

Standard VII. shows a decrease from 384 to 251. This is accounted for by the disestablishment of the District High School at Palmerston North. The average ages compare favourably with those of last year, Standards II. and VI. remaining the same, while the others are lower. There is a difference of six months in Standard VII. in favour of 1904. It is doubtful whether in the case of this class this is a good or a bad sign. It may mean that a great many of those who enter Standard VII. stay there for only a short time—a year or less—and it certainly points to the fact that only a minority stays two years or more.

The results of the examination of Standard VI. show that out of 802 who were present, 602 gained certificates of proficiency and 92 certificates of competency; that is, $86\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. gained one or other of the certificates, while 75 per cent. gained the higher one. Comparing this result with last year, we find that 81 per cent. gained certificates in 1903, as against $86\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in 1904, which would go to show, if an inference can be made on the results of one year's trial, that more pupils will pass Standard VI. than formerly, but fewer of them will qualify for free places at secondary, district high, and technical schools.

ARITHMETIC.—Last year we commented adversely upon the teaching of arithmetic in this district. Our judgment of the subject is based upon two points: (1) the accuracy shown in working the written test, and (2) the rapidity with which these and mental tests are worked. Generally speaking, in Standards I., II., and III. the written test was good where sufficient time was given. The result in the upper classes was almost satisfactory, as the following figures show. These are the average of the results gained in a considerable number of schools. The number of sums in each test was 5. For Standard VI. the average was 2.9; for Standard V., 2.6; and for Standard IV., 3.2: or, Standard VI., 58 per cent.; Standard V., 52 per cent.; and Standard IV., 64 per cent. Taking the larger centres alone, the results were slightly better. The time given was about an hour and a half for Standards V. and VI., and somewhat less for Standard IV. We found great differences in the time taken. In some schools, even in the upper classes, every pupil was through in about an hour; in others an hour and a half was too little. Teachers should train their pupils to put their work straight down on the paper; a great saving of time may be effected by insisting that only what is absolutely necessary shall be worked out on slate. There is no need that sums should be first stated on slate and then copied on to paper. We would urge that still greater efforts be made to secure rapid work. Much will be done towards this end if complete mastery of the tables be insisted upon in the early stages, and mental arithmetic be given daily in every class.

ENGLISH.—In our last report we dealt somewhat fully with English, under the two headings "Reading" and "Composition," and indicated points in which improvement was needed and methods by which this could be gained. Among other things, two outlines were given showing the kind of questions which might profitably be asked when "poetry" was being taught. We would again direct attention to those outlines, and would like it to be clearly understood that no value whatever is attached to the mere "gabbling" of lines to whose meaning the attention of the scholars has never once been directed. It is not expected that pupils should be able to understand the exact meaning of every line; that is impossible, but they should know in a general way the meaning of the pieces they learn, and should understand plain references. For example, a subject frequently taken in Standard V. is "The Destruction of Sennacherib's Army." Is it too much to expect that some attention be paid to the historical circumstances referred to in this poem? Yet, over and over again, the ignorance of the pupils showed only too plainly that no attempt had been made to enlighten them. This is only one example out of many. A very real difficulty confronts the teacher with regard to the subject-matter of the reading lessons in the three upper standards. It is absolutely impossible to deal fully with all the lessons in the book and at the same time give an adequate amount of reading. Observations and experience show that some of the lessons present more difficulties than do others—difficulties of language, difficulties in words, difficulties in geographical and historical references. We have recommended that a dozen or so lessons be selected for special treatment, the aim in such being to give the pupils complete mastery over the thought and power to express that thought adequately and distinctly. The remaining lessons may be treated more as sight reading, the teacher to content himself with seeing that the pupils understand in a general way their meaning and purpose, and select for study only such phrases as present special difficulty. We would again emphasize the need of daily exercise in phonics in the lower classes, and of frequent practice in syllabification in every class. If due attention were paid to phonics and word-building in the lower classes, the mechanics of reading should offer no difficulty in the upper, and it is of the utmost importance that such a condition of affairs should be attained. We are a long way from it yet, and the consequence is that a great deal of valuable time of the upper classes is used up in dealing with difficulties which should have been mastered at an earlier stage. From what we have said it will appear we are by no means satisfied with our work in this department of English. Too much time is still wasted in the needless rereading of lessons. We would insist upon the fact that, except in the case of the lessons which are singled out for special treatment, there is little gained by reading the same piece twice, so long as other suitable reading-matter is available.

WRITING.—The writing of our schools is from time to time subjected to criticism by business men. The complaint is made that the boys who enter their employment show very poor penmanship; it is ill-formed and hard to read. It must be at once granted that the public has a right to demand that not only would-be clerks, but all scholars leaving our schools after having passed through all the classes, shall be able to write neatly and legibly; and in view of the dissatisfaction which is said to exist we must either defend our schools from the charge laid against them, or admit it and straightway begin to reform. We are pleased to be able to say that, in so far as the large majority of our schools is concerned, the charge is quite groundless. Writing is in most schools well taught, and the exercise-books and examination exercises show careful work on the part of the pupils. This applies especially to our country schools. In the larger centres it is unfortunately only too true that the writing of many