

The numbers show for the year an increase of 68 in the number of pupils presented, of 131 in the number present and examined in standards, and of 84 in the number of pupils that passed in one or other of the standards. Of the pupils examined in standards last year, the percentage of those that passed was 86; this year it is 85. Of those examined in Standards I. and II., head teachers have passed 99 and 96 per cent. respectively. In seven schools I had to report that the promotions of the majority of the pupils from these classes were not deserved, the teachers granting a pass on what I considered too easy terms. In some of these schools the teacher had apparently fixed the passing point considerably under the standard of attainment that obtains generally throughout the district; in others, in their eagerness to swell the list of passes at any cost, the teachers had allowed their zeal or their fears to outrun their discretion. With these exceptions, which, after all, do not seriously affect the general results, however harmful they may prove to be in the sound advancement of the individual pupils concerned, the promotions in Standards I and II. were well merited; and the teachers as a body had exercised sound judgment in what to many is still an irksome duty, and to all should be a matter of grave concern. In Standards III., IV., V., and VI. the percentages of passes in standards were 82, 72, 75, and 85. The comparative frequency of failures in Standard IV. is mainly due to weakness in composition, dictation, and geography, and in Standard V. to arithmetic, composition, and dictation.

The number of children on the rolls in Standards I. to VI. was 3,667, and, of these, 3,570 were present at the examinations, the percentage of absentees being thus 2·6. Satisfactory reasons for the absence of pupils were generally forthcoming, and in many cases letters from parents explaining the absence of their children were handed to me by the teachers, who in so doing wished to make sure that no suspicion of conniving at the absence of dull scholars should rest upon them. If allowance is made for children that were sick, and for those on the rolls that had passed their standards earlier in the year in other schools, it must be deemed satisfactory to find 97 out of every 100 in attendance at the examinations. The regularity with which the pupils attend throughout the year continues to improve. The average attendance expressed as a percentage of the average number of pupils on the roll is 85·7, as against 84·3 for the previous year. The high degree of regularity shown in this percentage is one of the outstanding features in the management of our schools.

The number of pupils over eight years of age who were not presented for Standard I. was 218, as against 239 last year, and 281 in 1892, the first year this return was required. In accordance with regulation 5, written explanations of the reasons for not presenting such children in Standard I. were submitted by the teachers, and on the whole the explanations were satisfactory.

In accordance with the Board's revised scale of staff and salaries, female assistants are now appointed to schools with an average attendance of forty. Formerly an assistant was not appointed till a school had an average of fifty-five. Under this scale the number of pupil-teachers will be considerably reduced, and no pupil-teacher will be employed in a school with an average attendance of less than one hundred and five. The scheme does not affect pupil-teachers who are now serving their apprenticeship, but, when their engagements shall have terminated, about a dozen schools that now have pupil-teachers will be entitled to the services of certificated assistants. In such schools nothing short of excellent work should be accepted as wholly satisfactory; the head teacher will be free to devote his energies to the upper department, always, however, keeping himself in touch with the lower classes by periodical examinations of the children and helpful direction of his assistant; and the assistant, free from the mental harassment and physical strain involved in the government and teaching of large classes of young children, will have a splendid opportunity of showing what she can do in making her department a bright and happy training-ground, passing on her children to the upper school well equipped for strenuous effort there. In some of these schools the teachers will work together in one room—a disadvantage of some moment, which may be minimised to a very appreciable extent by the use of a dividing curtain. At this point I should like to say a word to all who have to do with the preparatory classes and lower standards. While in no way relaxing their efforts in training the children to habits of attention, ready obedience, and courteous behaviour to one another and to those set over them in authority, in developing their intelligence and imagination, and in cultivating their powers of observation and of verbal expression, they should make a special study of the best methods by which the children may acquire a sound knowledge of number, and the power to calculate with rapidity and accuracy. This last is generally a weak part in the work of the lower classes. I find many of the teachers unable to give a clear statement of how they deal with addition tables; and where there is no well-considered system it is not likely there will be success. There must be analysis of every number up to 20, addition to about 100 by equal increments of the numbers under 10, and exercise in series like 7 and 4 are eleven, 17 and 4 are 21, 27 and 4 are 31, &c. The lessons must be oral, of short duration, and graded with the utmost care; and the ground gone over must be secured by abundant practice before an advance is made. What the teacher must specially guard against is *counting* in its nefarious and multifarious forms. A boy who will tell you without a minute's hesitation what 7 times 6 are boggles at 7 and 6, and again at 17 and 6. He did not count before answering 7 times 6; no more should he at 7 and 6, or at 17 and 6; and if he does so the fault is in the teaching. I have met with classes in which each pupil would run up his column without a pause, 7, 13, 21, 25, 34, &c., reeled off as fast as the pointer travelled up the blackboard—not 7 and 6 are 13, 13 and 8 are 21, 21 and 4 are 25, 25 and 9 are 34, &c., with a dead halt and some lip or finger movement at every step. If such classes are not met with every day they ought to be.

The introduction of the new series of reading-books recommended by the Board should be hailed with pleasure by the teachers. The series that has been in use for the past six years was an excellent one in many respects; but going through the same books twice or thrice a year, and year after year, must have deadened a teacher's interest in the lessons, and produced a grooviness of treatment that could have little stimulating effect on the pupils. At my suggestion some teachers have asked the children to leave their old books on the school shelves to be used from time to time