

Proficiency Examination.—In accordance with the provisions of the regulations, candidates for certificates of proficiency were examined at their own schools under the supervision of the Inspector, except in the case of the outlying country schools, for which a synchronous examination was arranged. The work in English and arithmetic was tested as usual on the cards supplied for the purpose by the Department. We found these cards more or less uneven in their demands, the questions in grammar being harder than formerly. This may explain why in some of the larger schools the grammar was of disappointing quality. The work in English composition showed a very gratifying improvement: indeed, some of the essays were remarkably good. We feel that this result is due to the greater attention paid to the subject by the teachers and to the acquisition of ideas gained through wider reading afforded by the school libraries. Considering the nature of the questions in arithmetic, we feel that the results were generally satisfactory. Mental work has very much improved during the past two or three years. The writing was very satisfactory, and the degree of neatness in the work presented was, in a majority of schools, very commendable. Spelling has made good progress under the new system of teaching it, and the pupils' written work shows comparatively few mistakes. The reading is tested (1) orally and (2) by a written test in comprehension of the passage read silently. To this latter we attach great importance, and we find that teachers have also realized its value. We still find it desirable to supplement the oral test in geography, history, and science given at the second visit to the school by a short written test at the final examination, and we propose to continue this practice in the meantime. The new syllabus lays greater stress on these subjects. No special examination in drawing was held this year, the pupils submitting their year's work for inspection. We were very well satisfied with the average quality of their studies in various media. The following table shows the results of the examination. The decreased number of proficiency certificates is the natural result of the lengthy vacation due to the epidemic of influenza.

	1918.	1919.
Number presented	1,095	1,138
Certificate of proficiency	714	648
Certificate of competency including endorsed certificate ..	173	212
Per cent., proficiency	65.2	56.9
Per cent., competency	15.8	18.6

Subjects of Instruction.—In regard to the condition of the subjects of the curriculum, we have to report as follows:—

Reading shows a very marked improvement. In the lowest classes the method of teaching is generally effective and the mechanical part of the work is overtaken in a satisfactory manner. In the higher classes we have required greater attention to the intellectual side of reading. In examining this subject in the large classes we have in many schools tested the pupils' power of comprehension by a written test, and find that good progress is being made in grasping the thought from the printed page. The Board has amplified the supply of supplementary readers. These have been forwarded to all the schools in the district, in such a way that a much wider field in reading is now covered by pupils in the various classes. We ascertained to what extent the children have profited by the use of these extra readers, and are pleased to note in the first place that they have gained a much wider range of ideas, and in the second that a love for reading has been much stimulated. School libraries have been very widely increased; in some schools there are over three hundred volumes, and we have instances where the senior pupils have read as many as seventy books during the year. We have ourselves observed senior pupils making full use of the public libraries in various localities, and we feel that reading in the district is now far more general than formerly.

Spelling: We are pleased to note the marked improvement in spelling, which is specially evident in the pupils' written work generally. In most cases the spelling-lists are drawn up with commendable skill. There is yet the need for some definite teaching of spelling as opposed to the mere testing of it. In a great many cases the spelling period of half an hour is largely used up in the giving out of a passage for dictation, and this on every morning of the week. Teachers should understand that dictation is only a test of spelling, and not a mode of teaching it. We recommend that dictation be given only once a week, and that the spelling period should be divided into (1) a testing part, (2) a teaching part, the words and phrases dealt with to form the matter tested on the succeeding day. Teachers must now understand that the old method of setting the child to learn twenty to forty words at home is obsolete, unscientific, and therefore unjustifiable.

The writing in the district continues to give us every satisfaction, and our views are borne out by the success gained by the pupils of the district in competitions both here and elsewhere. We should like to arrange for speed tests to be given in order to encourage a training in producing quick and legible writing. In a few cases we have had to draw the attention of teachers to the need for training the pupils to hold the pen correctly and to adopt a correct and hygienic posture when writing.

Grammar and Composition: In the early part of the year we issued for the guidance of teachers a scheme in grammar showing as clearly as possible the prescriptions of the syllabus in regard to the subject. Teachers have found this to be of much assistance, and we think that the result has been to raise the standard to some degree. We feel that the requirements in regard to analysis in S5 should be more closely defined, and consider that the complete analysis of the simple sentence forms a sufficient programme. Under the present conditions the S5 child attempts to find in the simple sentence clauses which he has been taught something of while his class is grouped for instruction with S6, and the result is confusion. Letter-writing is, in our opinion, a most important part of the work in English composition, and this year we have had to direct the attention of teachers specially to the need for teaching their pupils the correct forms to be observed in ordinary correspondence and business letters. In regard to the essays and composition, we are pleased to report considerable progress. As mentioned above, we ascribe this in a large measure to the more extensive reading, but we should also give credit to the teachers of having attached greater importance to the subject. We feel sure that a material advance will be made when there is a more extensive use of oral composition in the upper classes, and we are glad to see that the new syllabus of instruction lays emphasis upon this matter.

In arithmetic the results of our examination show that the subject receives reasonable attention and the work of the pupils is, on the whole, fairly satisfactory. We still think that the demands of