

During the year a fillip 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 age at which children are able to attend. In both cases the proportion is as nearly as possible 5 per cent. of the total school enrolment. The probable explanation of the equality is that a higher ideal of what is necessary for the First Standard requirements prevails uniformly in the town schools than on the average in the country. The reasons assigned are almost invariably such as fall conveniently under the four heads—(1) insufficient time at school, (2) irregular attendance, (3) mental or physical incapacity, and (4) ill-health. Though these groups are not exclusive of each other, and though little may be learned from group (3), which is made up of very mixed elements, ranging from dulness to imbecility or physical deformity, yet the numbers ranked under each head may contain some features of interest. In fourteen city and suburban schools, with a roll-number of 8,161 children, there were in all 410 over eight years included in Class P on the date of examination. Of this number, 165 belong to group (1), 87 to group (2), 102 to group (3), and 56 to group (4). With the sufficiency of the reasons given we have pleasure in expressing ourselves fully satisfied: in this district there are, we believe, comparatively few children ranked at examination below Standard I. who ought, so far as the teacher's efforts are concerned, to occupy a higher position in the school classification.

The summarised results (Tables A and B) showing the proportion of passes and failures present a favourable appearance when placed side by side with the corresponding results of the previous year; but whatever values these proportions may under any circumstances possess—and it has never been pretended that they are to be taken as the full measure of progress in efficiency for the district as a whole, and still less for any individual school—it is necessary to bear in mind the altered conditions of the standard syllabus before coming to any conclusion from the comparison. Our own impression is that the efficiency of the standard preparation remains in general very much the same as before, the difference in numerical result being due in large measure to alterations in the programme prescribed, while something may also be set down in the two highest classes to the application of slightly easier tests in arithmetic. In the more mechanical features of the work, however, an upward tendency is still observable, and we think the Board has reason for congratulation in the progressive improvement made during recent years in schools of the smallest type. These are now frequently taught by young people of good attainments, who, while they take a healthy interest in physical sports and social enjoyments, yet retain the habit and ambition of self-improvement.

In Standard I. the new syllabus makes some addition to the requirements, but the addition is a slight one, if the apparently alarming demands in geometrical drawing are treated as "class"-subjects are treated. The children we have frequently found take much interest in their corners, squares, and triangles, and even derive some amusement from the use of the learned terms which give to the programme its formidable character. Though we have not thought it desirable to exact individual knowledge of these matters, and think, further, that the use of simpler terms in the lower classes would have been a wise restriction, yet the increasing importance of drawing has led us to advance another step in requiring the freehand and ruler exercises in this standard to be done on blank paper, whereas previously squared paper was generally employed. It has, then, been a little harder to secure a "pass" in the First Standard under the new syllabus than before.

Standard II. is in a very similar position with reference to any change in the requirements. The ground to be covered in spelling is a little wider, and more is prescribed in drawing; but only in requiring both curved- and straight-line exercises to be done on blank paper has any advances been made in testing individual ability in the subject, and we may here state that these exercises in quite a large number of cases are very well done indeed. In a good school it is not unusual to get Second Standard drawings that a year or two ago we should have been very thankful for in Standard III.

In Standard III. the chief change is the substitution of composition for grammar and composition as a "pass"-subject. As a result we get in more cases creditable exercises in the latter branch; but the "pass" is on the whole easier, since, if the subject is imperfectly taught, there is little difference shown between the better and worse members of the class, and to apply a rigid test would then be inexpedient. The mountains and rivers to be included in the geography are also defined. The list given, if several of the mountains be subtracted from it and a few rivers added, is co-extensive with the list to which questions have been confined in this district for several years, and does not therefore introduce any reduction in the work to be done, but it no doubt favours the children's success in so far as it prevents the teacher from going too far afield in the mistaken idea of what the Inspector may require.

In Standard IV. there is no easing-off of any moment in the work prescribed, and the inclusion of both grammar and composition as separate "pass"-subjects forms a distinct addition to the difficulty, though it does not often happen that a child's failure is determined by inability to satisfy the demands of the examination in these two subjects alone. In Standard V. and Standard VI., on the other hand, the standard "pass" is distinctly easier to obtain than before. Grammar, which is so often a stumbling-block in the way of teachers who have little taste for or knowledge of the subject, is no longer reckoned, and in most cases if a boy gets through in arithmetic he runs a very good chance of success.