

The average age, though still below that for the Dominion, has risen two months, the average of the preparatory, Standard VI, and Standard VII classes being each higher by one month.

We append a few brief notes on the subjects of instruction.

From the following summary of our estimate of the work done in the various branches of English and in arithmetic it will be seen that satisfactory progress is being made in the large majority of our schools:—

	Reading.	Writing.	Spelling.	Composition.	Recitation.	Arithmetic.
Efficient Schools	... 96	103	80	92	102	64
Non-efficient schools	... 20	13	36	24	6	52

When we compare the above figures with those for 1913 we find in the case of each subject a slight falling-off in the proportion of schools marked as efficient, largely due, no doubt, to the changes consequent on the introduction of the new syllabus. Although, as we pointed out last year, few important alterations were made, the introduction of any new system among a large body of widely scattered teachers serving under varied conditions is accompanied by unforeseen difficulties, and the first work on new lines must be regarded as tentative. At some inspection visits we found teachers still unprovided with copies of the new syllabus, and one was working without any syllabus or scheme. Some teachers found difficulty in utilizing the quantity of reading prescribed—three books per class. Authorized books in arithmetic, for example, were not available at the beginning of the year, whilst teachers wisely enough were disinclined to purchase those of the old type that soon might be disused. The minds of many lady teachers were vastly exercised over the scope of the new needlework syllabus, schemes for different classes, and more especially the procuring of material and apparatus, with the result that in this, as in other branches, when a doubt existed as to the interpretation of the syllabus, the teacher cautiously refrained from attempting anything new. The efforts of many of our teachers consequently suffer by comparison in that they are being criticized from a new and to some an unexpected standpoint.

Reading.—In quite a large proportion of our schools we have considered the results in this subject as satisfactory. Notwithstanding we find few instances in which the reading throughout the school is of special merit—it was marked “good” in five schools and “excellent” in one. In the junior and preparatory divisions defective phrasing and consequent want of fluency is the most general failing. This is perhaps due to the too-long-continued acceptance of mere word-naming. While in general the earlier attempts at reading may be developed in this style, it is a mistake to allow it to continue after the pupil has become so familiar with the words that he could readily read them in such a connected manner as the sense demands. In the senior division, although the reading was often fluent, with clear enunciation and correct pronunciation, it was seldom delivered with the expression that would indicate intelligent comprehension of the subject-matter. Study should precede the actual reading, and the reading ought to be the natural expression of the child’s conception of the meaning. In the higher classes some part of the reading-time should be devoted to the study of books as literature. The mere silent reading of a number of books is insufficient. Some books should be studied in detail in class. Silent reading may result in mere narrative reading for story or incident, so books chosen for class study should be of a higher standard than those chosen for unaided silent reading. In the syllabus, under the heading “English,” a special section is devoted to speech. It would undoubtedly be of considerable advantage to the style of the reading if the instructions there laid down to attain the ends desired were fully carried out in all schools. Our experience was that this phase of the subject was too lightly dwelt upon.

Standards V and VI this year, as a test in essay-writing, were given as a theme their choice of subjects selected from the teachers’ schemes of work in history, geography, and science. The essays varied much in quality, but as compositions were not so good as we expected. The most common failing apparent was a lack of revision, especially towards the close, the latter part of the essay containing most of the errors, many of which evidently resulted from carelessness.

History has been more generally taught, but the subject has suffered so much from previous neglect that it has not yet regained its proper place in the curriculum. This year too, the history of the past has suffered in comparison with the all-absorbing study of history in the making.

Home Science for girls has not yet received the full recognition that its prominence in the new syllabus deserves, and the new features in our drawing and needlework programmes have not been grasped by all teachers. We were, however, much interested by work in both branches inspected by us in the Nelson side schools; we more especially refer to mass drawing in colours.

Arithmetic.—We have little to add to our remarks in previous reports *re* arithmetic. In 55 per cent. of our schools the subject is quite as well taught as we could reasonably expect, but the 45 per cent. of schools in which the general work of the pupils in this subject is still unsatisfactory is in our opinion far too high. In our report of the year 1893 we find, “More of our scholars break down in arithmetic than in all the rest of the subjects included in the syllabus put together.” This cannot be said to-day, though the arithmetic is worse than any other of the subjects upon which promotion is based. In the same report we have, “Were the scholars graded and taught according to their arithmetical capacities without reference to their attainments in other respects the anomalies pointed out would disappear.” Unfortunately even with freedom of classification they have not all disappeared, and faulty classification may be largely the cause. While the status of our sole teachers remains so low we cannot, we fear, look for a very great and general improvement in this respect, for years of well-directed effort, combined with the highest teaching skill, may be required to ensure success.

Handwork and Manual-training Classes.—[See E.-5, Report on Manual and Technical Instruction.]

District High Schools.—[See E.-6, Report on Secondary Education.]