

progress through the standard classes ought to be more rapid than it was before. But this is not the case. The remedy for the present state of things is, we would suggest, to promote the children sooner out of the preparatory classes into the classes where they will have reading-matter more suited to their natural powers, and (this is important) to continue in the standard classes (especially the lower standard classes) the methods that exercise the activities, observation, and imagination of children in the most natural manner. We are afraid that we are forced to the judgment that children are at present kept too long in the infant classes without any corresponding gain: that the influence of the old standard pass is still so strong that it follows that the best pupils complete their primary course nearly a year later than they ought to complete it, and that even the average pupil might gain his certificate of proficiency much earlier than he does. The next stage of work—at the secondary school or technical school—might then be begun somewhat earlier than at present, and there would be more chance for the pupil to bring that work to a definite stage before he left school altogether.

In a good school the child of average ability can master one of the infant reading-books supplied in six months, and we fear that many of our teachers are not systematically making, as they should do, general promotions within the preparatory class itself every half-year.

The only gratifying feature in regard to the matter in this district is that the average age of the preparatory class remains the same, though the mean of average age of all standards—eleven years five months—is higher by one month.

As usual, we make a short reference to such of the subjects of instruction as appear to us to call for special comment.

ENGLISH.—Little difficulty is experienced with the reading from the prepared Readers, and, though few schools stand out as of special excellence, the great majority appear to make a satisfactory showing in this subject. In the larger schools it is often difficult to allow adequate time for sufficient individual practice, while even in many of the smaller schools satisfactory supervision cannot always be provided. We would again repeat the necessity for rigorously demanding distinct articulation and clear enunciation both in the oral answering and in the reading practice, as well as the cultivation of a natural style based upon the pupil's own intelligent conception and appreciation of the passage read.

The other side of the subject, the intelligent understanding of the subject-matter together with the knowledge of the meaning and application of the words used, was not always treated with such successful results as might be expected.

The time devoted to actual reading practice should not be curtailed by questions on the subject-matter and by explanations of difficult words. Each aspect of the subject undoubtedly requires a special period fully given up to its own treatment. We are pleased to notice that in many schools every facility is given to encourage a wider course of reading than can be obtained from the ordinary school Readers. The general use of the *School Journal* has likewise fostered this spirit in an admirable manner. In regard to the poetry, &c., to be memorized, we would recommend that, in the higher classes at any rate, some of the pieces should be selected by the pupils themselves. The final choice, of course, should rest with the teacher, who should retain as suitable only such selections as are worthy of being committed to memory. In this way many passages of prose from the Readers might be taken in addition to the usual verse.

In spelling, seventy-two schools were returned as efficient, and in writing seventy-nine. In the latter subject the preparatory classes in many cases suffered through the want of a uniformly graded scheme of work that would lead by suitable stages to the work of Standard I. In these classes we sometimes found very young pupils attempting to copy words and letters that presented difficulties of too advanced a character for mere beginners. While it is undesirable to make the exercises too easy of accomplishment, it is disheartening to the young pupil to find that after putting forth his maximum effort the result is comparative failure. The work asked for should be within the range of attainment of the pupil of average ability. There is much to be said in favour of a system of instruction that introduces the more difficult formations in some reasonable sequence, and that recognizes the various degrees of difficulty to be overcome. In the preparatory classes we hope to see some definite plan of work in the direction indicated. Another branch of the subject too often overlooked is the proper formation of figures. As inaccuracies in arithmetic are often the result of badly made figures, due attention should be given to insure their ready legibility.

In composition we would briefly call attention to two weaknesses observed by us—viz., (1) too little practice in essay-writing; (2) neglect of oral composition. From the work we have taken in this subject it would seem that the written exercises in composition have been confined in a great measure to mere reproduction, which has naturally to a large extent become simply memorizing. With the wider range of reading now in vogue in most schools the teacher might easily find abundance of very suitable subjects as theses well within the power of his pupils. The written composition might well include subjects arising out of the reading that require the child to draw upon his own personal experience and observation. To get the pupil to write his own ideas is indeed a constant difficulty, but a much greater freedom of expression might be developed by the teacher if the subjects were not only suitably varied, but were such as appealed to the pupils. Though the oral composition is more regularly taken in the lower standards, it rarely receives any definite treatment in the higher classes. There, in its place, we sometimes find merely the oral answering in some co-ordinate subject without such instruction as would allow us to regard it as a branch of composition. In spite of the above criticisms on some defects to which we necessarily call attention, it is very patent to us that there has been general all-round improvement in the quality of the composition since the introduction of the present syllabus and the consequent changes in the treatment of the subject.