

classes in school. For the latter classes many excuses can be made—bad roads, inclement weather, &c.; for the former, there is none. If parents, tempted by the usefulness of their older children, keep them from school to work on the farm, in the shop, or in the house, they have only their own blind selfishness to blame for the failure of their children at the proficiency examination.

With regard to the marks given by teachers in the various subjects of the proficiency examination, we may say that we found these marks of use only, or rather principally, in comparing the relative merits of the candidates for examination. Otherwise they were, from the low standard of marking adopted, in a large number of cases useless.

The number of pupils in Standard VII is steadily diminishing, and threatens soon to reach a vanishing-point. The increased facilities for secondary education at high or district high schools have, no doubt, contributed to this result. As the salaries of teachers in our primary schools vary less with average attendance than formerly, teachers have less incentive now to encourage the attendance of Standard VII pupils than they had formerly. The absence of Standard VII in a small school, moreover, gives the teacher a real sense of relief; in the work of the six standard classes and of the infant classes he finds sufficient scope for all his energy. In most country schools, we feel sure, the best way a pupil can utilize an extra year at school is to spend it in consolidating and rendering permanent the knowledge acquired in the Sixth Standard during the preceding year.

In many quarters the opinion is held that attendance at continuation classes should be compulsory on all youths up to the age of seventeen. While we view this opinion with sympathy, based as it is on good solid grounds, we are persuaded that the time has not yet arrived to realize it in actual operation. We feel, however, that the time is now opportune for making the Sixth, not the Fifth Standard, the certificate of exemption for the purposes of the Education Act. This would be a step—a perfectly practicable and justifiable step—in the right direction.

During the year the Board adopted a scheme by which certain inexperienced teachers in the more remote parts of the district were enabled to spend a fortnight in good schools of a grade similar to their own. The necessary expenses of board, travelling, &c., were met by the Board. The results of the experiment have been, so far, of a highly encouraging nature.

In other directions a healthy spirit of reform has been at work. In spite of the efforts of teachers, ably seconded, in many cases, by Committees and by the general community, many of our schools were inadequately equipped with apparatus and appliances for the proper teaching of certain subjects, particularly arithmetic and mensuration. The Board took a liberal view of the matter, with the result that there is now in our stores a miscellaneous stock of appliances amply sufficient for the present requirements of our schools. The Board's attention was called to the fact that considerable confusion and loss of time were caused in some of our schools by the unpreparedness of the teacher for the labours of the day. The Board's new rule, requiring the attendance of the teacher in school ten minutes before the time of opening for the preparation necessary for the morning session, will do a good deal to further the progress of the pupils, and will ultimately be found conducive to the benefit and comfort of the teachers themselves. Last of all, but not least, the abuses and inequalities that had by degrees crept into our holiday system were removed by the adoption of a uniform scheme of holidays, on a scale sufficiently liberal to satisfy the righteous aspirations of teachers, and so arranged as to interfere as little as possible with the ordinary course of school-work. The assistance rendered by the local Teachers' Institute in securing this desirable end is gratefully acknowledged.

The question of earlier hours of opening and closing our schools received some consideration during the year, and though nothing definite was done, it was felt that the plan proposed had much to recommend it. As matters at present stand, however, there would be some danger of friction with parents if such a plan were adopted, particularly in those districts where the dairying industry prevails. The importance of this growing industry is so great, indeed, as to warrant the utmost caution in making any change which might affect it adversely.

The Department's scheme for supplying school-books free to pupils was not received with any degree of enthusiasm in our education district. This fact is a tribute in some measure to our material prosperity. On the other hand, in the course of our travels, we heard much comment adverse to the scheme from economic, hygienic, and even educational standpoints. Possibly, in the future, when the grant is applied to the improvement of existing and the establishment of new libraries, more satisfaction will be felt with the working of the scheme.

Those teachers who have established school gardens in connection with their schools have been labouring hitherto under two distinct disadvantages— indefinite information as to the best means of utilizing these gardens from an educational point of view, and want of the apparatus necessary for the performance of the simple course of indoor experiments to be carried on in winter when the garden-work is suspended. The first want has now been met by the issue of a pamphlet containing fairly full and explicit instructions on school gardening; material to meet the second want is almost ready for distribution to the districts concerned.

The general withdrawal by the Government of the railway concessions hitherto afforded to teachers attending training classes will, if persisted in, affect most adversely the educational interests of our district. For many years to come, so far as we can see, Saturday training classes must remain absolutely necessary in such a district as ours. From time to time the Board is called upon to fill large numbers of poorly paid positions. For such positions it is foolish to expect a constant and sufficient supply of thoroughly trained teachers. It is evident that we must make the most of the material we have at hand by shaping it to our necessities as we best can. We are convinced that abuse of the privilege of free travelling to Saturday training classes is quite exceptional; that, on the contrary, the Saturday "trip" to Invercargill is, in a very large number of cases in our district, strong evidence of the exercise of stern self-denial.

A few notes on the quality of the work in certain subjects follow:—