in other districts of the colony. The handwriting and composition of our schools have lately been subjected to unfavourable criticism from both responsible and irresponsible sources. Now it is generally admitted that the excessive number of children which teachers are individually responsible for and the extent of ground to be covered in the syllabus are both causes which prevent handwriting as a subject receiving at the present day that attention and consideration that it was given, say, a generation ago. We have, however, made special efforts to meet the requirements of the business part of the community in this respect; and while we are far from maintaining that writing is in every instance as efficiently taught as it might be, still, taking the district as a whole, the subject is fairly satisfactory, and in any case there has been considerable improvement during the last few years. Critics must remember that the average age of pupils who pass Standard VI is thirteen years eight months, and it is folly to suppose that at such an age the average boy is educationally equipped for a merchant's office, and it is quite conceivable that many of them may even prove unequal to the task of writing a business letter "in terse and forcible English." During his school course his instruction in composition has been on the lines already indicated. He writes a strictly formal hand, which, under the supervision of his teacher, is as a rule neat and legible, but it is not a formed hand, still less is it a commercial running hand, and moreover it will take a certain amount of time and patience to make it one. It must not be forgotten that primary education has other duties and aims besides that of preparing the youth of the colony for a strictly commercial vocation. Had we no other aim beyond the writing of good business letters and expertness in arithmetic our task would be easy! But there are other requirements and activities to consider: handwork, drawing and manual instruction to train the head and eyes of the pupil, and so prepare him for industrial pursuits; nature study and instruction in elementary agriculture, to fit him for country life; these and other subjects all demand their share of the teacher's and the pupil's time and energy. The truth is our boys are taken away from school when too young; the primary school should be a stage, not the terminus, in a lad's education; a two-years' course at a technical or continuation school should follow, where he could specialise in those subjects required in the particular sphere of life—commercial or otherwise—which he intends to enter. During the year the Chamber of Commerce, for the purpose of encouraging the study of commercial subjects, very generously devoted some £25 as prizes for the city schools. The subjects of competition were composition, writing, and commercial arithmetic. The prizes will be awarded, we understand, at the next meeting of the Chamber, when members will have an opportunity of inspecting the papers of the various competitors. We cannot but feel that if a few of the members of a representative body, such as the Chamber of Commerce, were to visit some of our schools and express their opinion after actual observation of the work being done there, it would at least be a fairer and more reasonable way of passing judgment on our primary schools than sweeping generalisations based on the unsatisfactory letters of a limited number of applicants for some advertised position.

In arithmetic good work is done in Standards I to IV, and fair work in Standards V and VI. This estimate, so far as the standards above Standard II are concerned, is based on the results of the tests supplied by the Department. We have in previous reports stated our opinion that the tests in Standards V and VI are too exacting. In any case five sums is a narrow field in which to examine a whole year's work. The minimum of marks in arithmetic for Standard VI certificates of proficiency is 40 per cent. We should much prefer to see the tests made easier, the number of examples in a card doubled, and the minimum requirements raised. In mental arithmetic a considerable improvement is desirable, and we hope that the prizes offered by the Chamber of Commerce to our city schools will stimulate the teachers to pay more attention to this branch of the work.

The requirements in political geography (Course B of the syllabus) have been met by the use of the New Southern Cross Geographical Readers, and Nelson's "The World and Its People." We have as a rule found the work intelligently treated, but in the case of Course A (physical and mathematical geography) our experience has not been so satisfactory. According to the regulations the treatment of this portion of the subject should be based on the actual observation of natural phenomena by the child, and the study of the physical features in his particular neighbourhood. The scope provided for the resourceful teacher is ample, but as yet the supply of teachers who are able to find "sermons in stones and books in the running brooks" is very limited. Here again the large classes make anything like regular field excursions and observations a difficult matter. A school paper will shortly be issued by the Department, which we have every reason to believe will remove many of the thorns which at present beset the teacher's path in this subject.

The instruction in history and civics is good in the majority of cases. An intelligent knowledge is shown by the elder children of the system of electing members for Parliament and local bodies, the functions of these bodies, and the work and duties of various Government departments and officials. We should like to see more attention given to those incidents in the history of our race which are calculated to foster in the younger generation a proper spirit of patriotism and national pride. It is rather the fashion in these superior times to sneer and laugh at old-fashioned school-histories in which doughty deeds and personal achievements figured so prominently, but so far as children are concerned we are not at all certain that they did not approach the subject in a truer philosophical spirit than do many of the cold-blooded critical analyses that have taken their place. They at least fed the spirit of hero-worship that every healthily minded boy possesses, and it is to this spirit that some of the noblest qualities in human nature owe their inspiration.

In many of the senior classes of our schools programmes of elementary chemistry, physics, and physical measurements are carried out in the true scientific spirit. A great advance has been made in the nature-study work during the last year, more especially in the classes up to Standard IV, where we find children now studying actual objects for themselves instead of listening to the "information" lessons of a teacher. The zeal and enthusiasm of the teachers are worthy of all praise, but we sometimes find teachers who are apt to confuse the aim of this work, which is quite definite, with the