

OTAGO.

At the end of December 258 schools were in operation in the district. The average weekly roll for the December quarter was 22,229, and the average attendance was 20,759. Arrangements were made to examine the children of Grade 0 schools, of which the majority received a visit. All schools of Grade 1 and upwards were visited, and all but a few received two or more visits during the year. Twenty-three private registered schools were also visited and reported on during the year.

EFFICIENCY.—An analysis of the reports on the public schools gives the following results with regard to general efficiency: Excellent or very good, 10 per cent.; good, 45 per cent.; very fair, 33 per cent.; fair, 9 per cent.; weak, 3 per cent. Several events during the year have adversely affected the work of the schools. The bad weather and floods in April caused the closing, for a short time, of several schools in Dunedin and suburbs, and some schools on the Taieri Plain were more seriously affected by floods. An influenza epidemic and stormy weather interfered with the attendance during the June quarter, and owing to a very severe winter some of the country schools were closed for periods ranging from a few weeks to two months. Changes in the staffing lowered the efficiency mark of a number of schools. Of the twenty-four schools in the "fair" group there were changes in the staffing of twelve. Of the eight schools in the "weak" or "unsatisfactory" group, only two had the same teacher all the year. Several of the schools in this last group were in the "very fair" or "good" group in the previous year, and the change of condition in these cases was due in great measure to changes in the staffing.

ORGANIZATION.—In general our schools were found to be suitably organized. The organization of a few schools of Grade 3 was, however, adversely criticized on the ground that the headmasters allotted an undue share of the work to the assistants. In order to secure a more equitable distribution of responsibility, to utilize more fully the available accommodation, and to permit of freer promotion of individual pupils from class to class, the wisdom of the adoption of a system of parallel classification has been stressed in some of the larger schools. Those headmasters who show a disinclination to break away from tradition in this respect are advised to study carefully the article on parallel classification in the June (1923) issue of the *Education Gazette*. A few sole teachers fail to avail themselves of the provision in the regulations for grouping two or more classes for instruction in one subject, the result being an unnecessary diffusion of teaching effort. On the whole, teachers exercise with discretion their powers in regard to the classification of pupils, but a small proportion show a lack of judgment in this respect. In a few cases that came under our notice during the year pupils who reached a satisfactory standard of attainment in English were, contrary to the regulations, retarded in all subjects because of weakness in arithmetic. The annual examination report form B1A shows 280 children who on promotion to S1 were over eight years of age and had been more than two years in the preparatory division. In addition, 118 children over eight years of age are being retained in the infant department. Among the reasons given for such retardation are the following: "Distance from school," "irregular attendance," "late entry," "delicate health," "slow," "mentally dull," "subnormal," "mentally defective." It is the practice to refer subnormal and mentally defective cases to the medical officers for examination. We have occasionally given mental tests during the year, and compared the results with the teachers' marks. In the majority of cases the tests showed that the headmaster's classification had been justified.

SYLLABUS.—Reading and Recitation.—It is said that the most discouraging aspect of our modern life is the distaste for work on the part of the younger generation. One of the main functions of the school is to develop in the pupils that pass through its ranks a love of work which will be carried into practice in the world beyond the school. Do our teachers realize the importance of this in their class-teaching? While helping the duller pupils onward and keeping the normally intelligent working so as to receive full benefit from their work, are they also giving the brighter pupils the training due to them? Are these more highly gifted ones not being kept monotonously at work in which they have lost interest, and, indeed, are they not being drilled to lifeless uniformity? "To feed the slow without starving the quick, that is the great dilemma of education: we must take care that we do not maim a boy or a youth of genius." In this connection we should like to see the plan of dividing the larger standard classes into sections according to ability more frequently adopted, and the cleverer pupils set to do research work on their own account. The conditions of our class-teaching are frequently not conducive to instilling in the minds of the pupils a love for work, or to creating the desire to learn for themselves. "If the children acquire the habit of taking their [educational] meat from the [educational] spoon, their school training is not good for them but bad." This plan of dividing a class is specially suitable to the treatment of reading, the better readers being left to read silently by themselves, thus allowing the teacher more time to help the more backward over their difficulties. Even in the infant classes this plan may occasionally be used; if extra lessons are composed by the teacher from suitable material and written in permanent form on sheets a supply of exercises will soon be collected, and these will be available at any time for revision or extended practice. These lessons may not always be completely mastered by all the brighter pupils, but, if their interest is kept aroused and their powers fully extended, this condition is preferable to one of "boredom and concealed inattention" that is frequently seen in the case of the cleverer readers when listening to child after child reading the same lines, which are often known by heart before the lesson is completed.

As many schools do not now use the miscellaneous readers which supply in the appendices the meanings of difficult words occurring in the lessons, there will be greater opportunities for pupils in the higher classes to use dictionaries and atlases in the preparation of their reading-lessons. In this connection we have rarely seen a lesson given on how to use a dictionary, and pupils are frequently unable to find a word in the quickest manner, or to determine for themselves the correct pronunciation of new words, as the use of the key words usually printed at the bottom of each page in a good dictionary has not been explained to them.