reading is generally well taught, but in many schools the enunciation is indistinct. The main defect seems to be that beginners are not well taught, and that the fight against slovenly modes of speech is not maintained with sufficiently rigid persistence. The practice of training pupils to get at the thought-contents of the passages read and of reproducing them in their own language is bearing fruit in increased facility in oral expression. In the infant classes marked progress in the same direction is often secured by systematic well-told stories. The use of supplementary readers and of the *School Journal* has resulted in more general reading, and in a greater desire for useful knowledge. But not a few teachers fail to remember that these books are intended to be read for pleasure, and not for drill in the mechanical difficulties of reading; that they represent the child's introduction to literature, and are not meant to furnish materials for formal language lessons or lessons in word-building. The advantages arising from well-regulated silent reading do not seem to be sufficiently generally appreciated.

*Writing.*—In dealing with this subject the teacher's aim should be to enable the children to acquire the power to write legibly, neatly, and, in the upper classes, with fair rapidity. This threefold aim is on the whole realized to a satisfactory degree in our schools. Yet we meet not infrequently with teachers—and these not the youngest—who fail to appreciate the importance of thorough and systematic correction of the pupils' work. It is not an uncommon experience to find children filling page after page of their copybooks without criticism either from themselves or from their teachers. The neglect that this experience reveals tends to make the pupils believe that anything will do, and leads to habits of gross carelessness. The moral effect of such work is bad. In some schools we have had to comment on the failure of the teachers to mark regularly and correctly the home exercise-books of the pupils. Both writing and spelling suffer in consequence. These books are frequently inspected by parents, and a teacher whose supervision of the pupils' home work is careless or perfunctory suffers in their estimation.