

than 130 days since the previous examination, their names do not appear on the list of examinees. The effects of this wider cast of the net have not been exactly what was anticipated, the percentage of passes, 83, being much higher than it has ever been before, although there has certainly been no relaxation of the stringency of the tests applied, which indeed, as I have ascertained from a constant interchange of my examination papers with those of some of my fellow Inspectors, are at least equal in point of difficulty to those used in other education districts. Judged, therefore, solely by the standard test, which, in the estimation of the general public, is gradually elbowing out of sight all others, the Nelson schools have this year acquitted themselves remarkably well.

The serious question next occurs, Are the children at our public schools on the whole better taught, and are they more intelligent, than they were a few years ago under a widely different system, or is the apparent improvement merely due to increased deftness on the part of our teachers in grappling with the technical difficulties and requirements of the standards, and in skilfully imparting the precise minimum of instruction that will justify an Inspector in giving a bare "pass"? Unfortunately an examiner who, year after year, is being gradually accustomed to look upon the standards and regulations ever before his eyes as his sole guides in estimating the quality of the work submitted to him, however he may gain in expertness of method, and in the faculty of judging almost intuitively whether any given paper is deserving of "a pass," must, in the long-run, lose something of the capacity for discriminating between *education* and *cram*. However resolutely he may set out by forming in his own mind an ideal of intelligent as distinguished from routine work, the ever-growing pressure of examinations will leave him but little leisure for forming broad judgments, and the habit of constantly working in the same narrow groove will, sooner or later, "subdue him to what he works in." I have no hesitation, however, in affirming that in some by no means unimportant respects our schools are generally and steadily improving. The arithmetic of the large majority of schools here may fairly be termed good, that of not a few, excellent. The methods of working questions are shorter and more scientific than they were, and the ability to grapple with a problem requiring some exercise of thought is becoming more common even among the younger children.

The greater pains bestowed upon reading have also borne good fruit. Good taste and expression are of later growth, and can be found only among a few exceptional children. But the majority of our scholars at least read distinctly, and as though they understand what they are reading.

There is little to find fault with in the teaching of technical grammar, which is not now allowed to usurp more than its fair share of time and attention while most of the other scholars can write plainly and sensibly on any familiar subject, and have, as a rule, abandoned the style of the "Polite Letter-writer," formerly much in vogue and carefully inculcated, I grieve to say, by some of their teachers.

The less essential subjects of geography and history get at least as much attention as they deserve, the geography of New Zealand being especially well taught.

A much more important matter, handwriting, is not so well attended to. It is impossible to look at the neat, well-formed penmanship of every scholar in a few of our schools without being driven to the conclusion that only negligence or incapacity on the part of the teacher can fully account for the shapeless scrawls that some are not ashamed to produce by dozens at every successive examination. I find it harder to account for much of the bad spelling that undoubtedly exists in some of our best schools. No pains appear to be spared, no method is left untried, and yet the outcome is unsatisfactory. It is noteworthy that in some schools, where no extraordinary pains seem to be taken, the spelling is uniformly good. It would almost seem as if, in certain schools, there was a tradition of good or bad spelling, equally hard to be broken through in either case.

The full course of instruction prescribed in the regulations, which, in addition to seven—and in the case of girls eight—standard subjects, embraces drawing, science, and vocal music, is carried out in comparatively few of our schools, those being usually in towns, where the number of scholars is large enough to admit of a teacher being put in charge of only one, or at most two, classes. But in the small country schools—which abound in this district—where a single teacher has to do everything, and where the attendance is too commonly very irregular, all apparent superfluities must be rigidly excluded from the school course. The full programme evidently presupposes a full staff of teachers and a regular attendance. A yearly attendance of 130 school-days—and hundreds of our children fall short of this modest minimum—leaves scant room for "beakers and test-tubes," for "drawing models," and the mysteries of the "modulator." Knowing how strong is the temptation to neglect essentials for these more showy matters, I have never urged the teachers of small schools to extend a programme that does not go much, if at all, beyond the seven standard subjects. There is ample scope for the energies of even a very capable teacher within the limits of this apparently narrow course of instruction. It is gratifying to find that the reduction to almost a minimum of home-lessons, which I have never ceased to urge upon our teachers, has now become general, and that, if the results of this year's examination may be taken as a criterion, the progress of the scholars has not, at any rate, been retarded by the lightening of their burdens. The gain to the health of the children ought also to count for something.

Much has been done this year to prepare the children by periodical rehearsals for the annual examination, and the good effects of this are manifested in the superior readiness of the scholars, especially in paper work, and in the greater neatness of the papers sent in, which, in our best schools, are models of orderly arrangement.

The column in the record of passes, showing the proportion that the number of passes in each school bears to the number of scholars on the roll, is significant, and affords a much-needed check to the otherwise misleading column giving the mere percentage of passes. If, for obvious reasons, the preparatory schools and those which admit none but the standard scholars be excluded, it is,