

thing—can be increased by trying to pour something more into a vessel that is already full, is one of the most mischievous superstitions of the nineteenth century.

I subjoin my usual short estimate of the present state of each school.

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Education Board.

W. C. HODGSON, Inspector.

NELSON.

SIR,—

22nd December, 1882.

I have the honour to lay before you my report of the Nelson public schools for 1882. I have inspected and examined 71 of the 73 schools now at work. The number present at examination was 3,536, the number on the roll at the time being 4,102. The number on the roll at the close of the December quarter was 4,092. I have to regret the absence of no less than 566 scholars on examination day, no sufficient reason for such absence being given, except in a very few cases. On the whole, I think that the schools are at least as well taught as they were last year. They are certainly better disciplined. Although the percentage of passes is somewhat higher than that obtained in 1881, the number of scholars presented for standards was less by 396, the passes being fewer by 218. But comparison even on this limited basis is difficult, owing to the much greater strictness with which the First, and to a certain extent the Second, Standard requirements have been intentionally construed this year, with the object of keeping back very young children; and it will be seen from a glance at the tables that it is in the two lowest standards that the falling-off in numbers chiefly occurs.

It is by this time hardly necessary to remind the Board how incomplete, and possibly misleading, any estimate of our schools based upon passes and percentages alone must be. With extended experience of the working of the standards, remedies, or at least palliatives, suggest themselves, which afford relief in those cases where the pinch is most keenly felt. I have this year devised plans by which two of the difficulties which give most trouble to teachers and Inspectors may to a great extent be overcome. Hitherto I have found the pernicious habit of presenting very young children for the First Standard almost incurable, especially where sanguine and inexperienced teachers were concerned. Remonstrances on the part of an Inspector, and even the demonstrating how unfavourably this practice affected the school life of the children and the future welfare of the school, were of no avail. I have, therefore, settled the matter by increasing the difficulty of the requirements at this stage, especially in reading and arithmetic, to the utmost extent permitted by the regulations. The result has fully equalled my expectations, and is far from being unpopular with the teachers, who perceive that the change will ultimately be for their benefit. The hitches that were sure to occur sooner or later where very young children had been pushed forward too fast will be fewer now that a better start is secured at the outset of standard work.

The much-mooted question as to what constitutes reasonable regularity of attendance I have attempted to solve by requesting teachers to enter on a separate list, at the foot of the list of candidates on the examination schedule, the names of those scholars who have made less than 260 half-day attendances since the previous examination. The failure to pass of any of these is not recorded. I saw that under the former permissive system grave irregularities, and even abuses, were not uncommon. Scholars who had attended badly, or who were considered dull, were either kept at home on examination day or, though present, were not brought forward for examination, so that the state of the school was in some instances actually judged by a carefully picked sample. These practices also naturally produced heartburnings on the part of the scholars thus left out, and discontent on the part of their parents. I am, therefore, emboldened by the success that has attended the two foregoing experiments to insist that, in future, all scholars who have passed the First Standard shall be presented for a higher standard year by year. The more difficult entrance examination will exclude nine-tenths of those too young for the work, and irregularity of attendance, being duly allowed for, can no longer be pleaded as an excuse for withholding a scholar. I have felt that, under the system of allowing a wide latitude to teachers as to what scholars they should bring forward, a fair comparison of the work done at different schools—one of the prime advantages claimed for a system of standards—was unattainable. The only practical difference will be that, instead of leaving it to the teacher to find out for me which of his scholars are dunces, I shall have the pain of doing that for myself, my consolation being that the brunt of the wrath of disappointed parents will fall hereafter, as is most fitting, on the Inspector instead of the schoolmaster.

It is difficult to account for the wide discrepancy between the performances of children on ordinary schooldays and the performances of the same children at an examination. That it really exists no one can doubt who has observed the unfeigned surprise and disappointment so often exhibited by teachers at the shortcomings of their scholars, especially in arithmetic and grammar. And this disappointment is not confined to novices, who may be supposed to be imperfectly acquainted with the powers of their pupils, but is also felt by experienced teachers. The difficulty or the unwonted form of the questions put will not explain the matter, for the requirements of each standard, as construed in this district, are by this time pretty generally understood, and it is a common remark of the teacher that his scholars had solved with ease similar or even harder questions a few days before. If the notable device—so much in favour with the distrustful portion of the public—were adopted, by which, with the view of securing their impartiality, Inspectors are to be periodically transplanted, thus insuring ignorance of the history and peculiarities of each district, and indifference to its welfare on their part, and uncertainty and the fear of the unknown on the part of the children and teachers, the problem would be easy enough of solution. But, having been at some pains, during many years, to win the confidence of the children of Nelson, I venture to assert that an examination is now hardly more dreaded than an ordinary schoolday, and that nervousness plays a very small part indeed on these occasions. I am not sure that the habit of copying, so difficult to prevent in a full school, has not something to do with the unlooked-for failures at an examination, where every one has to work independently, and where undetected cribbing is well nigh impossible. The general introduction of