

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR THE WHOLE DISTRICT.

Classes.	Presented.	Absent.	Excepted.	Failed.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
Above Standard VI. ...	31	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	152	1	3	22	126	14·2
" V. ...	321	9	7	97	208	13·5
" IV. ...	543	16	19	118	390	12·5
" III. ...	781	20	35	176	550	11·6
" II. ...	902	12	36	119	735	10·5
" I. ...	1,009	8	34	109	858	8·6
Preparatory ...	1,952	...	...	...	...	...
Totals ...	5,691	66	134	641	2,867	*

* Mean of average age, 11·9 years.

MARLBOROUGH.

SIR,—

Blenheim, 17th March, 1890.

I beg to lay before you my annual report on the public schools of the District of Marlborough for the educational year ending March, 1890.

I have examined thirty-one schools, with a roll number of 1,826, and an attendance of 1,659 on examination day. The quality of the work done in the several schools was so very unequal this year as to make it no easy matter to give any general estimate of the results that would not be so limited by exceptions as to be almost worthless. In several of the smaller schools every pupil succeeded in meeting the demands of the regulations, but in some of the larger establishments the percentage of children who were clearly unequal to the required minimum varied from 30 to 100 per cent. *Primâ facie* it may be fairly assumed that any school which shows a proportion of backward children equalling even the lower of these two numbers is not in a satisfactory state. But extenuating circumstances certainly exist in several instances, and are invariably recorded in my detailed estimate of each school. Where the report is silent on this head it may safely be taken for granted that it is because there is really nothing to be said. Comparatively little help towards a correct general estimate of last year's work is contributed by the fact that the percentage of failures recorded amounts to less than 15 per cent. Much indifferent work is necessarily allowed to pass muster in any standard examination. All who have studied the subject know that the difference between really good writing and such indifferent stuff as is not quite bad enough to reject is enormous, and the same rule applies to reading. A boy's work may also be very poor all round, and yet the examiner may not be able to put his hand on the exact weak spot that would justify him in rejecting the candidate.

I shall again follow the practical course of detailing what, if any, improvement has been made during the past twelve months in the several subjects prescribed for the syllabus, reserving the more special application of my remarks for the subjoined detailed estimate of the state of each school when it was last examined.

READING.—Although something has been done to make the reading more what it ought to be, there is still a wide gap, even in many of the best schools, between the present attainment of the children at nine years old and the measure of attainment which was laid down by me two years ago as being no more than could be compassed by well-taught children of that age of average capacity. Comparatively few of our nine-year-old scholars, even yet, could comply with my test that they should read fluently and intelligently, at sight, an easy narrative that they had not previously studied. With less than this as the outcome of four years' schooling I shall not be satisfied, nor ought the public to be satisfied. It is notorious, however, that in almost every class there is a certain residuum, varying from 5 to 10 per cent. of the whole, whom no amount or species of culture will force up to the level that I have indicated; but the incapacity of these dullards must not be made a pretext for keeping back the whole class. This would indeed be nothing short of inflicting a grievous injustice on the great majority of those who are teachable. The parents of very backward children may fairly be called on to do their part by practising their offspring at home in reading. The whole burden of their stupidity ought not to be cast upon the teacher, nor ought he to be called upon to waste on their behalf an excessive amount of time and pains that might be more profitably bestowed upon the more capable. Even a costly system of State education cannot entirely relieve parents of their responsibilities in this respect. Half an hour's home reading—not home lessons—steadily pursued, would at the end of a few months wonderfully lessen the percentage of bad readers. It is taken for granted that, after so many years of a public-school system, the number of those who are unable to help their children so far as a lesson in elementary reading goes is comparatively small.

SPELLING.—I regret that I can discover no improvement whatever either in the methods of teaching this important subject or in the results. The same well-worn mistakes were all continually repeated this year, and in very few schools is the list of words habitually misspelt (which I recommended to be made out) to be found. Even the scholars in the highest classes, where correct spelling may naturally be looked for, are very deficient in that respect, inasmuch that they frequently exceed my liberal allowance of three mistakes in half a dozen lines of dictation, taken from the reading book in use. So far from lowering my requirements in order to meet the short-