

tion. In the latter subject it was expected that three or four lines from the usual reading-book would be accurately transcribed, but in many schools the failures in this exercise were surprisingly numerous, and this was the case even in schools in which the spelling on slates was very well done. This circumstance plainly indicates insufficient superintendence of transcription exercises in a good many of the schools. In Standard III. also there is a sensible decline in the percentage of passes, which is attributable partly to a greater number of failures in reading, but principally to failures in geography and history. In Standards IV., V., and VI. there is also a slight falling off in the returns for the year. The average ages for the various standards agree very closely with those of last year.

A glance at the fifth column in the above table will show that the results in Standards III. and IV. are greatly inferior to those in the lower and the higher standards. This fact, at first sight unexpected, is not difficult to explain. In Standard III. the examination is for the first time in seven subjects, and two of these (more particularly history) are vaguely defined, so that it is difficult to make sure of passes in them. In Standard IV. the low percentage is due to the two circumstances, that the interval between the Third and Fourth Standards is greater than between any other consecutive ones, and that the examination in this standard has been purposely fixed somewhat high, because it represents the modicum of education that is compulsory under the Education Act. These considerations sufficiently explain the relatively low results in these two standards. Though the results in the schools examined by me during the year fall somewhat below those of last year, they afford satisfactory proof that the schools are fully maintaining their efficiency. Last year's results were exceptionally high, and may not be surpassed for some years. The reason for this was that teachers were then allowed to present their pupils for such standards as they considered them qualified to pass—a privilege that was exercised in such a way as to produce unusually high results. During the past year no such choice could be exercised, except in the case of the comparatively small number of pupils who failed to pass the standard examination of the previous year. The great majority of the pupils had to be presented for a higher standard than that which they last passed. When due allowance is made for these circumstances, the results for the year are fully as good as could be expected.

In an appendix to this report will be found a statement of some of the details of the standard examinations for all the schools in my district. In general, the results shown therein give a fairly accurate measure of the success of their management. It seldom happens that a well-managed school, in which the control is good and the teaching well directed, fails to secure good results in the standard examination. In a few cases, however, the results have fallen considerably below what might be expected from their efficient management. Among such I may mention the schools at Merton, Papakaio, Evanasdale, and Pukeuri. I have been unable to make any visit of inspection to a considerable number of schools in my district. None in Vincent and Maniototo Counties were visited except for examination. In the smaller schools in these counties, however, I was able to combine examination and inspection to a certain extent, but in most the examination occupied all the available time. A good many schools in the north coast district also passed unvisited. I have therefore had fewer opportunities than usual of seeing the teaching in the schools. In most of those visited the teaching is being directed with increasing skill. In nearly every case I was highly satisfied with the earnestness and fidelity with which the teachers carry out their arduous duties. There were frequent indications of a genuine desire to raise the quality of the teaching, to infuse an intelligent spirit into the work, and to train the pupils to habits of attention, self-reliance, order, and truthfulness. Cases of weak control rarely came under my notice. In general, the discipline and tone were good, while copying, prompting, and other minor moral delinquencies were less conspicuous than formerly.

In the subjects which do not count in the standard examination there is less improvement than could be desired. In many schools, and more especially in those taught by a single teacher, and having a large number of classes, the pressure of the standard-work causes them to be neglected, and they generally receive but a minor share of attention. I have heard but few object-lessons, chiefly in the smaller schools, and in general they were not given in a methodical or skilful way. The results of the science lessons have likewise been disappointing and meagre. The teaching in this subject appears to be of too abstract and general a character, and to take too little account of facts and processes already familiar to the pupils. I find that the common properties of liquids, solids, and gases, with the nature and effects of which every child possesses some personal acquaintance, are rarely understood. There is the like ignorance, in many cases, of the construction and uses of such common instruments as the barometer, the thermometer, and the common pump. I think it is much to be regretted that the department has not recommended for science teaching the use as reading-books of such works as Chambers's Scientific Reader, or Huxley's admirable Physiography, instead of a syllabus showing the heads to be treated of. An attentive perusal of either of the works mentioned would, in the circumstances of the Otago schools, lead to far better results than flow from the existing arrangements for imparting a knowledge of elementary science.

I have not been able to examine the exercise-books in the various schools so fully as in former years. I fear that these aids to education are, in many cases, real hindrances. All work of this kind requires more thorough and careful supervision than it usually receives. Much of the bad writing in the schools is undoubtedly due to the slipshod way in which exercises in these books are done. The numerous new and well-appointed schools recently erected are being kept in excellent order, and both teachers and pupils deserve great credit for their determination to hand down to those who come after them clean and unutilized furniture. In some cases the Chairman and members of the School Committees have taken an active interest in this matter, and their exertions have had most satisfactory results. I hope that the example thus set will be generally followed by the School Committees, who, by taking steps to conserve the school buildings, and keep them in good repair, can both further the comfort of the children in the schools, and, to some extent, lessen the cost to the community of replacing buildings that might with proper care last for years to come.

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