

school candidates out of 1,871 then examined failing to qualify in the subject by gaining 40 per cent. of the attainable marks. That the arithmetic of Standard V was often weak was pointed out in my last year's report, but so unsatisfactory a result for Standard VI was not expected. I do not think the questions set were unfair or unduly difficult, though some of my colleagues think they were on the difficult side. They were certain of the forty sets of cards supplied annually to Inspectors by the Education Department for the purpose of testing the arithmetic of Standard VI. I am inclined to think that careless overconfidence has caused many of the failures. Mr. Crowe's remarks about the dictation are in keeping with this, and so is the alleged fact that inferior pupils frequently passed while their supposedly smarter class-fellows failed. The strange surroundings under which a central examination has to be conducted no doubt helped to aggravate the unfavourable result. This surprise of the year should not be without its lesson to all our teachers, and more especially to those charged with the instruction of our more advanced pupils.

Respecting Geography Course A, the following extract from Mr. Burnside's report to me shows how the teaching generally stands: "Geography A in Standard III and Standard IV is in the main dealt with satisfactorily. The work of Standard V and Standard VI is not so good, though when taken orally much more intelligent answering is secured than when the answers are written. No matter how well the subject is taught, if pupils have not been trained to take full notes the written answers will be disappointing." The answering of Standard VI pupils in this subject shows great inequality, and a considerable number evidently understand little of the subject, or have had no adequate practice in writing out in a clear concise form what they have come to know. Fully half of those examined gave creditable answers. To enable teachers to curtail the course of topics studied, if they should so desire, six questions spread over the so-called compulsory course are set in each examination-paper, while candidates are not allowed to answer more than four of them, and gain half marks by answering two correctly. To show how unintelligently some of the topics are handled, I may mention that in diagrams showing the position of the earth's axis at opposite points in the earth's orbit, the lines representing the axis would in many instances if produced intersect and form an angle. The same pupils, if pointedly asked, would say that the position of the earth's axis was stable, and was always parallel to itself. The diagrams, nevertheless, frequently showed it as "wobbling." I have repeatedly expressed a desire to see Course A geography recast, and, in Standard VI especially, greatly simplified.

The teaching of Geography Course B and of history by the reading of books, accompanied by suitable questioning on and explanations of the matter, and by proper references to maps, is proving singularly ineffective. A comparatively small number of teachers, recognising the futility of the method of treatment authorised in the syllabus, have given in addition special instruction in the more important parts of political and commercial geography, with satisfactory results. All teachers could do the like if they chose. In general very little accurate or permanent knowledge or training is being gained in these subjects. Mr. Grierson points out that an alternative course, admitting of oral lessons in addition to reading class-books, is available under the syllabus, but it seems to me that this interpretation of the syllabus is incorrect. If the alternative were available I should certainly welcome it. To improve the teaching of political and commercial geography, and of history also, I would suggest that the Board ask authority from the Minister to substitute for the "compulsory courses" the courses of geography and history as prescribed for these subjects when taken up as "additional subjects." This would emancipate us from the tyranny of the reading-book treatment, and give teachers a freer hand to do their best for their pupils in these important branches of education. In addition to the oral lessons in history, I think the continued use of a class-book or class-books highly desirable. If practicable, they should be read several times, and certainly more than once. Civic instruction is very often taught by special lessons, and very fair work is in many cases done in it; the work can seldom be considered good. In a number of schools Arnold-Foster's "Citizen Reader" is in use. It is the crowded condition of the syllabus that is really responsible for the failure to secure better work here.

The quality of the teaching of nature-study varies very much from school to school, depending largely on the special gifts and interests of the teachers. Its value when suitably handled is unquestionable, but the aims of the study are often poorly conceived, while in the large classes of the bigger schools the supply of material is frequently insufficient and lacking in variety. Speaking of the schools of the S. Central District, Mr. Cox remarks as follows: "Too often children are gravely questioned about objects about which they have nothing to discover. Often it has been my painful experience to sit through a lesson where the teacher appeared to have nothing for the children to discover, and where his object seemed to be to make five minutes' uninteresting work last half an hour, and to keep the children from answering too rapidly." "In the majority of schools," Mr. Burnside writes, "the work in this subject is satisfactory, the instruction being generally profitable and interesting." Mr. Stewart has some apposite remarks under this head: "Too much stress cannot be laid on the truths that it is nature at first hand that should be studied, and that it is not so much information* that should be aimed at as the cultivation of the powers of observation. Children's capacity to absorb external impressions always outruns their power of expression, and frequently I have had good reason to believe that the benefits of the lesson were much greater than the answers of the children would lead me to think. The method in this subject is of the first importance; the habit of telling, still far too common, should be abandoned for the method of guiding the observation. During the year many country teachers, acting on my advice, have taken up blackboard drawing, which lends itself to correlation with nature-study: anything that a child sincerely attempts to draw it must closely observe, hence the benefit of blackboard drawing in the lower classes." This is true enough of form, but much of the value of

*The giving of information, and not its discovery, is evidently meant here.