

it has received its full share, in some instances much more than its fair share, of the teachers' and of the pupils' time; yet it has been by far the most fruitful cause of failure in examinations for certificates or for classification. The reason is that a false idea has prevailed of the aim in teaching arithmetic in the primary schools: too much has been made of arithmetic as a training in abstract mathematics, too little of arithmetic in its utilitarian and practical aspect. If the enlightened aim of the syllabus is kept in view, it will be seen that there is no need to spend the time of primary-school pupils in solving arithmetical puzzles or in simplifying intricate fractional expressions. While we believe that some schools have on the whole given too much time to arithmetic, there are two respects in which the time might with advantage be increased—*i.e.*, in building up and thoroughly memorizing the addition and the multiplication tables, and in mental and oral arithmetic. If these departments of the subject are adequately treated, the time devoted to written arithmetic can be materially reduced. In the circumstances in which most of our schools are placed the success of the teaching of arithmetic depends very largely upon the text-books used. Where the teacher has two or more classes to teach, as is the rule in the vast majority of cases, the pupils' practice in arithmetic is perforce almost entirely confined to the exercises contained in the text-books. Unfortunately the arithmetic text-books heretofore available have failed to interpret satisfactorily the spirit of the syllabus. The possibility of the preparation by the Department of suitable class-books of exercises in arithmetic might be considered.

It is hoped that the relief afforded in arithmetic will result in increased attention being given to the English subjects. In the smaller schools reading and composition generally require more time than they receive. The interesting continuous readers which have been put into the hands of the pupils of the senior division should be used not merely for extra practice in reading aloud, but in reading for the purpose of getting the thought-content, and in reading for pleasure. A number of schools are fostering a taste for literature by means of school libraries. It is axiomatic that style in composition is most readily acquired by imitation of good models, and it must therefore follow that a wide course of suitable reading tends to improve the written composition. It is in written composition, perhaps, that progress is slowest; we believe, however, that this subject is steadily improving, especially in S6. We have constantly advised teachers that oral composition and the collection of materials should precede the written essay, and that errors in construction, &c., should be corrected in class after the essays have been marked. We are of opinion that exercises in narrative composition, the easiest form, should constitute a larger part of the pupils' practice. We shall watch with interest the effect of the new course prescribed in spelling. In certain schools far too much time has been spent in the testing of spelling by dictation exercises and lengthy lists of words; these are rarely the schools that obtain the best results. If this time can be reduced by the new method, it should be possible to give more attention to reading and composition. In respect of writing, there need never be any deficiency of practice, for, rightly considered, every written exercise is an exercise in writing. We are pleased to report that this view is gradually being adopted, and that all the written work is, in the case of a very fair proportion of the pupils, at least neatly done. At the same time, we are of opinion that formal lessons in the formation of letters and in the rules for good writing should be more frequently given, at least up to S4. We regret to say, further, that the extended use of slates, rendered necessary by the expense of writing-paper, is having a detrimental effect on the quality of the ordinary writing with pen and ink.

In history and geography a definite scheme, in which the items of information are set forth in some detail, has, by arrangement with the Educational Institute, been in operation for two years. The results have hardly come up to expectations. We fear that there is a tendency in some quarters to regard these subjects as unimportant. There are, of course, no unimportant subjects on the syllabus. It is to be apprehended, too, that some teachers in their scrupulous avoidance of the appearance of "cram," grudge to put any tax on the memories of their pupils. But it must be recognized that there are certain simple facts in geography and history, including the names of places and persons, that must be memorized. To get geographical and historical facts memorized the method is the same as is employed in other subjects; orderly presentation, illustration, repetition, and drill by questions and answer. In the case of history there is another circumstance that should be mentioned, namely—that there is no suitable text-book available that covers the ground and deals with the subject in the manner prescribed by our syllabus.

The instruction in handwork in the senior division (woodwork and cookery) was seriously interrupted by the restrictions placed on the railway service, the attendance of the classes that travel by rail to the manual training centres—*i.e.*, of the majority—having been suspended for many weeks.

As in former years, the examinations for the proficiency certificates were held during the last three months of the year. Candidates attending schools from which facilities for travelling to examination centres do not exist were examined at their own schools on the occasion of the inspection visit during October and November, and the remainder were examined at suitable centres during the last week of November or the first two weeks of December. The percentage of passes varied but slightly from that of the previous year, a result that is to be regarded as a subject for congratulation in view of the serious handicap with which the pupils began their year's work. The following is the table of results:—

—	Presented.	Examined.	Proficiency.	Competency.	Endorsed Competency.	Failed.
Public schools ..	816	809	537 (66·4%)	135 (16·7%)	5	137 (16·9%)
Registered private schools	68	67	39 (58·2%)	14 (20·9%)	0	14 (20·9%)
All schools	884	876	576 (65·8%)	149 (17·0%)	5	151 (17·2%)

The corresponding percentages for 1918 were,—

	Proficiency.	Competency.	Failed.
Public schools	69·4	16·7	13·8
Registered private schools	44·0	25·3	30·7
All schools	67·3	17·4	15·2