

From this table it is seen that the number of pupils presented for examination in classes S. 5, S. 6, and S. 7 is much greater than in former years. In 1889 these classes were represented by 713 pupils, in 1890 by 888 pupils, and in 1891 by 1,038 pupils. This increase is a most hopeful sign, and a matter for sincere congratulation.

Table B.

	1889.	1890.	1891.
Percentage of passes	47·6	48	46·3
" of failures	16·6	17·1	17·5
" in class-subjects	54·7	55	57
Average of additional marks	54·4	57	60
Percentage of absentees	3·2	3·6	3·2
" of pupils excepted	4·9	5·3	4·9

From this table it will be seen that the percentage of failures in standards shows a slight increase. This is no doubt due to the marked annual increase in the number of scholars presented for the upper standards, where a "pass" is much more difficult of attainment than in the lower. On the other hand, the table reveals a gradual increase in the number of marks awarded for class and additional subjects, which goes to show that the general efficiency of the schools is year by year becoming greater.

Of the 117 schools examined, 37 make 10 or under 10 per cent. of failures; 41 make over 10 or under 20 per cent.; 21 make over 20 or under 30 per cent.; 12 make over 30 or under 40 per cent.; 5 make over 40 or under 50 per cent.; 1 makes 63 per cent. There are thus in all eighteen schools—those, namely, that make more than 30 per cent. of failures—that have made what may be deemed a decidedly unsatisfactory pass. In four schools the poor results are ascribed to changes in the teaching staff; in three, to irregular attendance; in one, to the continued sickness of the teacher; and in two, to the fact that the examination year was shortened by about two months. For the others no reasonable excuse has been adduced; in their case the indifferent results must be attributed to the incompetence, the indolence, or the sheer indifference of the teachers.

The following schools gained the highest percentage of marks in class-subjects:—Caroline, 90 per cent.; Gummie's Bush, 83 per cent.; Wyndham, 82 per cent.; Waimumu, 82 per cent.; Wendonside, 80 per cent. These figures furnish a noteworthy commentary on the remark, ever on the lips of some teachers, that there is, in country schools, no time for teaching anything but the pass subjects.

The following schools gained the highest aggregate of marks for additional subjects: Wyndham, 106 marks; Lumsden, 103; Gordon, 96; Otautau, 94. Many of the smaller country schools, in which the teacher is unaided, stand high in respect to the additional subjects, but they cannot compete on equal terms with schools more liberally staffed. Taking a general survey of the year's work, we gladly note improvements in several directions. First, in a number of schools organisation has improved; the forces available for the effective and expeditious performance of work are better and more freely applied; and, as a consequence, where the complicated school machinery was formerly sluggish and jerky, every part now runs smooth and steadily. Second, Standard VII., which in past years was too often a nondescript, do-nothing kind of a class, has this year done creditable work in nearly every school in which it has been presented. The practical result to some extent appears in the fact that several of the pupils successfully passed the Junior Civil Service examination, one of them—A. Duncan, of Wyndham—being fourth on the list for the whole colony. The instruction given to this class, being directive rather than specific, has in no way proved detrimental to that given in the junior classes. In point of fact, in schools where Standard VII. was most efficient, there, too, were the lower classes highly efficient. Third, a desire to improve and refine the manners of the children is steadily growing. It is pleasant to hear the hearty "Good morning, sir," or "Good afternoon, sir," with which the teachers are greeted; and pleasant also to see the neat courtesy of the girls, and the frank salute of the boys, as they enter and leave the class-room. Fourth, arrangements, more or less complete, are being made in an increasing number of schools for the profitable employment and rational instruction of the infant-classes. In most of the larger as well as in many of the smaller schools these are now supplied with appropriate and varied exercises, upon which the beginnings of the severer studies may be easily and naturally grafted. Fifth, there is all over the district an evident improvement in the methods of imparting instruction. This indicates that the teachers as a body are alive to the exigencies of their profession, and that, while they despise cram as such, they make the avenues to knowledge as easy and as alluring as possible. This general statement is unfortunately sharply qualified by a reference to the table of percentages of failures already given. Bound by the chains of traditional routine, some of our teachers give little or no consideration to the higher and vital phases of their profession; while a few, fortunately a very few, are satisfied with a perfunctory discharge of their duties, apparently regarding their work as a piece of necessary drudgery. The former have the excuse of at least conforming to time-honoured custom, but for the latter not even a shadow of an excuse can be found. And when, as in their case, indolence is added to indifference, it is clear they have reached a point at which the Board should put its foot down and demand a swift and thorough reformation.

Though doubtless an anxious time for both teachers and scholars, examination-day usually passes smoothly enough with the examiner. He, as a rule, has much to encourage him. In nine cases out of ten the thoughtfulness of the teachers and the spontaneity of the children make his task comparatively easy; the appliances for carrying out the work of examination are at hand; the pupils are in their places, ready to begin; and all look forward to a successful issue of the day. And here the exception markedly sets off the rule; for if the examiner finds, as upon occasion he does, teachers, scholars, and school in a state of confusion, he must, however reluctantly, assume the rôle of censor at the very outset of the examination.