

WESTLAND.

SIR,—

I have the honor to lay before the Board my annual report on the State schools of this district, and more particularly on the results of the recent examination.

The examination, of which the following is a detailed report, has been, without doubt, the most searching that the schools have hitherto undergone. Every child above the infant division has been personally examined, and in all the standards the questions were fully up to the programme of instruction in point of difficulty. For the principal subjects I prepared three sets of examination papers, which were used in such a manner as to avoid giving the same questions to two adjacent schools.

For the first time since the establishment of the present system the scholars were all examined in the subjects of the standards in which they were presented, instead of those of the next lower standard. Henceforth the expression "passing Standard V." or VI. will mean, as it does when applied to results of the recent examination, that the pupils so described have accomplished the work laid down for them in the programme named. I have therefore thought it advisable to enter more into detail in this report than has been customary in the past, or will be necessary in the future.

* * * * *

In preparing the accompanying table of results, I have added four new columns, the first showing the number of days upon which each school was open during the year; second, a column in each class, showing the average number of daily attendances of each pupil, a very important factor in estimating the relative progress of the various schools; third, the failures per cent. of the number examined; and, fourth, the total percentage of passes made by the whole school, exclusive of the infants. This last is the Victorian method of stating the result, and will give a general idea of the relative merits of the various schools, but not a very accurate one, since just as much credit is obtained for passes in the first as for those in the sixth or seventh, while it would be possible for the upper classes (if small) to fail altogether, and yet the percentage of passes to be good, being made up by the greater numbers in the lower classes. With regard to the total percentage of passes, it may be assumed that from 90 to 100 is an excellent result; 80 to 90, very good; 70 to 80, good; 60 to 70, fair; 50 to 60, poor; 40 to 50, bad; below 40, very bad.

With regard to the columns numbered 5, containing the average number of marks gained by each pupil, and 6, containing the percentage of passes gained by the whole class, it may be observed that, with respect to each class as a whole, and as a general rule, a low percentage of marks, combined with a low percentage of passes, shows general weakness throughout the class, and may be regarded as very unsatisfactory. 2. A high percentage of marks, with a low percentage of passes, indicates proficiency in some subjects and weakness or failure in others. 3. A fair percentage of marks, with a high percentage of passes, shows moderate general improvement in all subjects. 4. A high percentage of marks, together with a high percentage of passes, indicates satisfactory improvement in all subjects.

For the purposes of comparison on the basis of the foregoing data, anything much below 50 may be considered a low percentage of marks. Anything near or above 70 per cent. of marks, or 90 per cent. of passes, may be considered as high percentages.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Reading.—The remarks made in my last report in connection with this subject appear to have produced some effect, and perhaps the additional reading books issued during the year have helped to bring about an improvement in this respect. The reading at the larger schools has considerably improved, and the neglect of the aspirate and the final *ng* is not nearly so common as formerly. The girls, however, in many instances still read in so subdued a voice that it is with the greatest difficulty that they can be heard. Punctuation is more carefully observed than it was at the last examination. In the majority of cases a fair amount of intelligence was displayed in answer to a few questions upon the subject of the reading lesson.

Writing.—There are some schools where this subject is most admirably taught, the copy-books containing evidence of frequent supervision and correction; and, on the other hand, it seems in some cases to be left to the discretion of the pupils, and this is naturally of more frequent occurrence in schools with insufficient staffs. Very little attention is paid in some schools to the manner in which the pen is held. In one very large class I observed not more than six who were holding their pens properly, and, upon my pointing this out to the teacher, he triumphantly produced the copy-book of one of the six, and showed me that the writing was very bad, as though it was so in consequence of his holding his pen properly. There is still too great a tendency, especially at some of the smaller State schools and at all the subsidized schools, to allow children to advance too rapidly through a series of copy-books. I have found children in the 1st class making miserable attempts to write in Darnell's or Vere Foster's No. 4 or No. 5.

Arithmetic.—The frequent reference in the previous portion of this report to this subject shows that it is still generally the least effectively taught subject in our schools—more particularly in some of the smaller. To illustrate this I give the average number of marks obtained in this subject by the children in the fifth class at the following schools, the maximum number being 70: Stafford, 12; Goldsborough, 27; Greeks, 40; Kumara, 43; Greymouth, 44; St. Patrick's, Grey, 11; Hokitika, 50; St. Mary's, Hokitika, 23; South Spit, 10; Kanieri, 20; Woodstock, 6½; Blue Spur, 35; Greenstone, 30; Marsden, 15; Ross, 33. If we assume that less than 20 marks is a poor result, between 20 and 40 fair, from 40 to 60 good, and above 60 excellent, the arithmetic of this standard is bad in one-third of the schools represented. The average of the Hokitika School is just equal to the average obtained in the same standard by the 6th class at the last annual examination.

The practice of counting the fingers, or marks made on the slate, instead of adding the numbers themselves together, still prevails at some schools, notably at St. Patrick's, Grey, in the girls' department, where nearly all the children in the 2nd class were evidently accustomed to this method of arriving at the result. It is my intention shortly to visit the schools where this weakness is most