

SOUTH CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

Education Office, Timaru, 7th March, 1894.

I have the honour to present my report on the schools in this district for the year 1893.

Visits of inspection were paid to nearly all the schools in the earlier part of the year. A report of each visit was read before the Board, and then forwarded to the Chairman of the School Committee for the information of the Committee and the teacher. Fifty-nine schools were open during the year, and all were examined by the end of December except the two schools at Hakateramea, which were not visited for examination till near the end of January.

The following table shows the results of the examinations for the whole district :—

Classes.	Presented.	Absent.	Excepted.	Failed.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
						Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI. ...	79	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	243	8	4	39	192	13 10
" V. ...	408	33	12	90	273	13 0
" IV. ...	640	38	28	145	429	12 2
" III. ...	725	41	31	124	529	11 2
" II. ...	671	28	21	43	579	9 10
" I. ...	691	43	15	33	600	8 9
Preparatory ...	1,552	...	...	...	...	...
Totals for 1893 ...	5,009	191	111	474	2,602	...
Totals for 1892 ...	5,002	146	112	478	2,599	...

The number of pupils presented on the examination schedules was 5,009, of whom seventy-nine had already passed the Sixth Standard, 1,552 were in the preparatory classes, and 3,378 were entered for examination in one or other of the standards. Of the 3,378 in Standards I. to VI., 3,187 were at school on the examination day, and 2,602 passed the standards for which they were presented. Of those that were not successful, 111 were "exceptions," and 474 "failures." The percentage of failures, estimated on the class-rolls, exclusive of absentees and exceptions, was 15·4.

A comparison of this year's summary for the whole district with last year's shows a remarkable closeness in the results: On the roll, 5,009, against 5,002; present at examination in standards, 3,187, against 3,189; absent, 191, against 146; excepted, 111, against 112; failed, 474, against 478; passed, 2,602, against 2,599; percentage of failures, 15·4, against 15·5; average percentage of marks for class-subjects, 53, against 52; average of marks for additional subjects, 57, against 55. The advantage, though a slight one, is with the results for this year except in the matter of absentees; but, with the measles epidemic still fresh in every memory, the increase in the number of absentees need cause no surprise; the wonder is that it was not greater. I had many opportunities of noting the fine spirit displayed by both boys and girls in braving the ordeal of the examination, some of them scarcely at the convalescent stage, and others with the spots of the disease all but showing.

The number of children over eight years old presented in Class P. amounts to 243, as against 281 last year. This is a gratifying and substantial reduction for one year. Written explanations of the reasons for not presenting such children in Standard I. were submitted by the teachers; and from these it appears that 42 per cent. of the children were irregular attendants, 35 per cent. were comparatively recent admissions, and 23 per cent. were accounted too dull to be prepared for the examination. In testing the work of the preparatory classes I paid close attention to the performances of the children over eight years old, and I am satisfied the teachers have shown good judgment in withholding as many as they did from examination in Standard I.

Reading.—The reading of the children in the First and Second Standards is better than it was a few years ago, though there is still room for great improvement. Many a time when I have had good reason to find fault with the reading I have felt my position strengthened by the clear statement in regulation 16 of what constitutes good reading; and, in directing the attention of teachers to this statement, I like to lay stress on the fact that proper emphasis and tone are to be insisted on even in the First Standard. Our school children as a rule read too little, and so long as most of them get through only one class-book in a year, no great advance may be looked for. Arranging the schools in four groups, and taking account of all the standards, I find that in the first group, consisting of over a fourth of the schools, the reading of the classes as a whole possessed distinct features of merit; in the second group, consisting of about one-third of the schools, and containing the great bulk of the scholars, it was fairly good; in the third group, consisting of about one-fourth of the schools, it was rather poor in quality; and in the fourth group I might name at least half a dozen schools where it was decidedly bad. By every means and device the teacher should strive to give his scholars such a command of reading that they will feel pleasure in reading by themselves, and, in the exercise of their power, find themselves possessed of the most effective instrument for their own advancement and culture.

Writing.—Writing is relatively much better in the lower than in the higher classes; and yet it cannot be because of any inherent difficulty that the promise of success shown in the earlier stages is not fulfilled as the children pass on to the higher classes. The systematic teaching and painstaking correction of faults, with abundant practice found necessary in the earlier stages, give place in many instances to simple and insufficient practice in copy-books in the upper classes, with supervision more or less strict according to the standard of attainment the teacher has accustomed his scholars to aim at. To make the writing much better than it is, direct teaching and free