

A comparison of these figures with those of previous years shows a very decided increase in the number of schools with a comparatively low percentage of failures—*i.e.*, of comparatively high efficiency.

The revised regulations of the Education Department came into force at the beginning of the year, and all the schools, except the small one at Nevis Valley, were examined in accordance with their provisions. In the larger schools examined before July, the headmasters were unanimous in preferring that the examinations should be conducted under the revised syllabus. The course of study in the new syllabus remains substantially the same as before. Contrary to expectation, the changes made by it are not all in the direction of lessening the heavy burden of work imposed on teachers. The course of instruction in geography has been considerably curtailed in Standards V. and VI.; that in history remains much as it was; while the course of instruction in drawing is now considerably heavier than before. In one respect, however, the new syllabus is a great improvement on any of its predecessors; it allows great freedom in grouping classes for instruction in grammar, geography, and history, a boon which the teachers of the smaller schools greatly appreciate, though they do not always take advantage of it as fully as they might. If the requirements in drawing, especially in Standards IV. and VI., had been more moderate, and history had been treated in all the standards as a supplementary reading subject, without special examination, beyond requiring that the language of the history-books read should be understood, the new syllabus would, in our judgment, be well adapted to the circumstances of the larger public schools.

The examination results for the year show a very considerable improvement on those of recent years. The percentage of passes in standards has risen very decidedly in Standards III., V., and VI., and slightly in the other standards, except Standard I. The age at which the standards are on the average passed has declined one month in Standards II., V., and VI., and has gone up one month in Standards I. and IV., as compared with that in the corresponding standards for last year. No fewer than 1,217 pupils over eight years of age were not presented for Standard I., but in most cases what appeared to be sufficient reasons were assigned for their being withheld from examination. The reasons most commonly given were lateness in entering school, irregularity of attendance, and dullness. Of the validity of these reasons it is very difficult for us to form a trustworthy opinion, but we cannot but feel disappointed that the age at which Standard I. is on the average passed should continue to be so high as nine years and one month. With regular attendance and efficient teaching, pupils should pass at that age if they did not enter school until they were six and a half years old. It seems certain that the great majority of infant pupils enter school at a lower age than this, and, indeed, that the rate of progress in the infant classes is less than in any of the higher classes. There can hardly be a doubt that the yearly standard examination in the latter is the cause of their more steady progress.

There is little occasion for our referring at any length to the various branches of instruction. The work of the schools has been in hardly any respect inferior, and in several ways it has been superior to that of previous years. Except in a few schools, and in cases where changes of teachers have been frequent, reading improves in readiness and natural expression. There is less progress in the comprehension of the language of the lessons, and the treatment of this matter often strikes us as barren and mechanical, and but little fitted to stimulate the interest and understanding of the pupils. They are too seldom led to picture and realise in imagination the scenes of which they read, and to carry light from their conception of the whole to illuminate points that are difficult or obscure. In spite of much insistence on the benefits of preparatory study of English lessons, and the need of direction and training of teachers in the art of conducting it, we fear there is, in the majority of schools even, little intelligent preparation, and perhaps equally little effort to encourage it by testing it shortly at the opening of every English lesson. This the teacher cannot do unless he has himself given the lesson some careful study, and there is reason to think that this is much more rarely bestowed than might be expected. We see in many cases evidence of preparation of a sort—*viz.*, a diligent conning of the list of words explained at the end of the lessons, the scholar learning them much as they would the multiplication table, without any reference to the context in which they occur, or consideration of the sense of the passage as a whole. This mechanical process is one that no true teacher should rest satisfied with or even tolerate. Dictionaries are seldom seen in the pupils' hands, and when they are they are usually so meagre as to be of little use. In this and some other matters parents show great indifference to providing their children with the necessary aids to study. Their notion seems to be that everything should be poured by the teacher into the minds of their children, while the friends of education and the foes of cramming desire above all things to see him train his scholars to use their own powers, to make intelligent use of dictionaries and other helps to study, and to work out as much at first hand without assistance or prompting as may be. It is especially in the smaller schools that well-directed preparatory study is so necessary, for in them the time for teaching reading is brief, and a wise economy in the use of it is of the highest importance.

The extra time needed to overtake the increased requirements of the new syllabus in drawing has been generally found at the expense of writing, for the practice of which, particularly in the smaller schools, too little time is now available. Two or three short lessons a week are wholly insufficient to give an adequate training in this art. We notice with satisfaction that vertical or upright handwriting has been introduced in a number of schools with very promising results. In writing in this style the pupil can sit straight up, with the spine erect, and the head and eyes looking fair and straight at the sheet—an advantage of great importance for the physical well-being of the scholars. We shall be glad to see this system of writing more widely used. The attitudes in which children are allowed to sit at writing, and the way they are allowed to hold the pen, frequently call for censure. We can explain the prevalence of these faults only by remarkable indifference on the part of teachers. In recent years a penholder, known as the Archimedean penholder, has come into the market, and has found its way into some schools. The use of this holder in the lower classes would go far to prevent the acquisition of bad habits of writing.