

The next table shows the average age at which children are presented (or passed) in the several standards in this and the two neighbouring Education districts:—

District.	Average Age of Scholars in Standards.						Remarks.
	VI.	V.	IV.	III.	II.	I.	
North Canterbury: Mr. Res-tell's report, 1879	13·8	13·1	12·8	11·8	10·4	9·0	Passed standard. Age last birthday.
North Canterbury: Mr. Edge's report, 1879	13·5	13·1	12·4	11·4	10·3	8·8	Presented in standard. Age last birthday.
Nelson report, 1880	14·2	13·5	12·1	11·0	9·8	8·2	Passed standard.
Westland report, 1880	14·3	13·2	12·6	11·1	9·6	8·0	Presented in standard. Age at date of examination.

From the above it will be seen that at present the average ages of the several standards in Westland do not differ much from those in the other districts. The age of the Sixth Standard is indeed a little higher, but it is not, in my opinion, a matter of regret that children should be found in that standard at the age of fourteen years and upwards.

I believe that the great majority of children are incapable of deriving the full benefit of the present system of instruction in that standard at any much earlier age, and it is more to be feared that, unless means be devised to prevent it, the present practice of admitting children under five years of age, and advancing them a standard every year, will hereafter result either in numerous failures in the higher standards, or, what would be far more disastrous, in the overloading of the immature brains of the rising generation, by forcing upon them mental pabulum that they are unable to digest or even to retain. It is my opinion, and, I believe, it is the opinion of many experienced teachers, that when a child has passed Standard IV. (or the standard of exemption), he should not "be expected to advance" the two remaining standards in the two following years, but that in the majority of cases it would be greatly to the advantage of scholars to be allowed at least three years to complete the work of the Fifth and Sixth Standards. I have this year arranged the schools in the Table of Results in five groups, each group containing schools which are somewhat similar as regards average attendance and staff employed. . . . I must, however, caution the general public against falling into the error of supposing that the mere comparison of the figures in the Table of Results will enable them to form a proper estimate of the relative merits of the several teachers. To do so requires a far more intimate acquaintance with the past history and present circumstances of both schools and teachers than is possessed by the generality of persons unconnected with school matters.

I have followed the course I adopted last year with regard to scholars whose attendance has been very irregular. All such who failed at the examination are excluded from the body of the table, and placed by themselves in a column to the right. It will be observed that the Third and Fourth Standards present more failures than the others, and this I account for in the following manner: The Fourth Standard is the "standard of education" fixed by the Act, and the passing this standard exempts the scholar from the operation of the compulsory clauses. I have therefore thought it proper to make the examination in this standard as severe as the regulations permit, so that this exemption shall not be too easily obtained. In the Third Standard it must be remembered that the scholars are, for the first time, examined on paper, and doubtless this causes many to fail to do themselves and their teachers full justice. But the great stumbling-block in this standard is the English history. The whole range of English history from the Roman to the Brunswick period is included in their programme, and although only "a few of the most interesting facts in each period" are required, yet many teachers complain, with reason, of the difficulty of making a suitable selection from so extensive a field. I propose to meet the difficulty by drawing up a brief synopsis of English history, suitable for this standard, within the limit of which the examination will in future be confined.

Nearly every year the prevalence of some infectious disease is reported as having hindered the progress of education in some of our schools. This year is no exception. At Greymouth an outbreak of whooping-cough caused the Committee to take steps to prevent the attendance of any children from families so infected, the natural consequence being a considerable falling-off in the attendance for that quarter. At Hokitika the Committee closed the school for four weeks for similar reasons. The very low average attendance at the Arahura Road School, which also was closed for some weeks, is partly attributable to the presence of diphtheria and other diseases in the neighbourhood. Brunnerton suffered considerably at the beginning of the year from the prevalence of whooping-cough. At Hatter's Terrace, bronchitis and whooping-cough prevailed for some time, and very much reduced the attendance, and it is possible that other schools may have suffered from similar causes, although their cases have not been brought prominently under my notice.

For some time past statements have been repeatedly made in the columns of a local newspaper to the effect that the Hokitika School is in a disgraceful state of disorganization. These statements, and almost daily attacks upon the headmaster in the columns of the same paper, have no doubt done incalculable injury to the school, and have enormously increased the difficulty of preserving order and discipline. In addition to this, special pains seem to have been taken to disseminate these statements by giving them publicity in the influential papers in other parts of the colony, and it is chiefly on this account that I feel called upon to give public expression to my opinion on the subject. I, therefore, have no hesitation in asserting, without fear of contradiction by any person qualified to give an opinion on the subject, that, with respect to discipline, organization, efficiency, and general management, the Hokitika School is, and always has been, equal to any similar school in the colony. It is indeed a source of astonishment to me that, under the wretched circumstances which have prevailed during the past six months, and in spite of a diminished staff and other drawbacks before alluded to, the discipline and general tone of the school remain as good as they are, and that it should have taken so high a position at the late result examination.