

By comparing the figures in the foregoing table it will be observed that there is a steady increase, not only in the number enrolled, but also in the number present at examination. In view of the latter fact, I think that the teachers deserve credit for having, on receipt of the notice of examination, made some special effort to get as many pupils together as possible.

Very little improvement has manifested itself in the regularity of attendance during the year. In some instances there has been a falling-off in this particular, owing to the prevalence of sickness among the children. Many children, chiefly in country districts, have been kept at home for long intervals during seed-time and harvest to assist their parents in farming operations; and, taking into consideration the low prices of produce during the past few years, I do not see how this was to be prevented. Many persons seem to think that indiscriminate compulsion is the only true remedy for irregularity in the attendance of children at school; but I confess that I do not clearly see this. Of course, in places where children are, owing to the wilful negligence, selfish indifference, or ineffectual control of their parents, allowed month after month to absent themselves from school, compulsion is, in the interests of the children themselves and of society at large, an absolute necessity. In agricultural districts, however, the putting into force the compulsory clauses of the Education Act will always be a delicate question, and one which will require the greatest care in handling. I know something of the opinions of parents throughout the district, and I am greatly afraid that enforced school attendance will not prove either popular or effective. In some few schools that I examined during the year the low average daily attendance of the scholars was undoubtedly due in a great measure to the indolence or incompetency of the teachers in charge. There is not the slightest doubt that the indifferent quality of the instruction and the general inefficiency of the school management cause many children to take a thorough dislike to school, and make their parents negligent about sending them. One very objectionable feature in the attendance is that it is not sufficiently consecutive; and I have heard many thoroughly efficient teachers complain bitterly of this. It is quite out of the question to produce satisfactory results in the higher standards in schools where the attendance is broken. It is difficult enough to get through the work of each standard in a year, without having to be continually going over back work with those children who absent themselves from the most trivial causes. I find, on looking through the duplicate schedules, that on the average about one day out of three was lost from school attendance in the case of fully one-third of the children presented for examination in standards in country schools during the year just passed. The punctuality of attendance is, as far as I had opportunities of judging, good in two-thirds of the schools. Where children loiter on their way to school, apparently indifferent as to whether they arrive in time or not, there is almost certain to be something wrong in the discipline and management of that school. The satisfactory condition of some schools as regards punctuality shows that, notwithstanding the careless neglect of parents, the rate of late scholars may be very much reduced by firmness and tact on the part of the teachers, and by encouraging the children to take an interest in their school work and playground sports. Further, it is a fact that when teachers are earnest and methodical in the discharge of their duties they invariably succeed in securing punctual scholars.

The school registers are usually kept correctly and neatly. In four schools, however, which were visited unexpectedly, the registers were found in such a neglected state that I was compelled to report the matter.

In the large majority of schools the neatness and cleanliness of the schoolrooms may be very favourably reported on. The out-offices, however, were in some instances found in such a bad condition as to indicate carelessness and neglect on the part of those who are supposed to look after the interests of the schools. The neglect of such matters is almost certain to foster habits of indecency among the pupils. Mats and foot-scrapers should be provided at the doors of all schools.

Various improvements, additions, or repairs have rendered the material condition of several schools of a more satisfactory character. With extremely few exceptions, the schools are well supplied with suitable furniture and appliances. Wherever there is a deficiency in such articles it is usually traceable to the neglect of the teachers. Several teachers still require to be more strict and mindful in seeing that the furniture and apparatus are not unnecessarily damaged.

The order and discipline were reasonably satisfactory in the majority of the schools that I examined. The children generally appeared to be earnest and industrious in their work, and very anxious to acquit themselves creditably. As a general rule, I think that the pupils are tractable and amenable to discipline, and that most cases of disorder are traceable to bad organization, inefficient teaching, or to want of experience on the part of the teachers in detecting and correcting faults. Some few teachers still continue to ignore the instructions with regard to school drill and class movements. In several schools I found the pupils of each standard so promiscuously arranged as to cause considerable loss of time during the examination. It is very desirable that the children should be arranged in their standards in the order in which their names appear on the schedules.

Time-tables were used in all schools that I visited except three; but in some cases they were not adhered to, but put up more for ornament than use. When teachers are indifferent about the time of beginning or ending a lesson, it cannot be expected that the scholars will show much regard for order and punctuality; but in schools where the teachers recognise the importance of doing certain things at stated times the pupils will soon see the necessity for being attentive and prepared for their work. In some schools too much time is allotted to mechanical work, and too little to those subjects requiring thought, skill, and continuous mental effort. I think it would be well if all teachers adopted the plan, now so common in the large schools, of making out programmes of the work to be undertaken for certain periods—say, a month, or a quarter. I am quite convinced that many of the failures each year are due to a want of systematic treatment in dealing with the requirements of each standard. At the end of each month or quarter the attainments of the scholars in the work gone over should be carefully tested, the teachers bearing in mind that no one can be certain of the results of teaching on children until those results have been tested by