

CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

Christchurch, 12th April, 1920.

We have the honour to present our annual report for the year 1919.

The number of public schools open at the close of the year was 391. In addition to these, forty-seven private schools were inspected. The following is a summary of the results of the examinations for proficiency certificates :—

	Number presented.	Proficiency.	Competency.	Endorsed Competency.
Public schools	2,510	1,642	463	57
Private schools	287	174	53	6
Special examinations	73	24	13	..
Totals	2,870	1,840	529	63

Medical inspection has been extended, and there is now scarcely a school which is not visited once at least in every two years. The Medical Inspector has been ably supported by her nursing staff, and from the interest that is now being taken by parents we have every reason for predicting a great improvement in the general health of the pupils.

The physical instructors continue to do excellent work, and in the corrective classes there is marked evidence of the value of physical instruction. The physical instructors have been aided by the faithful co-operation of the majority of the teachers, and there are very few cases where teachers do not recognize the beneficial effects of the instruction, both in the physical up-building and the increased power for mental effort on the part of the pupils.

The year just passed proved to be full of problems for our teachers. 1918 closed in gloom and with an unprecedented break in the ordinary routine of school life. When the schools reopened in 1919 many difficulties had to be met—the courses for the previous year had not been covered; many pupils were not fit for promotion; and time had to be spent in bringing these up to the standard of proficiency that would give them reasonable opportunity of benefiting by instruction in a higher standard. These difficulties were still further increased by the many changes of teachers that occurred at the beginning of the year. However, these adverse conditions were faced courageously, and although in some schools the disadvantages continued throughout the year, in the majority considerable leeway was made up. The effects of the unfavourable initial conditions were most noticeable in the varying quality of composition, grammar, and arithmetic. Of course there were schools in which there were no appreciable signs of impaired efficiency.

While the majority of teachers submit suitable programmes of work with a full recognition of proper sequence and gradation, there are others who through lack of sufficient knowledge of the syllabus fail to present courses in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the requirements. On some subjects text-books are slavishly followed and have been made to take the place of a thoughtfully drawn scheme. Such action is quite contrary to the demands of the syllabus, and is to be deprecated as being neither effective nor tending to make the instruction interesting. In future much more stress must be laid on the proper presentation of schemes, and with the assistance furnished in the new syllabus there can be no excuse for failure to make a satisfactory attempt. We are glad to see that the new syllabus emphasizes the importance of speech-training and oral expression. Although reading is on the whole fluent, there are some schools in which little attention is paid to clear articulation and correct enunciation. Insufficient emphasis is placed on purity and distinctness of utterance, while the thought-content of the passage read also calls for more attention. It should be borne in mind that besides making it possible for children to master printed matter for their own use, the reading-lessons should help to train children in accuracy of speech, to extend the child's vocabulary and general information, and to inculcate a taste for good literature.

In some schools recitation is really well said, but in too many the pieces memorized have been poorly chosen and little effort has been made to arouse an interest in the subjects. Syllabus directions with regard to recitations are most helpful. The pupils should make a study of the poem with the teacher, so as to grasp thoroughly its meaning and spirit and to form an appreciative liking for the piece itself. Only after this has been done should it be memorized.

Although spelling on the whole is not a weak subject, the adoption of more intelligent methods of treatment would be productive of better results, with less worry. Word-building in the preparatory classes is too often lacking in definite aim, and little is made of the excellent opportunities afforded for training in clear enunciation, oral composition, and the purity and fullness of vowel sounds. The demands frequently made by the teachers in connection with spelling are too heavy. Words beyond the child's spoken or written vocabulary should not be expected.

Writing varies considerably in quality and is not as good as it should be. More careful attention to details is needed in many schools, and a definite scheme and plan of writing should be drawn up and adhered to throughout the school. Sometimes the style and general formation of letters in copybooks used differ considerably from the teacher's set writing-lesson on the blackboard. The effect of this on pupils' writing is obvious. The awkward ways of holding the pen seen in some of the senior classes indicate a grave lack of supervision in the earlier stages. A sound foundation there laid must have its effect throughout the school life. The practice of keeping young children for a lengthy period making single letters is neither profitable nor interesting, for it fails to give the incentive necessary to bring forth the child's best effort. Words from the reading, and associated in the child's mind with some object, might be used profitably, and a desirable correlation of reading and writing thus secured.

Composition, although carefully done in many schools, often shows a want of definite teaching in sentence-construction, paragraphing, and punctuation. Improvement in written work might be effected by systematically following a well-drawn-up scheme of oral work throughout the standard classes as well as in the preparatory division. Percival Chubb (President, High Schools Department, New York), in his "Teaching of English," says: "The poorness of quality in pupils' written expression is because teachers have not taken oral work seriously, and have not realized that as are a child's habits of oral expression so will his habits of written expression tend to become; or, in