But of course the real touchstone of efficiency for the education given in the schools is the results obtained in the examinations in pass-subjects; and here I regret to say my report will be far from favourable. I must therefore trouble the Board with a few words on the principle on which I have conducted my examination in these subjects, which comprise, as the Board is well aware, the fundamental ones of reading, spelling, writing, drawing, arithmetic, grammar, and geography. The mere enumeration of the subjects shows that these pass-subjects are by far the most important part of the school-work, and that this is the view taken by the department on the matter is apparent from the express injunction laid upon Inspectors by the Orders in Council, 1887 (Reg. 7), that, with a slight qualification, of which I have fully availed myself, no scholar shall be deemed to have passed for the standard who does not show a satisfactory knowledge of every one of the pass-subjects. It seems to me, therefore, that for an Inspector to adopt a method sometimes employed, and assign—say, 700 marks to these seven subjects, allowing a boy to pass for the standard who gains on the whole only 350 of them, and a girl who gets even 10 per cent. less, is to comply neither with the letter nor the spirit of the regulation; since it will thus often happen that a child by doing well in half the subjects, say the more mechanical ones of reading, writing, and drawing, with the addition of one other, perhaps spelling, will easily obtain the 350 marks required for a standard pass, whilst at the same time gravely or even wholly ignorant of such vital subjects as arithmetic, grammar, and geography. And a further almost inevitable result of adopting such a method must be to create a tendency on the part of schools to neglect the more intellectual and difficult subjects to which I have referred, since, as I have already pointed out, it would be possible for a child to pass his examination with little or no knowledge of these, and the very object of the Education Act be thus to a great extent frustrated. I have therefore discarded all such methods of testing the efficiency of a school, and have adopted the more usual practice of requiring the scholar, subject to the authorised indulgence already spoken of, to answer at least half the questions set in each of the pass-subjects in order to secure a pass for the standard. Had I done less than this, I should have felt myself culpable, not only as ignoring the very objects for which the schools exist, but as putting both scholars and teachers into a false position. For of two things we may be quite sure—1, that we can hardly do a more cruel thing to a scholar than promote him to a class for which he is unfit, since a child overclassed immediately becomes a child discouraged; and 2, that we can hardly inflict a greater injustice on a teacher, or paralyze his efforts more completely, than by requiring him to teach a class the scholars of which are incapable of doing the work of the class below them.

If I have succeeded in putting the matter clearly before the Board, it will now occasion it little surprise to learn that under this more severe ordeal a large number of scholars in many of the schools have failed to show the required proficiency, and that the percentage of standard failures for the whole district has risen in consequence from 17 to 30·6. Although, therefore, a grave defect in the education of the district is thus disclosed to view, it must not be supposed that this implies any decline in the diligence of the teachers, or any incapacity on the part of the scholars to reach the authorised standard, but simply the more strict application of a necessary, wise, and authorised test. For my own part, I have already seen enough of the teachers of the district to feel some confidence that they will willingly conform their teaching to the new call made upon them, and that another year's work will go far to remedy the defect here pointed out and reduce the percentage of failures to its former figure.

As showing the full significance of the unfavourable result just noticed a glance at Table III. appended to this report will be found helpful; it is a table to exhibit the percentage of scholars passed by the whole district in each pass-subject. The results of this table, agreeing, I may say, with my own observation, show very plainly, first, that three, or even four of the pass-subjects are, speaking generally, thoroughly and efficiently taught in most of the schools—viz., writing, reading, drawing, and spelling, the writing most so, and the other subjects in the order in which they are here mentioned. Indeed, this reference to drawing recalls to my mind the surprise which I have myself again and again experienced in my visits to the schools successively—surprise at the excellence of the results achieved by the pupils in this art, especially the freehand branch of it. At the same time it is impossible to misinterpret the testimony of Table III. as to the unsatisfactory character of the work done, and therefore of the teaching given, in the essential subjects of grammar, arithmetic, and geography, which can only be described by the positive, comparative, and superlative degrees of the adjective "poor." Whilst the pupils passed in reading are 87 per cent. of those presented, and in drawing 85, those passed in grammar are only 58 per cent., in arithmetic 56, and in pass geography, 55. In other words, nearly every second child on the average examined in these subjects has failed in them.

But to give merely the average of failure seems to me hardly right, first, as unjust to schools that have done well, and secondly, as by no means adequately exhibiting the gravity of the case in respect to the other schools. I have therefore prepared another table (Table IV.), showing the percentage of failures obtained in each of the thirteen schools of the first group in the three essential subjects already mentioned—viz., arithmetic, grammar, and geography; but, as the bulk of the failures occurs in the higher classes of the schools, I have confined the statistics of Table IV. to classes Standard VI., Standard V., and Standard IV. I will now take up the particulars furnished by the table for one or two of these schools; but, not to prolong this report unduly, I will confine my remarks to the arithmetic alone, referring any who may require similar information on the other subjects in these schools to the table itself. The schools I shall take up are those of Lower Kokatahi, Kanieri, Stafford, and Kumara. Although this order happens to be the inverse of their roll-numbers I have mentioned these schools in the order of their inefficiency, and the worst first. At Lower Kokatahi the net number of scholars presented in the three classes in question was seven, and as all these failed in their arithmetic, the percentage of failures in that subject was of course 100. I must add that four of the seven did not work a single sum correctly. At Kanieri