

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Invercargill, 8th March, 1886.

I have the honour to lay before you my fourth general report on the condition of the public schools of Southland.

The results of the year's work, as far as these can be represented in statistics, are shown in the following table (Table I.), which, as required by the Orders in Council, I have compiled :—

TABLE I.

—	Gross Number of Scholars presented.	Excepted.	Net Number of Scholars.	Passed.	Per- centage.	Per- centage in 1884.	Number of Schools presenting the Standard.	Number of Schools present- ing the Standard in 1884.
Standard VI. ...	80	14	66	44	66·7	62·7	22	16
Standard V. ...	194	21	173	96	55·5	43·5	43	38
Standard IV. ...	480	82	398	216	54·3	51·1	60	60
Standard III. ...	889	148	741	532	71·8	55·8	67	68
Standard II. ...	894	111	783	685	87·5	76·1	67	69
Standard I. ...	899	76	823	777	94·4	88·5	68	67
Infants ...	2,534	...	...	...	...	...	68	69
Totals ...	5,970	452	2,984	2,350	78·8	68·4	68	69

The table shows that this year, as last, sixty-eight schools have been examined ; for, although the report last year spoke of sixty-nine schools, this arose from the fact that one school was examined twice. These sixty-eight schools, however, include six new ones, examined for the first time this year and added to the list—viz., those of Fernhills, Spar Bush, Nightcaps, Croydon, Redan Valley, and East Forest Hill. It also includes one of two schools omitted last year—viz., the Wai-kiwi School, now the Makarewa. On the other hand, from various causes, the examination of eight schools had to be postponed to the new year, so that their names do not appear in this list—viz., those of Limehills, North Forest Hill, Pinnacle, Otama, Ferndale, Gummie's Bush, Ryal Bush, and Otaria. The table further shows that this year 3,436 scholars were presented for examination in one or other of the standards—an increase of 155 on the preceding year. In calculating the percentage of passes, however, 452 scholars must be deducted from this gross number, as scholars included in one or other of the following classes and therefore “excepted”: (1) Scholars absent through sickness, or other imperative cause; (2) scholars who have already passed Standard VI.; (3) scholars presented for examination in a standard already passed; (4) scholars who have made less than 250 attendances during the year, and failed at the examination.

Of the net number of scholars (2,984) thus attained, 2,350 satisfied the Inspector at examination, so that the percentage of standard passes this year for the whole district is 78·8, as against 68·4 of the previous year, or an apparent improvement of 10·4 per cent. I say “apparent improvement,” because there is a small misleading factor to be eliminated before the comparison between the two years can be made with perfect fairness. Throughout the year just closed the Order in Council has been in force allowing scholars to be re-examined in a standard already passed; and also the resolution of the Board, exempting from computation all scholars who failed at examination if their attendance had been below a certain minimum; whilst in the previous year neither of these came into operation until half the schools had been examined. It is easy, however, to reduce the number of scholars exempted this year (452) by the number exempted (178) in those schools in which no such exemption was made last year; and if this be done a percentage (74·4) will be obtained which may with perfect fairness be compared with that of last year. In this way the schools will be seen to have increased in efficiency during the year to the degree of 6 per cent. of standard passes, a result on which, I think, the Board may be congratulated. It is satisfactory, too, to note that the improvement recorded is common to all the standards, though greatest in Standard III. Standard IV. appears to be the least strong, and the one that has made the least improvement.

The figures just quoted show that the teaching in the schools is more efficient than formerly; and the same table also reveals another satisfactory feature—viz., that in several schools a higher education is being given than before. This appears from the circumstance that twenty-two schools this year presented scholars in Standard VI., and forty-three in Standard V., as against sixteen and thirty-eight respectively last year. Too much, however, must not be made of this fact, as the very slight increase in the number of scholars presented in those standards shows that the new classes consist of only two or three scholars each.

Without entering at length into the causes which, in my judgment have contributed to the improvement here chronicled, I should like to mention two which have repeatedly forced themselves on my attention—(1) the better selection made from candidates for appointment as teachers, in consequence of the Board taking the duty more completely into its own hands; and (2) the greater publicity given by the Board to the Inspector's reports on the condition of the schools. I think it is highly desirable that as much publicity as possible should be given to the Inspector's criticism on a school, whether favourable or otherwise; that in this way the efficiency of a school will be promoted; and that even teachers in the long run will benefit by the practice, although temporary annoyance may arise from it at times. In saying this I am aware that a contrary opinion has been expressed, and several reasons have been urged by teachers and others