

Standard I. . . . The number is 352, or about 34 per cent. of the pupils in the preparatory classes. The reasons assigned . . . have been classed as follows: Irregular attendance, 142; weak health, 19; recent admission, 106; incapacity, 31; not sufficiently advanced, 54. . . . The 31 returned under 'incapacity' is, I consider, a fair estimate of this unhappy class; and, of those unfortunately 'not sufficiently advanced,' the majority owe their backward state of preparation to inefficient instruction, as well as to the frequent changes of teachers in the schools of the district."

The following are extracts from other reports on this subject:—

Wanganui:—

In the new standard regulations a very important clause has been inserted, which provides that, when a pupil over eight years old is presented in Class P., the principal teacher shall give the Inspector a written explanation of the reason for not presenting the pupil in Standard I.; and, further, that the Inspector shall report to the Minister of Education on the number of such cases, and on the sufficiency of the reasons assigned for them. Thus, while the Act does not make presentation in Standard I. at the age of eight years compulsory, it clearly fixes the age at which a pupil should, in the ordinary course, pass into that standard. To comply with the regulation, after each annual examination every child over seven years old, or between the ages of seven and seven years and eleven months, of which seven years and a half may be taken as the average, should be transferred to the class preparing for Standard I.; and this would make the average maximum age for passing the standard about eight years and a half. Now, for each of the years 1890 and 1891 the average age in the whole colony for passing Standard I. was nine years. In the Wanganui District the average age in 1890 was nine years and four months (exceeded by Taranaki only, nine years and five months), while in 1891 it was nine years and five months (exceeded by Hawke's Bay only, nine years and a half). In 1892 the average age was nearly nine years and a half, but no comparison can be made, as the returns from the other districts are not to hand. This would seem to indicate that children have been kept back in the infant departments, and in some cases we know this has undoubtedly been so. But there are many cases in which it is impossible—nay, it would be absolutely pernicious—to present pupils in Standard I. at the age of eight years, for in not a few of the bush schools pupils do not come to school until they are seven years old, or even more, and to force on such children without a thorough grounding in the rudimentary work would be a grave error of judgment.

Of the 2,752 children in the preparatory classes, 610, or 22 per cent., were over eight years old. In the majority of cases the reasons given for non-presentation in Standard I. were satisfactory (especially as when many of the schools were examined the new regulations had not yet been a year in force), and were—(1) the advanced age at which school-life was begun; (2) incapacity of the Maori pupils for overtaking the work, especially in reading; (3) irregular attendance.

Hawke's Bay:—

The new regulations require an Inspector to include in his annual report a statement of his opinion with respect to children presented for examination in the preparatory classes who are more than eight years of age. In some schools far too many children are so presented. Napier affords a notable example, where 121 pupils, or more than 10 per cent. of the whole, were examined as preparatory pupils, although at an age when they might fairly be expected to pass Standard I. At Gisborne twenty-one children over the age of eight years were examined in the preparatory class, and at Port Ahuriri there were twelve. A careful analysis of the causes for the low presentations shows that bad health, natural dulness, inability of parents to provide boots or clothes, and irregular attendance of children are among the principal reasons stated by the teachers, but irregular attendance is urged as the chief cause of all. The results of the examinations in their effects upon irregular pupils support this view, as the standard failures are mostly made up of children who do not attend school at least 320 times within the school-year.

Nelson:—

In compliance with the latest instructions to Inspectors, I have ascertained from head teachers what are their reasons for not presenting such children in Standard I. I find that there are in all 200 such cases in this district. The reasons assigned may be grouped under three heads: Shortness of school-life, irregularity of attendance, and exceptional dulness. Sixty-nine children had attended school for a month only before the examination, eighty-nine had attended very irregularly, and thirty-eight were set down as being hopelessly dull. The number held back for these reasons does not seem to me excessive, and the explanations of the teachers are apparently fully borne out by the facts. The fact is that hitherto, in the Nelson District, the tendency to be guarded against has been in quite an opposite direction to that of unduly keeping back scholars from presentation in the First Standard.

North Canterbury:—

During the year a filip has been given to the presentation in Standard I. by the departmental regulation which prescribes that a reason shall be assigned where children over eight years of age are still retained in Class P. It is not clear that the object of the regulation is to hasten the presentation, and any hastening of the presentation, unless the children are thoroughly well prepared, or are exceptionally old, we have consistently deprecated; but there is no doubt its tendency is in that direction. We have kept a more or less complete record of children for whom the required reason has been assigned, and find that the proportion is substantially the same in town and country schools, though the town schools might naturally be expected to have an advantage in the earlier