

In closely reviewing the whole work of the district, I am of opinion that the numerical deficiency, as shown in the first part of this table, fairly and accurately represents the falling-off in the work generally, but more particularly in the work of the higher standards. The number of passes in Standard VI. is still less than the number (183) passed two years ago. And now come the questions, Where is the weakness? and What is its cause? Last year I was pleased to be able to state that there were no cases of serious failure with badly-taught classes in large schools; and again, that there were few cases of schools which had suffered considerably by change of teachers. It is not so this year. One large city school, two large Wairarapa schools, several country schools, besides large classes in one or two others, have this year been more or less under inefficient instruction. Almost without exception the weak classes have been under newly-appointed teachers, or under teachers whose past reports have been unsatisfactory. It is not necessary for me to go into the particulars of these cases, for they are already pointed out in detail in my *ad interim* reports sent in to the Board in each case soon after the examination was made. The falling-off in the results is in part attributable to the weakness in the strength of the staff in several large schools. The time of the head-masters has been largely taken up in acting as substitutes for assistants required, ill, or suddenly removed. It is necessary that the Board should have at least one assistant-master as a supernumerary teacher, who could fill any post on emergency. But without doubt there is nothing more essential to the success of the present system of elementary education than the careful appointment of painstaking, kindly, and thoroughly practical teachers, and, if possible, of teachers who are known by experience to be capable of doing useful work.

It is in a great part due to the energy of the head-masters of some larger schools, in taking so much of the work upon their own hands, that the examination results have been on the whole fairly good. But this work deprives them of the opportunities necessary for training their junior teachers, and for supplementing the general class-teaching of the schools. In schools with about two hundred children attending the head-master takes the Fifth and Sixth Standard work himself; and, if he should be supplied with an inefficient assistant for one of his larger classes, the result is serious. This occurred in three Wairarapa schools during the past year, one of them being so good in the remaining classes that 81 per cent. was made on the whole, notwithstanding the fact that in the weak class alluded to only eight children passed the Third Standard out of a class of thirty-eight on the schedules. To obviate the evils and injustice which arise from the want of a fair distribution of good teaching-power, I think it would be well for the Board, with my assistance, once every three months to carefully revise the teaching-power of the larger schools, the number and efficiency of the staff being considered.

I do not wish it to be inferred from what has been said that the condition of the whole district is unsatisfactory. Six of the seven largest schools obtained very creditable results in several of their classes, and in one class—Standard V., Masterton—the arithmetical work was the best that has come under my notice, one-fourth of the sixty candidates clearing the paper. The standard work of the Clareville School was particularly commendable. The larger country schools around Wellington also did improved work. The chief cause of failure, both this year and in former years, is the difficulty of meeting requirements in grammar and arithmetic.

The standard system is a levelling system. It aims at uniformity; it ignores ability above an average order; it sets as much value on the fairly passable work of the dullard in the lowest standard as it does on the strong pass of the Sixth-Standard candidate. The attention of a head-teacher is most directed to his largest classes; the energy and skill of a class-teacher are most directed to their weakest pupils. This is as it should be, and the interests of the community as a whole are thus best considered. Again, the standard system exacts just as much from a class which has in past years been under an untrained or unskilled teacher as it does from a class which has received its previous instruction and training from one who is master of his art, provided always both classes have satisfied the minimum of requirements for the class-promotion. Looking at these facts, how important it is, first, that the early training of the classes should be such as to lay a good foundation for the higher work; and, secondly, how unwise it would be on the part of any teacher to aim at obtaining brilliant results from a few, and fail to satisfy the requirements of the standards with regard to many pupils of more moderate ability! Hence it is that I view with alarm any outward pressure which may be put upon teachers to specially prepare the best pupils for scholarship-examinations. It would be easy to do, and there is some temptation to do it; but the interests of the many would be wholly sacrificed by the practice.

The question of the supply of teachers for the lower classes of elementary schools is a burning one. The pupil-teacher system, if well carried out, has much to commend it; but it is open to one very serious objection—these young teachers gain their experience and training at the expense of the pupils, and more or less in a haphazard way. They are not prepared to begin their work systematically and to use the most approved methods. Moreover, the candidates are not chosen, as they should be, after they have shown aptitude and skill as teachers. Only literary attainments are looked for. All this appears to me radically wrong, and I strongly advise the Government of the colony to take up this question. It would not be difficult to put candidates for pupil-teacherships through a preliminary course of training in the precise work which they would be required for a year or two to teach. Then, with the practice and experience they would gain as pupil-teachers, we may reasonably suppose they would become efficient. The preliminary period of training would allow of a good selection being made, and those who were selected and trained would carry with them into the school on their appointment a fair knowledge of their duties. The more I see of elementary school work, and the more I look into the cause of failure in class-teaching, the more I am convinced that failure is caused by deficiency on the part of the teachers in method, skill, tact, patience, judgment, or knowledge of the elementary principles of the art of teaching any particular subject. And yet in our pupil-teacher system the great aim is an annual pass-examination—a literary examination; in our Training College the all-absorbing subject is a pass-examination—a literary one; and, lastly, with our head-teachers the beau-ideal of a first-class man is one who has