

Government, which, in my opinion, is an exceedingly well-arranged and progressive scheme. It should be remembered that, if each branch is to be well done, the girls in each standard will not be permitted to advance a step beyond what is required of them in the syllabus. Of course, as pupils proceed to the higher classes, a little of the previously plain work may be done again, though much improved, and in addition to the more advanced branches. This rule will vary according to the article chosen for inspection.

There are two or three schools which deserve commendation, as the manner in which the work has been done by the girls shows that much care has been bestowed upon this subject by the teachers. These are the Napier, Waipukurau, and Gisborne Schools.

It is unnecessary to enter into minute details regarding the many specimens examined, for sufficient progress has not yet been made to require this, excepting in the schools mentioned above. Cutting-out, darning, and patching, have in a number of instances been generally well done, owing, I suppose, to the encouragement given by Captain Russell in awarding prizes for these branches. Knitting does not seem to have been attempted, but I would recommend that attention should be given to it during the present year, if only to teach the girls how to knit their own stockings.

Perhaps it would be advisable another year to make such arrangements that all the sewing specimens done by the girls in the upper standards throughout the schools of the district could be forwarded for examination at the same time.

Napier, 28th February, 1881.

EMILY HILL.

MARLBOROUGH.

SIR,—

9th November, 1880.

I have the honor to lay before you my report on the Marlborough public schools for 1880. I have examined 19 schools, the flooded state of the rivers having hitherto prevented me from examining the remote little school at Kekerangu. It is the wish of the Board, however, that I should publish my report without waiting for the result of the examination of that school. The number of scholars on the rolls of the schools examined was 1,122, 892 of whom were present at my examination. The number of passes was 505, giving a percentage of 78 for the district on the number presented for standards, 643. The age at which scholars pass the standards being an important factor in determining the value of the work done, I have compiled a table showing the average age at which the pupils in each school have passed the several standards. I have also shown what is the average age for passing in the whole district.

As a rule the schools did well this year, though the state of a few—as will appear from my estimate of each school—was far from being satisfactory. There are also defects in the method of teaching common to most of the schools, which I shall point out. The schools, however, vary so much, that it is not easy to give such a general estimate of the degree of success with which each subject is being taught as shall be equally true even of a large proportion of them. The reading, on the whole, has improved, the spelling being certainly far better than it was. The arithmetic of many schools is still weak—this being especially manifest when a question is put in a form differing even slightly from that to which the pupils have been accustomed. Thought would be stimulated and accuracy gained if teachers would exercise their scholars in sums set in the most varied forms. Geography is now fairly well taught in almost every school, while the results of the examination in history were, taken altogether, better than those obtained last year. Letter-writing—among the most important matters that a child can learn—is evidently not practised enough. Not only are many of even the older scholars quite at a loss to express themselves clearly on the simplest subjects, but they have not been properly instructed in “form;” that is, they do not know how to address or subscribe a letter properly. The handwriting in the different schools, with at most half a dozen exceptions, is still far from being as good as it ought to be, and as it would be if the requisite pains were taken. I shall not cease to insist upon this point until I see a general amendment. Elementary science continues to be well taught. Singing by note is now taught, so far as I can ascertain, in one school only—Renwick; I make no account of singing by ear. Drawing forms part of the school course in a few places; needle-work being taught wherever a mistress or assistant-mistress is employed.

Before giving my usual summary of the present state of each school, I shall do what I can to correct a wide-spread misapprehension as to the quality of the instruction given in our public schools, and its probable effect both on the scholars themselves and on the cost of the system. It is broadly and very generally alleged—1st. That the kind of education given in our primary schools is such as to unfit children for their future work in life; and 2nd. That expenses might be largely curtailed if the instruction were confined to the bare elements of reading, writing, and arithmetic. It will not be difficult to show that there are no good grounds for either of these allegations. A practical test is, fortunately, readily applicable. Six hundred and forty-three children have this year been presented for examination in the Marlborough District. Of these, no more than 21 have succeeded in passing the Fifth Standard, 21 having passed the Sixth, including nine scholars attending the High School. And there is no good reason for supposing that this number will be materially increased for some time. It follows, then, that the vast majority of the children who attend the primary schools will not get beyond the Fourth Standard when they leave school. Experience shows that their time, especially in the country, is too valuable to admit of their being retained at school much beyond their twelfth year, when this standard is usually passed by scholars of average ability. But all that the average boy carries away with him from school after passing the Fourth Standard may be summarized thus: He can read a passage of ordinary difficulty from a newspaper, not well, but intelligibly; he can write a short letter on some simple subject in a legible hand, and probably without gross misspellings; and he knows enough of figures to be able to make out or to check a tradesman's bill. As to the rest of his acquirements, no apprehension need be felt lest the scraps of geography, grammar, and history that he may have picked up should be a serious obstacle to his success in life. It may be assumed that a large proportion of