

In all standards save the Fourth, a decided improvement has taken place in the ages at which the standards are passed. There can be no doubt as to its cause. The schools are gradually passing into the hands of capable teachers, whose efforts are bringing about improved results. The action of the Board in improving the teaching power is receiving the approval of the Committees. Members of Committees, and parents, have repeatedly expressed to me their satisfaction with the changed conditions under which the schools are now conducted.

Coming to the numerical results of the year's work, it is satisfactory to record an advance from the position of the past two years. The numerous changes of teachers—about forty in number—were fatal to progress in 1891; but no ground was lost. About half as many changes occurred in the beginning of this year, and caused me to anticipate similar results. The work, however, suffered but little interruption, and the results may be accepted as an indication of steady progress. The following table shows the percentages gained :—

Year.	Of Failures.	Of Passes.	On "Class". subjects.	Mean of Additional Marks.	Reading.	Spelling.	Writing.	Drawing.	Arithmetic.	Composition.	Geography.	Grammar.	Inspector's Marks.
1890	23.8	41.1	54.9	49.7	90.9	84.2	92.9	86.4	73.5	...	69.4	57.8	63.9
1891	23.9	40.5	60.7	46.9	82.7	85.8	92.3	68.4	69.2	...	57.2	52.1	63.2
1892	21.3	41.5	62.1	48.6	85.4	91.8	93.4	78.2	78.9	78.7	77.3	48.9	30.1

It will be noticed that the entry for the year under "Inspector's Marks" is much lower than those of former years. The wide difference is due to the method of reckoning the percentage, which is now computed on an assignment, after the pass-marks have been earned, of four or a less number in each subject. Any marks obtained by scholars failing in a subject do not appear on the schedules, so that the percentage indicates numerically the degree of attainment above the pass requirements shown by the scholars who have passed in the various subjects.

The instructions to Inspectors now require from them a statement of the number of children over eight years of age who have not been presented in Standard I. In compliance with this instruction, the following information has been collected from the head teachers. The number returned is 352, or about 34 per cent. of the pupils in the preparatory classes. The reasons assigned for their non-presentation have been classed as under :—

Irregular attendance	...	...	...	...	...	...	142
Weak health	...	...	...	...	...	...	19
Admitted within six months, 62; within twelve months, 30; within fifteen months, 14	...	...	...	...	...	...	106
Incapacity	...	...	...	...	...	...	31
Not sufficiently advanced	...	...	...	...	...	...	54

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Irregular attendance is again to the front, and will continue to be so until, by legislation, the Committees are relieved of the burden of the enforcement of the compulsory clauses of the Act. The large number of recent admissions shows that a rather large proportion do not enter school until the age of seven is reached. The number (31) returned under "Incapacity" represents, 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.

Some of the preparatory classes obtained excellent reports, but in not a few others the work was found to be uneven and sometimes poor. The instruction of such classes is too often left to the pupil-teacher, with but little assistance from the master, whose time is fully occupied by the demands of his standard classes. This is especially the case in schools with a high roll-number and an indifferent average attendance. In the schools, also, where the attendance of two pupil-teachers taking the place of an assistant is allowed, the classes are backward and unworthy of the school; neither can they be favourably compared with those under the control of a mistress. The pupil-teacher's position is that of a learner, and his place is either in a school of about fifty scholars, or where there are one or more certificated assistants, who are responsible under the head teacher for the proper instruction of the classes. Written instructions and schemes of lessons may, and ought to be, put into the pupil-teacher's hands; but unless these are supplemented by the frequent criticism of lessons, and the practical aid of the trained instructor, the pupil-teacher is more likely to pull down than to build up. I am again able to report favourably on the increase of the number of good readers in the preparatory classes. There are several schools where this work is of excellent quality. I have often wished that some of our teachers, whose ideas of reading even in the standard classes do not rise above the mere utterance of the printed words, could attend one or more of these schools, to take a lesson from the little folk. I have frequently drawn attention to the instructions in Regulation No. 16, and pointed out that intonation and emphasis must begin with the lowest preparatory class if the standard of the regulation is to be reached in Standard I.

Reading in the standard classes is improving year by year, the number of schools where the subject is better taught than formerly is on the increase. Although I have had in this subject to fail nearly every scholar in one or more classes in a few schools, the percentage of passes is higher than last year's. No hesitation was shown in my treatment of the subject. Now that the majority of the teachers are working with me to give it its due prominence, good results should follow in a year or two.