

The system of examination in standards was begun in 1879, so that it is yet, comparatively speaking, in its infancy in this district. We have to some extent been acting tentatively in order to lay a firm foundation on which a reality might stand. This, I think, we have been able to do to a considerable extent. Some of the schools are in by no means a satisfactory state, and must continue so till we can provide better teachers for them. On the other hand there are very many schools in which the work is really excellent; and all the teachers now understand that nothing but good work will be accepted. I may state that we get some really creditable composition, in the shape of letters, from the pupils in the Third and Fourth Standards. I believe that but little composition is exacted from these standards in other districts. This, of course, will make a wonderful difference in apparent results.

I append a table showing the number examined and passed in each standard, also the average age at which the pupils passed.

—			Examined.	Passed.	Failed.	Percentage of Passes.	Average Age at Time of Passing.
Standard I.	...	...	2,095	1,633	462	77.9	9.0
Standard II.	...	...	2,241	1,427	814	63.6	10.7
Standard III.	...	...	1,723	974	749	56.5	11.9
Standard IV.	...	...	945	625	320	65.6	13.3
Standard V.	...	...	453	277	176	61.1	14.3
Standard VI.	...	...	117	62	55	52.9	15.0
Total	...	...	7,574	4,998	2,576	65.9	...

It will be seen that the percentage of passes is smaller than that of last year. This is due to more than one cause. A somewhat more stringent test was applied: it was judged that the time had arrived for doing this. Some of the schools did not stand the test. The great amount of sickness which prevailed last year caused irregularity of attendance, which seriously disarranged many of the schools, and, of course, hindered their efficiency. I have thought it right not to lower our requirements in order to enter in a race for results with other districts. I have no doubt that before long we shall reap the benefit of this. Notwithstanding the percentage of passes, I am satisfied that the efficiency of the schools has decidedly increased during the year. The rules adopted by the Board in September last, in reference to the sending up pupils for standards, came into force on the 1st January last. These rules will have a beneficial effect, and will help to prevent abuse. Their tendency will be, however, to lessen the percentage of passes. I should be glad to follow the system pursued in South Canterbury, where every child in a school is sent up. The large numbers at some of our schools would make that almost impracticable here; but perhaps we may be able to adopt some modification of it before long.

I will now refer briefly to the teaching in some of the subjects in the schools. In some of the schools there is considerable improvement in the reading. Many of the candidates for district scholarships read really well: on the other hand, a great many of them did not read well; there was too much running of one word into another, and dropping the final consonant—too much monotonous and unintelligent drawing. In the large schools, where of necessity there is a great deal of simultaneous reading, the process is often excruciating. It is a monotonous kind of screaming song, without expression or intelligence. "But if the art of reading, to be of any service, is an expression of the writer's thoughts, and their association with the reader's own, what sort of instruction in the art is that which produces a town-crier's recitative from the reader's mouth, and a responseless lack-lustre in his eye?" This is to be got over by insisting on the pupils speaking instead of singing, by making them speak in a very low tone. They will be heard much more distinctly, and the human voice, after the bird-like scream, is most grateful to the ear.

There is considerable improvement in the writing. Some controversy has arisen as to the method of teaching writing adopted here. It appears to me that the matter is very easily dealt with. When a certain system of writing is adopted, and certain models chosen, is this system to be carried out, and are these models to be copied or not? Is the work to be a reality or a sham? Are the children to be trained to do what they profess to do, or something quite different? It seems to me that there can be but one answer to each of these questions, anything that may be written to the contrary notwithstanding. In connection with this matter, I regret to find that a practice is gaining ground of giving exercises to be written at home on paper, by children who have just passed the Second Standard. This, in the majority of cases, will, instead of helping the teacher, heavily handicap him. Children at this stage should not be allowed to write on paper, except under careful supervision. Teachers should make use of the ninth page of No. 1, Vere Foster's Copybooks, as a guide for their pupils—a guide as to size, as to slope, and as to the beginning and ending of portions of letters. They should cut out this page and paste it on cardboard, and give one card to each desk of their junior classes, and, in some instances, to the members of their senior classes.

Many teachers err by ruling the slates for their junior pupils at too wide intervals; Vere Foster's hand is not half-text, and it cannot be properly written the size of half-text: it is large small-hand. Again, some teachers allow of too upright writing. In many schools the pupils are not prevented from cramming too many words into each line when they transcribe or compose. When the words are crowded the letters in the words will be crowded too. Each word and letter should have plenty of breathing space. Every desk in the junior classes should be supplied with a card, having the large and small manuscript letters written upon it with great care, as a guide in transcription. Blackboard writing will not serve this purpose. It is often of necessity hurried, and besides is liable to be influenced by the state of the teacher's hand, or the state of the teacher's mind. I have found lately in some schools that undivided attention has not been given by the teacher to the writing lesson. This, of course, cannot be allowed to continue. When it is practised the writing is inevitably bad. If a little