

Whilst I am on this subject of geography I should like to notice the strange peculiarity, whether designed or otherwise, which, unless I misunderstand the terms used, is exhibited in the revised programme of geography for Standard V. Of the large towns of Europe of which a knowledge is required from the scholar practically all are excluded which are not at the same time ports; so that such important cities as Leipzig and Breslau in Germany and Lyons in France may in future be unknown names to the New Zealand scholar. It is true that in the case of Great Britain and Ireland towns of more than two hundred thousand inhabitants are expected to be known; but, as there appear to be only five such towns in all Great Britain, exclusive of ports, it is plain that a New Zealand child may under the new syllabus grow up in great ignorance of the Home-country.

My object in referring thus at some length to the revised syllabus is to show the Board the new conditions under which teachers and scholars have this year been conducting their work. I should not, however, be dealing fairly with the document in question if I did not recognise at the same time one excellent feature of the new arrangement by which, in the department of "class"-subjects, a teacher may now group together the three highest classes in the subjects of geography and history, and so at once economize his own time and make his methods of instruction far more efficient.

Education is a large subject, and an education report ought to deal with the theme in a comprehensive spirit and with a wide grasp. It should refer not only to the intellectual attainments of the children, but to the mental habits formed and the interest awakened in their minds in mental pursuits; it should refer to morals and character as well as to book-work, and show how far the system is fitting the children for the duties and responsibilities of life. Such is the true ideal of the educator; but such a report is not possible to the School Inspector of the present day; and with this protest I yield to the inevitable, and confine myself as usual to the statistics afforded by examination-papers, and a record of the facts stored up in the minds of the children during the past twelve months.

Of this minor issue I am pleased to be able to give a good account, and to inform the Board that satisfactory progress is being made by the children of this education district in their school-work. The evidence of this will be found in the statistics attached to this report. Of course the most crucial test of the work done during the year is afforded by the percentage of failures made by the whole district in "pass"-subjects at the annual examination. Table II. shows this to be 24.3, which is more than 6 per cent. below that of the previous year. Although, therefore, the statistics of failures are still abnormally high, they are evidently on the decline, and the figures show conclusively that improvement has been made in the quality of the work done in the schools generally. I may add that the three schools which show the greatest improvement are, in those above the first grade, Blue Spur, Goldsborough, and Stafford, with an improvement of 29, 27, and 24 per cent. respectively; or, if the grouping of last year be adopted, Gillespie's, Blue Spur, and Goldsborough. Amongst the schools of the first grade Waikukupa has made the greatest progress. It is satisfactory, too, to notice that it is in the higher standards that the improvement is chiefly found, the failures being less in Standard IV. by 7 per cent., in Standard VI. by 21 per cent., and in Standard V. by no less than 27 per cent., or very nearly so.

As a sceptical critic might perhaps be inclined to suspect that the progress indicated is only apparent, and that the real cause of the decrease in the percentage of failures is the circumstance that the difficult subject of grammar is no longer required of candidates for the highest two standards, I have constructed another table (Table III.) showing the percentage of passes obtained in each "pass"-subject, and a comparison of the results here presented with the corresponding ones in Table III. of last year will demonstrate the genuineness of the improvement indicated by the figures already given.

It will be remembered that the subjects in which the schools, and especially the higher standards, failed most conspicuously last year were those of arithmetic, grammar, and geography. Between the grammar results of this year and those of last it is hardly possible to institute a comparison, since grammar, as has already been noticed, is no longer a "pass"-subject, except in Standard IV. So far as the comparison can be made, however, Table III. shows that the children are more efficient in this subject, to the extent, indeed, of more than 16 per cent. But setting grammar aside, and confining our attention to the other two subjects, the same table shows that arithmetic has improved 10 per cent. and geography more than 13 per cent. It seems therefore incontestable that the efficiency of the schools has increased this year very considerably, and that in the most important subjects. The same result, too, is arrived at, at least in most cases, if particular schools are referred to. Last year it may be remembered four schools were mentioned by name as exceptionally weak in arithmetic in the upper classes—viz., Lower Kokatahi, Kanieri, Stafford, and Kumara. Of these, the corresponding percentage of failures this year is in the case of Kanieri, 15, or an improvement of 65 per cent.; of Lower Kokatahi, 57, or an improvement of 43 per cent.; of Stafford, 45, or an improvement of 28 per cent.; and of Kumara, 62, which at least shows an improvement of 8 per cent.

Granting, then, that the progress claimed has been really made, the objection might still arise that it refers to the "pass"-subjects alone, and may be purchased at the expense of the other subjects comprised in the public school curriculum, which are certainly not unimportant. Let us ask, therefore, further, What do the statistics of examinations testify as to the proficiency of the scholars in what are technically known as "class"-subjects and additional subjects, amongst which I may remind the Board is that of elementary science, a subject the knowledge of which is becoming every day more essential to the success of the individual in life and the prosperity of the colony?

The reply to this question is given in Table II., which shows amongst other things the percentage of marks obtained by each school in "class"-subjects, and the total of marks obtained by each in additional subjects; and, taking the mean of these, we get for "class"-subjects a per-