

Of the 21,986 pupils presented on the examination schedules 13,524 were entered for examination in one or other of the standards, being 553 more than the corresponding number for last year. A total of 13,115 were present and were examined in Standards I. to VI. Of these 10,492 passed the standard for which they were presented—a result which gives 80 as the percentage of passes in standards. Last year the percentage was 77, so that there has been an advance of 3 per cent. for the year. The percentage of failures in standards (the exceptions being excluded in this computation) was 18. The average percentage in class subjects was 58, as against 60 in 1886; and the average of additional marks 63, as against 61. In Standards II., III., IV., and VI. there has been a slight advance in the percentage of passes in standards, and in Standard V. a decline of nearly 1 per cent.

The following statement is instructive, as showing a considerable advance in the efficiency of a number of schools. In 1886 the number of schools examined was 179; and in 1887 183. The statement shows what percentage of the whole number of schools had a percentage of failures of a certain range. The range of the percentage of failures was—

0—5	in	7	per cent. in 1886, and in 7	per cent. in 1887.
6—10	"	9	"	13
11—20	"	23	"	32
21—30	"	29	"	22
31—40	"	16	"	16
41—50	"	9	"	7
50 and over	"	7	"	3

From this it appears that in 1886 39 per cent. of the schools had a percentage of failures below 21, while this year 52 per cent. of them had the like percentage. As the percentage of failures is practically the complement of the percentage of passes in standards, the above figures indicate a very satisfactory improvement in efficiency.

The results of Standard V. are considerably lower than they were a few years ago. The decline is chiefly due to weakness in arithmetic, and in grammar and composition.

It will be noticed that the average age at which Standard I. is passed is nine years and three months. This age is much higher than it should be. If it be assumed that, on the average, pupils enter school at six years of age, then it takes them three years and a quarter to get well abreast of Standard I. In our judgment, two years and a half should be sufficient for reaching this point. If that be a fair estimate, the teaching of the younger classes is evidently less efficient than that of those above Standard I. At present teachers are at liberty to present pupils for Standard I. when they think them fit, without any restriction as to age. The result is that only those who are thought to be sure of passing are presented, while the motives for pushing forward the work of the junior pupils are greatly weakened. In several districts parents have called upon us to complain that their children had been kept back; and in some of these cases inquiry showed that there was good reason for the complaints. We think that the progress made by the younger children is, as a matter of fact, unnecessarily slow, and it seems desirable that all pupils who are eight years and a half old should be required to come forward for Standard I. or a higher standard. Were such a rule as this in force, the comparative neglect of the infant classes would soon become a thing of the past. It is curious that the age at which Standard II. is passed should be only seven months in excess of that at which Standard I. is passed. As the ages at which the standards were passed last year were not computed, it is hard to say exactly how this fact should be explained, but it seems to point to a rise in the age at which Standard I. is passed. Above Standard I. good progress is made throughout the school course. In the higher classes the figures indicate that many of the older pupils either fail to pass or are withdrawn from school. The average ages given are those of the pupils who actually passed in each standard.

The syllabus continues to be a burning question with teachers. The persistent discussion of its provisions is not, however, an unalloyed good, for it tends to make teachers less careful and zealous in carrying out their instructions, as laid down in the syllabus, than they would be were their faith in its suitability less frequently and less rudely assailed. About two years ago considerable changes were made to render it more workable in schools of small and medium size, and further changes in the same direction are desired and, we think, desirable. But, strange to say, a great many of the teachers, whose labours should be made more easy and more fruitful by these changes, do not take advantage of them. It would, in fact, appear that there is no small amount of sham about the outcry for easing the syllabus and allowing greater freedom in the course of instruction and in the grouping of classes. It seems clear, too, from the fact that so large a proportion of the smaller schools do well not only in the pass subjects, but also in the class and additional subjects, that the syllabus, as it stands, is not so unworkable as many would have us believe.

The results of the year's examinations testify to the continued efficiency of the instruction given in the standard classes. In the teaching of the infant classes there has been fair improvement in thoroughness and in intelligent treatment. But in most of the smaller schools there is still much room for improvement in both these directions, as well as in the rate of progress. We have been very anxious to get a better style of reading in the junior classes, and the teachers have made praiseworthy and, in many cases, very successful exertions to attain this object. Mere word-reading, as opposed to reading by phrases or sentences, is, however, still rather prevalent. Failure to secure good reading at this stage is due to several causes, but chiefly to the following: (1) Insufficient preparatory working-up of new and hard words; (2) a want of thoroughness in mastering the lessons before they are left; and (3) neglect of frequent revision of former lessons. The last point is one of great importance at this stage, for revisal and repetition of old lessons, in which the difficulty of recognising the words has been already overcome, affords an excellent means of culti-