

Less rigid and formal methods of instruction than those too frequently found in lower classes are used in special classes, whose aim is "to provide the backward children with an atmosphere that gives greater scope to natural interests and abilities, where less pressure is exerted to incite them to struggle with uncongenial 'academic' tasks." In establishing these classes New Zealand is but following the example of other countries. For many years such classes have been in operation in Great Britain and in America. Their value to society is without question, as nothing can be more wasteful educationally than to subject pupils to methods of teaching that are unsuited to their needs.

The Inspectors' reports show that greater attention is being shown to speech-training, with the object of counteracting incorrect habits of speech out of school. In this connection it may be mentioned that the pamphlet prepared by the Department is being much appreciated by teachers and is now in general use.

The intellectual aspect of reading—"reading for content," as it is called—is receiving greater attention from the teachers, and in most of the schools good class libraries are to be found. The traditional reading lesson, which consists of having each child reading aloud a few lines in turn without previous preparation while the rest of the class are required to follow word by word, has now almost disappeared. But it is a mistake to think that reading aloud, in order to give pleasure to an audience, should not still receive its merited share of attention. Clearness of utterance, audibility, fluency, and expression based upon comprehension are the essential qualities of good reading aloud, and it is most desirable that attention should still be given to secure these in our pupils. Further, it is generally recognized that reading aloud is the most potent means which a teacher possesses for awakening in his pupils an appreciation of literature, and frequent reading by the teacher of specially chosen passages in order to stimulate the interest of the class or to form their taste cannot be too strongly recommended as the means of enforcing the appeal of literature.

It would appear that the Inspectors generally are of opinion that too much time is still given to arithmetic which, being regarded as the most important subject in the school, has devoted to it not only the prescribed period but any spare time in addition. The simplification of the syllabus in arithmetic as promulgated in the *Education Gazette* had for its object the bringing of the subject more into accord with the requirements of life, to ensure a good foundation in the basic processes, and to reduce the time formerly devoted to it. Here again it would seem that teachers are too generally dominated by the text-book, the chief use of which is to afford the necessary revision and mechanical work, and not to define the course of instruction.

Revision of the Syllabus.—The revision of the syllabus referred to in last year's report, has been placed in the hands of a special committee appointed by the Hon. the Minister. The task is one that requires considerable thought and care, and cannot be accomplished in a limited time.

The revision of the syllabus will naturally be followed by a revision of the class-books authorized for use in schools, and this is, without doubt, very desirable. As it is, the most progressive teachers have moved away from the present text-books as regards both the scope of the work and also its treatment. Particularly is reform necessary in the text-books in English language, the teaching of the mother-tongue being of paramount importance in the primary schools. The Inspectors of Wellington District, for example, report that "without doubt the most difficult subject in the curriculum, and yet the most important, constructive English, is still possibly the worst handled, and will continue to be so unless it is quickened by the personal enthusiasm of the teacher, and not strangled by the warping influence of any text-book which prescribes for every child not only the subject on which he shall write, whether he likes it or not, but the very ways in which he is to think about it."

The Senior Inspector of Hawke's Bay District calls attention to the need for inculcating to a greater extent habits of thrift. He points out that the children could economize in their use of the ordinary school requisites to an extent that would probably reduce appreciably the expense to which their parents are put on this account. There is no doubt a good deal of truth in his remarks, and the attention of teachers should be directed to the desirability of developing in their pupils the habits of judicious saving in both material and money.

In this connection it may be stated that the provision in the Education Act for the establishment of schools savings-banks for the use of children attending the schools is not made use of to any great extent. This is a matter for regret, as there is no habit more desirable, and, indeed, none in more urgent need of fostering amongst children at the present time, than that of thrift.

The following extracts from the Inspectors' reports contain their views upon other matters related to the general work of the schools.

READING.

Wellington District.

The practice of taking a whole class for oral reading dies hard. We are forced to the conclusion that the reason is to be found in the lack of preparation of questions for testing silent reading, for silent reading *must* be carefully supervised and tested if it is to be at all effective. Further, there is perhaps the baseless fear that silent reading will not help the pupils to read orally. The art of reading aloud should certainly not be lost sight of, but should be cultivated as a distinct accomplishment, wholesome and pleasure-giving. It does not, however, encourage a love for natural reading. If children are reading naturally, they will not be content with one book; and, indeed, we frequently find this to be the case.

The method of teaching the first steps in reading varies with the teacher—we have laid down no royal road to be followed. In general, phonics is still an important factor, and its virtue in training