

The number of pupils presented on the examination schedules was 5,223, of whom 93 had already passed the Sixth Standard, 1,587 were in the preparatory classes, and 3,543 were entered for examination in Standards I. to VI. Of the 3,543 in Standards I. to VI., 3,439 were present on the day of examination, and 2,959 passed. The increase for the year is 112 in the number of pupils presented for examination, 81 in the number of pupils present in Standards I. to VI., and 226 in the number of those that passed.

In 1894, of the children examined in the standards, 81 per cent. passed; the percentage of passes this year has risen to 86. This percentage is higher than that reached in any previous year. Compared with last year, the percentage of passes is higher in Standards IV., V., and VI., there is a slight falling-off in Standards II. and III., and there is no change in Standard I.

Of the 1,587 children in the preparatory classes, 239, or 4.5 per cent. of the school-roll, were over eight years of age at the time of examination. It is satisfactory to note that, though there is an increase of 60 children in the preparatory classes, the number of those over eight years of age is less by 23. The reasons given for not presenting these children in the First Standard were in the main satisfactory.

As was the case last year, the passes in Standards I. and II. were determined by the head-teachers; but in all but a few of the largest schools the Inspector has to conduct the examination of these standards very much in the same manner as when the passes were in his own hands. In a specially-reserved space of the official form of examination report he has to enter "Notes on the Passes in Standards I. and II."; and the report is also to contain an expression of his judgment of the degree of discretion displayed by the head-teacher in determining these passes. The percentage of passes is no doubt somewhat higher than if the passes were marked by the Inspector. The teacher, knowing the special circumstances of each child, may rightly allow in some cases for shortcomings that an Inspector could not overlook. It appeared to me that in some of the smaller, and in one of the larger, schools the teachers had not aimed high enough in preparing the children, and had been too lenient in the examination tests. Greater proficiency would have insured stronger and pleasanter going in the rest of the standards. Teachers are every day face to face with the experience that whether the child's school-life is to be one of irksome drudgery or of lightsome labour largely depends on the equipment provided in the First and Second Standards.

Among the pass-subjects reading is given the first place in the syllabus, and it is well to remember that it is also first in importance. In about one-fourth of the schools the children read well from the prescribed reading-book. This leaves about fifty schools in one-half of which the reading may be described as fair, while in the other half it is poor. In the schools where I have classed the reading as "poor," I found the children so much occupied with the trouble of telling the words as they came to them that it was in vain to look for correct phrasing and intelligence; in those where the reading was described as "fair" there was not wanting a certain degree of fluency and ease, but the reading came short of the merit mark, because it lacked clearness and crispness of articulation, and that firm grip of the words which shows that the reader knows thoroughly what he is reading about. As I understand it, the syllabus prescribes one reading-book for Standards III., IV., V., and VI. respectively. Were the reading of two or three books a year prescribed, and the test in reading in the upper standards to be an "unseen" passage from a suitable book, then, unless the testimony of educational experts in England is to count for nothing, we might begin to look for great improvement in the children's power of reading. With the power would come the pleasure in its exercise and the growth of the reading habit.

Spelling and dictation were very well done in a large majority of the schools. In the few schools where the spelling was bad there was seldom much to recommend in the rest of the work. That so many of the schools showed to advantage in spelling is a sure proof that the teachers have given their best attention to the subject, and have been careful in the marking and revisal of misspelt words. It may also be taken as a proof of the children's diligence. All this is in the highest degree creditable; and yet it may be questioned whether the children are really good spellers. The words for spelling and the passages for dictation are selected from the reading-book in use. How the pupils would fare in writing passages of equal difficulty from "unseen" books would be an interesting experiment. It would certainly be a truer gauge of the children's ability to spell than we have in our present mode of testing. It would compel attention to systematic word-building lessons as an exercise of the greatest utility for every class throughout the school, and not one simply for the infant classes, to which such lessons are now almost altogether confined. Wider reading would also be imperative.

In about one-third of the schools the handwriting of the scholars as a whole is very good; in the others it does not possess much merit. In general, however, even where the formation of the letters leaves much to be desired, all work on paper is clean and neat. In our second-largest school the "upright" style of writing was introduced about seven months before the examination. The result was an improvement which I had not anticipated. Indeed, the school was classed at once among the best in writing, though this subject had not previously been one of its strong points. The improvement was no doubt due in some measure to the style itself; but the real cause of success was that the children were *taught* to write, and not left simply to copy the engraved head-lines. The latter practice, with more or less strict supervision, is, I fear, a common one; but the bulk of the scholars cannot be made good writers in this way, whatever style is adopted.

More schools have done well in arithmetic than in any other of the pass-subjects; and in very few were the results unsatisfactory. There is still much to be desired in the way of setting down the work so as to make the reason of every step of the process intelligible. The teachers should aim also at making their scholars rapid as well as accurate workers; a card that in one school will be cleared by the children in three-quarters of an hour will give occupation to those of another school for an hour and a quarter. Mental arithmetic properly treated should be the most effective instrument for the attainment of speed and accuracy.