

retards the progress of others in the same class, discourages the teacher, and (for they are invariably present on the day of inspection) wastes the time of the examiner. The question of compulsion has, I believe, been discussed by several Committees, and in some districts, where the school accommodation is sufficient to meet all requirements, the effect of it has been tried, but with what result I am not at present aware. I may here state that I think it would be well, as head-teachers have very different ideas on the matter, to define distinctly the number of attendances necessary to constitute a "fair attendance."

Three new schools have been opened, and important additions and improvements have been made to the buildings at Tinwald, Ashburton, Dunsandel, Heathcote Valley, Heathcote Lower, and other places. Except in the case of isolated families, there are very few places where the means of education are not placed or about to be placed within a reasonable distance of all children of a "school age." As regards the material condition of the buildings and grounds, they are nearly all in a very fair state, and, with few exceptions, I found the rooms clean and tidy, not only on the days appointed for examination, but also on the occasion of my surprise visits. More care is exercised in letting the buildings, as only two teachers made complaints against persons using the rooms in the evenings and neglecting to leave them in proper order for the next day's work.

The number of children present at examinations this year was 6,318, being an increase of 435 over those examined in 1879. The enrolment on the same dates was 7,847. The following table shows the enrolments and attendances for the years 1878, 1879, and 1880 :—

Year.	Enrolment.	Present at Examination.	Percentage.
1878	5,857	4,767	82
1879	7,443	5,883	79
1880	7,847	6,318	80

This year, out of the total number examined, 3,828, or 60 per cent., were presented in standards. It will thus be seen that there is still a large proportion of the pupils attending our elementary schools whose attainments range below Standard I. This is far from encouraging, and, until some very marked improvement is effected, the quality of the instruction given in the infant classes cannot be deemed satisfactory. The following table shows the number presented in each standard, the number passed, the average age at which the scholars pass, and the percentage gained :—

	Presented.	Passed.	Average Age.	Percentage.
Standard VI.	63	32	14.0	50
" V.	211	104	12.9	49
" IV.	547	255	12.3	46
" III.	882	424	11.2	48
" II.	1,084	787	9.7	72
" I.	1,041	861	8.8	82
	<u>3,828</u>	<u>2,463</u>		<u>64</u>

The above table shows that the percentages of passes, except in the Sixth Standard, are considerably lower than those of the previous year. Although in many instances I am not surprised at the results, yet the marked general falling-off is very disappointing, especially as I was very careful not to put an unduly high construction on the requirements, and the tests applied are not severer than formerly—indeed, in some subjects, the questions were designedly a little easier. Of course a large proportion of the failures is due to absenteeism and irregular attendance, but, in addition to these acknowledged hindrances to successful teaching, there are others; and there are, in my opinion, defective training in the preparatory classes, the absurd system of cram persisted in in some schools, and the disinclination or inability of a few teachers to adapt their methods of instruction to the standard system. Frequently during the past year circumstances have come to my knowledge that have convinced me that in some cases, for at least two-thirds of the year, the scholars are classified and taught, not in accordance with the regulations, but in accordance with the wishes of their parents. A month or six weeks before the annual examination, probably not before the teacher receives notice of the Inspector's visit, the children are put back into their proper standards, and an attempt is made to overtake the work of months in as many weeks. As may be readily supposed, everything goes wrong on the day of examination. Some sulk because primers are substituted for their No. III.; others are indignant because they are compelled to disclose their ignorance of the compound rules, instead of being allowed to display the fact that they have been *working in* vulgar fractions and interest. Until masters make up their minds to perform their work in a systematic and progressive manner, or their places are supplied by thoroughly trained persons, the educational aspect of the district will always appear to more or less disadvantage. Far too many head-teachers still persist in devoting an undue proportion of their time and attention to preparing a few pupils for the higher standards, and think that, if after a year's cram they succeed in passing a fair percentage of them, they have done very well. I use the word "cram" advisedly, for in these schools all questions requiring the slightest exercise of the intelligence were either passed over or incorrectly answered. Thus, for example, four-fifths of a class preparing for the Fourth Standard would, in all probability, correctly multiply £16 13s. 4½d. by 54. When, however, the same question was given in the form of a problem, as—How much money must be divided between 54 persons so that each may receive £16 13s. 14½d.? hardly one-fourth of the same class would be successful. I am afraid that this neglect of the junior classes is not confined to unsuccessful country schools, but is also to be found in some of the town schools. I am forced to this conclusion, not only by what I have observed on my visits of inspection, but also by the carelessness, inattention, bad style of reading, and general unpreparedness displayed during examination. It is far from creditable to find that, out of 2,125 children presented in Standards I. and II., 477 failed to come up to the very moderate requirements, and especially so when their ages and the periods that they have been at school are taken into consideration. Seeing that the majority of the children enrolled leave school at the age of twelve, or attend so irregularly after that age as to make but little progress, it is evident that,