

It will be seen that extended experience, and such changes in the special requirements of our schools as each year is sure to bring about, have necessitated constant alterations in the detail and method of examination. New rules as to the compulsory presentation of scholars for standards, and the exclusion from the published records of all those whose failure can be accounted for by irregularity of attendance, have now been adopted, almost simultaneously, and with little or no concert, by the Inspector in every education district in the colony. It is to be regretted that such modifications as must inevitably be made, from time to time, in every system that is not doomed to remain altogether stereotyped and hide-bound, cannot be effected, systematically and with a better sanction, by a conference of Inspectors. These might meet at some central spot every second year, bringing with them the results of a widely-extended and widely-varying experience of the practical working of the standards. If no more were accomplished than the bringing-about of a substantial accord on the present chief moot points, leaving a wide diversity of opinion and practice on less important matters, such a conference would be well worth, to the children of New Zealand, all the time and money it would cost.

Little help, I fear, is to be looked for from the counsels of teachers' associations and kindred institutions, if we may judge from some of the proposals that have, apparently, found favour with those bodies. The reduction to a minimum of the freedom of judgment and action of Inspectors, and the securing, under all circumstances, of an absolute uniformity in examinations, seem to be the favourite objects aimed at in most cases. And these are sought to be obtained by such notable devices as that the standard examination-papers for the whole colony shall be set and issued annually by the Education Department—a plan that would reproduce, in their worst form, some of the worst evils of a Continental bureaucracy. The unsought advice of those whose work is to be criticised, as to the best method of criticism, is, moreover, usually viewed with not unreasonable distrust by the outside public. In the meantime, in the absence of better guidance, I shall continue to avail myself, to the fullest extent, of the latitude allowed by the spirit of the regulations, and endeavour, by giving a marked trend to my examinations—by laying special stress on such subjects as I have reason to believe are neglected, and by passing lightly over such as are unduly prominent—to get such things thoroughly taught as will tend most to the future welfare of the scholars. In the very first rank of these must be put reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and letter-writing. Next may come grammar and physical geography, after these, political geography and history. If time is left for science, drawing, and singing, so much the better but the plea that much attention has been devoted to the latter will not be held by me a sufficient excuse for any shortcomings on the first five essential subjects.

I am glad to find an opinion that I have for some time held as to the worthlessness, and even the harmfulness, of prize-giving in our public schools confirmed by the successful example of the borough schools, where no such incentives to study are offered. Yet I have never seen scholars who showed a keener zest for their work, or who took a livelier interest in the result of the examination, than is habitually shown there. But the interest is of an altogether better and more generous sort than that which is painfully prominent at most competitive examinations, where the success of the individual is the sole aim. At the borough schools, after a successful examination, the predominant feeling is evidently that of pride that every scholar has done his duty, and that first the class, and then the school, has acquitted itself well. Whatever, indeed, tends to lessen the ever-increasing strain of competitive examination—that bane of modern schoolboy life—I count for good. I can only regret that no better way of selecting winners of scholarships has yet been devised than the fiery ordeal of competition, in the long preparation for which much valuable time must be wasted, by diverting the energies of the most promising scholars from their ordinary work, and as the result of which, after all, the prize may not fall to the candidate who really deserves it best.

I append a brief statement of the condition of each school when last examined. *

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Education Board.

W. C. HODGSON, Inspector

NELSON

SIR,—

30th December, 1883.

I have the honour to lay before you my report of the Nelson public schools for 1883.

The number of schools in the district (seventy-three) is apparently no greater than it was last year; but actually five aided schools, Pukororo, Woodstock, Burnside, Upper Takaka, and Hampden, have been opened since 1882, the reorganization of several of the town schools, recommended in my report of 1880, having reduced the nominal list by four. The number of scholars on the roll at the end of the December quarter was 4,543, being an increase of 451 during the year. The number present at examination was 3,774, the number on the roll at that time being 4,392, showing an increase of 290 as compared with last year. It is disheartening to find that about one-seventh of the scholars again absented themselves from examinations made during an exceptionally fine season. It would be an interesting but costly experiment to ascertain, by the offer of a ticket to a tea-party or some equally potent inducement to every scholar in attendance on examination-day how many of the 618 absentees were unavoidably detained. I have too good reason for suspecting that the notorious feebleness of parental control in this district, which renders the task of enforcing school discipline so hard, is at the bottom of three-fourths of these absences. So long as attendance is left to the option of the scholar will the muster-roll on the examination-day show many blanks.

The strict rule—enforced for the first time this year—which provides that all scholars who have passed the First Standard shall be presented for a higher standard year by year, irrespectively of their attendance or attainments, has swelled the record of those presented for examination by 358 names. At least 200 more were examined and failed to pass, but, as these had attended for less

* Not reprinted,