

In conclusion, I must express my sense of the uniform courtesy and assistance that I have received from teachers when examining their schools.

The Chairman, Education Board, Auckland.

I have, &c.,

JOHN S. GOODWIN, Inspector.

3.—MR. FIDLER'S REPORT.

SIR,—

Auckland, 25th February, 1886.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending the 31st December, 1885.

During the past year I have paid 101 visits to various schools—Eighty for the purpose of examination, and twenty-one for that of inspection. The schools allotted to me have not been in one particular locality, but mostly in groups in different parts of the province, and have embraced several of the town schools. The division of the province into districts for the purpose of examination and inspection, which comes into use this year, besides its other advantages, will render an annual report of this kind more useful, as it will then be easy to compare the work done in successive years in the several districts thereby defined.

I submit the following table, drawn up in accordance with the requirements of the regulations under the Education Act, VIII., 5:—

Standard.				Examined.	Passed.	Failed.	Average Age of those who Passed.	
							Yrs.	mos.
Standard I.	...	...	...	1,194	988	206	8	11
Standard II.	...	...	...	1,057	850	207	10	5
Standard III.	...	...	...	852	590	262	11	8
Standard IV.	...	...	...	406	226	180	12	9
Standard V.	...	...	...	250	120	130	13	6
Standard VI.	...	...	...	76	44	32	14	11

Two fortuitous circumstances have made the percentage of passes in the schools examined by me this year lower than should be expected. One group, consisting of fifteen schools, in the Bay of Islands District was examined, by order of the Board, four months before the usual time, to prevent the examination taking place during the winter. Again, the majority of the schools examined by me chanced to be some of those from which mediocre work is generally got. Many of them were in bush or gum-digging districts, or were mill-schools, and were, on the whole, far below the general average of the schools in the province. But this does not explain the whole result as numerically expressed above, as in not a few cases inferior work was got from larger schools and from those differently situated. An inquiry into the more general causes of these results, which are noticeably poor in the upper standards, distinguishing those which have operated in small schools from those which have acted in larger ones, or those which have affected both, will show which are beyond control, which can be modified, and which eliminated, and what are the conditions and probabilities of an early improvement in those schools which are below the mark. Though much that I treat of has been noted before at one time or another, still, along with the facts I shall state such inferences as seem worthy of attention, and occasionally suggest, with respect, what seem to me to be the lines to be followed by those who have the control over the causes referred to.

One Cause of the Results found in the Character of many of the Scholars.—One cause operating very largely in a number of the small schools is found in the condition unfavourable to the scholar's progress which exist in the character of many of the scholars themselves and in their surroundings. The great amount of physical labour which many of the parents require from their children, even though they may allow them to attend school, is a condition unfavourable to anything like intellectual progress. A great number of the boys and girls of thirteen or fourteen on the small bush-farms (which are so numerous in this province) or on the gumfields, besides attending school, have to do several hours' hard physical work every day. On such farms there is no machinery, no paid labour, and the children aid their parents very materially in their efforts to make a comfortable home. Truth compels me to add that not an insignificant proportion of parents who could afford to render the conditions of their children's educational progress more favourable prefer to use their labour, and to send them to school very irregularly, rather than procure that hired labour which their circumstances would permit. The interest of such pupils in their school-work is necessarily much diminished, and they often prove the most difficult subjects that the teachers have to deal with. In many of these schools, where a good number of the children are the offspring of parents with little or no appreciable school-education, much of the good, moral and intellectual, that is done does not admit of statistical representation, and only one who observes carefully can estimate the great progress which must be made by many of these children before they pass even the Third or Fourth Standard. When the system of public instruction has existed longer its effects will act more powerfully as causes, and every child who is fairly educated in such schools as I am speaking of will, directly or indirectly, vindicate the claims of its associates, or of those in the family who are younger, to the enjoyment of similar advantages. It is well, therefore, to recognise that, while the overtaking of the standard-work in a thorough manner is an object to be aimed at in such schools, the adverse conditions stated or alluded to often make the task difficult even for a good teacher. There are influences awakening the intelligence of children brought up where many of the schools are large which are not brought to bear on those attending small scattered schools—forces acting on