

There has been a slight reduction in the ages at which Standards VI., V., II., and I. were passed, and an increase of one month in the case of Standard IV.

As the ordinary statistics prepared year by year for the Education Department do not throw much light on the efficiency of the instruction given in the several pass-subjects included in the regular course of study I have had the following return (Table II.) prepared for the information of the Board. Its compilation involved a good deal of trouble, a considerable part of which was willingly undertaken by the teachers; but the light it throws on the strong and the weak points of the teaching in the public schools yields ample compensation for the labour involved in its preparation. The table shows the number of pupils examined in each of the standard classes, and the number of passes gained in each of the pass-subjects for each standard. The results given under Standards I. and II. are determined by the head-teachers, who now examine these two classes for the standard pass. In the other standard classes the results given are those of the Inspectors' examinations. To facilitate comparison a few of the results have been expressed as percentages.

TABLE II.

Showing the results of examination in the several pass-subjects of each of the standards :—

Standard.	Number examined.	Passes in									
		Reading.	Spelling and Dictation.	Writing.	Drawing.	Arithmetic.		Composition.		Geography.	
							P. cent.		P. cent.		P. cent.
VI. ...	1,427	1,316	1,213	1,344	1,349	828	58	1,155	81	1,165	82
V. ...	2,468	2,218	2,007	2,267	2,272	1,533	62	1,945	79	1,844	75
IV. ...	3,681	3,190	2,847	3,306	3,323	2,314	63	2,645	72	2,428	66
III. ...	3,899	3,442	3,141	3,543	3,556	2,989	77	3,230	83	3,028	78
II. ...	3,539	3,138	3,151	3,229	3,198	2,850	81	...	...	...	...
I. ...	3,345	3,094	3,095	3,202	3,180	3,071	92	...	...	...	...
Totals ...	18,359	16,398	15,454	16,891	16,878	13,585	...	*8,975	...	*8,465	...

* Out of a total of 11,475.

A brief examination of this table shows that the subjects of reading, spelling and dictation, writing and drawing, are in general efficiently taught; that composition is taught with considerable success; that there is great weakness in the teaching of arithmetic in the upper standards; and that there is some weakness in the teaching of geography, particularly in Standard IV. The inferior results in arithmetic and geography are not attributable to the high standard expected for passing, for in both the standard is less exacting than in spelling and dictation, and in composition. The inference is that they are due to inferior teaching, and this is, I think, certainly true of arithmetic, and to a considerable extent of geography also. In judging of the results it is necessary to bear in mind that failure to pass does not mean that the pupils who failed showed no knowledge of the subject or subjects in which they failed. It shows only that their knowledge did not come up to a satisfactory standard: in arithmetic, for example, the boys who failed did less than three-fifths, and the girls less than a half, of the work set for them to do. As a matter of fact, a large proportion of those who failed in arithmetic did two sums out of the five that were set. Bearing this in mind we must still conclude that the teaching of arithmetic in the three upper standards is much less efficient than it should be, and much less efficient than the mass of the teachers believe it to be. For teachers are very good at extenuating the failure of their pupils in arithmetic, and generally flatter themselves that they could and should have done much better. This optimistic view of the case I do not share, and I believe it is largely fallacious. The pupils have ample time to do the sums set, and throughout the year these have been as fair examples as could be given, except occasionally in Standard VI.; yet in school after school, and, in fact, year after year, the record in this subject bears the same unfavourable complexion. The chapter of accidents is no doubt an elastic thing, but it can hardly explain so uniform and persistent a feature of the examination results as this.

The inefficient teaching of arithmetic in the upper standards is, I believe, mainly due to the two following causes, but principally to the second. The first is the want of a sufficiently ready and accurate knowledge of tables and of simple operations involving their use that still prevails in the upper standards of a good many schools, though it has well nigh disappeared in the lower. We often see the pupils of Standard III. and Standard IV., and sometimes even more advanced ones, putting down small numbers of pence and formally dividing by twelve to change them to shillings; and we find them unable readily to make the simple transformations frequently required in changing one denomination to another, or in changing fractions from one denominator to another. This is a defect that can be cured only by sufficient oral drill in such transformations, and teachers must see to it that the necessary practice in appropriate oral and mental exercises is given.

But the chief cause of our failure to teach arithmetic better than we do is this: the teaching is not thorough enough; it does not give a clear and sure knowledge of the reasoning and the principles which the pupils are constantly applying in the working of examples. I do not mean that the teaching is unintelligent or deliberately careless, for this is seldom the case, but that it is not driven home; that the pupils are not trained to re-state the explanations given by the teacher; and that they can seldom tell clearly, even when an example has been worked through, what we want to