

The examination and inspection of the schools were finished somewhat earlier than usual, although more visits of inspection were made to the schools than at any former period. By means of a slight rearrangement in my work, combined with the fact that all the arithmetical tests for the standards are issued by the Central Department, there is much more time available both for inspection and examination, and I was able to visit certain of the outlying schools three, and several of them four, times during the year.

The following table gives in summary form the examination results from all the schools with the exception of the Meanee Catholic Mission School, which was examined by me in December at the request of the authorities. The presentations in standards, including thirty pupils in the class above the Sixth Standard, numbered 4,463, or 62·9 per cent. of the total number enrolled. There were ninety-seven absent from examination, 880 failed to reach the requirements, and 3,456, or 79·7 per cent. of those examined, passed the necessary tests.

For purpose of comparison the results are added for the corresponding period of 1894:—

Classes.	Presented.	Examined.	Failed.	Absent.	Passed.	Percentage of passed to examined.	Average Age of those that passed.
							Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI.	30	...	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	255	251	72	4	179	71·3	14 0
" V. ...	474	468	177	6	291	62·2	13 1
" IV. ...	784	726	200	22	562	77·4	12 4
" III. ...	920	895	191	25	704	78·4	11 0
" II. ...	963	944	104	19	840	90·0	10 0
" I. ...	1,037	1,016	136	21	880	86·6	8 11
Preparatory ...	2,623	...	...	...	...	...	...
Totals ...	7,086	4,336	880	97	3,456	79·7	11 6*
Totals for 1894	6,735	3,961	797	192	3,164	...	...

The total number belonging to the schools as shown in the table is much lower than the average weekly roll as shown in the quarterly returns of attendance; but it may be assumed that the number entered on the examination schedules represents the normal attendance of pupils at the schools for the year. Excluding those examined in the class above Standard VI., the passes for the year reach a satisfactory percentage, but the most favourable circumstance in the presentations is the fact that 63 per cent. of the pupils belonging to the schools are doing work in one or other of the standards. Those who fail in the examination are simply unable to claim promotion to a higher standard, but it is assumed that they are able to do the work required for the standard below that in which they were severally examined. Five hundred and twenty of those in the preparatory classes were over eight years of age. The causes alleged by teachers for the non-presentation of so many children in one or other of the standards are similar to those stated a year ago. As usual, irregular attendance is the chief cause, whilst "natural dulness," "wanted at home," and "recently admitted," account for the remainder.

In the above table it is interesting to notice the proportion of passes in the different standards. Of those examined in standards 79·7 per cent. pass the requirements. In Standards I. and II. the percentages are 86·6 and 90 respectively. Standard V. shows very low results, but this is probably the most difficult standard under the present syllabus. Standards I. and II. were examined in pass-subjects by the principal teacher in each school, and the above results represent the sum of their judgment. On examination day I usually test some of the pass-work in my own way, but in every instance the results submitted by the teachers have been accepted without demur, after forming my judgment upon the efficiency of a standard, from an inspection of copy-books and drawing-books, followed by an oral examination of the children in class and additional subjects. Nor have I any reason to think that the large majority of teachers accept other than a fair standard of attainments from those whom they examine under the regulations: and yet I doubt the wisdom of the course that is being adopted. The fifty-eight schools in the district have each a different ideal as to what should constitute a pass, and there are certainly wide differences in the attainments of Standards I. and II. pupils in the different schools. I ventured last year to express a somewhat strong opinion against taking up the time of the principal teachers in examination-work for pass purposes to the neglect of higher and more important duties, and careful observation during the past year has further strengthened me in my objection. The lessening of examinations, improved methods of organization, and the better utilisation of the services of headmasters in the larger schools are matters that call for most serious consideration if the schools are to become something better than places for the pursuit of mental gymnastics. It was one of the aims of the Inspectors when in conference to minimise the examinations as much as possible, and thereby benefit all concerned in them. But the examinations continue in an intensified form, the only difference being that the principal teachers are withdrawn from their legitimate duties to do the work of examiners and supervisors. I desire particularly to bring this matter under the notice of the Board, because I am satisfied that the best work of the best teachers in the district is being lost by the new system which is coming into fashion. It is teaching and not examination that will improve the condition of education, and I am anxious to see this aspect of school-keeping enforced in all the schools of the district.

* Mean of average age.