

In all, 116 schools were examined in standards, Awahou being the only one that dropped out of the intended examination, and this was accounted for by a flood in the Pohangina River. Of the remaining ten schools shown as open during the last quarter of the year, Ongo Road, Ruahine, and Glen Nevis were temporarily closed when the Inspectors were in their neighbourhood; Raetihi, Ohakune, and Taihape were opened at the close of 1896, and they necessarily must be examined in the autumn of the year; Utiku and Moawhango were opened during the first quarter of 1897, and they, too, must be examined in the autumn; and Anderson's Road and Komako were opened only during last December. Four new schools—viz., Parapara, Mangahoe, Rewa, and Mangawhero—were examined for the first time. The manner in which some of the aided schools, as Ongo Road, Mangahoe, Glen Nevis, &c., are opened, closed, re-opened, and so on is very annoying.

On the days appointed for the examination in standards there were 9,827 pupils (5,076 boys and 4,751 girls) on the school-rolls. Of these, 6,649 were in Standards I. to VI., 3,095 were in the preparatory classes below Standard I., and 83 had already passed Standard VI.

The number of pupils presented in standards expressed as a percentage of the roll-number (the class above Standard VI. is thrown out of calculation) is 68·2—that is, 31·8 per cent. of the pupils on the rolls were considered by the teachers unfit for presentation in Standard I. In the majority of schools, however, where the percentage of the roll-number presented was low we found extenuating circumstances—e.g., the children coming so late in life to school, as is generally the case in the back settlements, that it was quite impossible to make them fit for Standard I. At the same time we believe that some teachers kept back children who could readily have passed Standard I., while, on the other hand, it is only fair to state that other teachers presented and passed in Standard I. very young children whom it would have been very much better to have kept in the highest primer class for another year. Also, we have reason to believe that some teachers, instead of showing us as presented in Standard I. on our examination-day such children as failed for the standard at their (the teachers') examination, showed them as presented in the preparatory class; but if all teachers did this there could not be any failures for Standard I. With regard to the children over eight years of age in the preparatory classes (587) that were not presented for Standard I., 57 were represented as not having made half the possible attendances, 36 were Maoris, 360 were under two years at school, and for the remainder "dullness" was the excuse for non-presentation.

The percentage of the roll-number presented in standards varied very much at different schools. The following is an abstract for the district: Below 50 per cent. of roll-number, 5 schools; 50 per cent. but below 60 per cent. of roll-number, 16 schools; 60 per cent. but below 70 per cent. of roll-number, 44 schools; 70 per cent. but below 80 per cent. of roll-number, 36 schools; 80 per cent. but below 90 per cent. of roll-number, 11 schools: total, 112 schools.

The four schools in Wanganui are not included in the foregoing, as the Boys' School and the Girls' School have not got preparatory classes, while the two so-called infants' schools have only one standard (the first) represented.

The total number presented in the six standards is 99 higher than in 1896. Standards VI., V., IV., and II. show increases of 30, 64, 105, and 19 pupils respectively; while Standard III. shows a decrease of 14, and Standard I. a decrease of 105. Standard III. shows the highest number presented, and this we think is due to the fact of an unusually large number of pupils being two years in this class. Presumably such is the result of teachers taking too lenient a view when examining pupils in Standard II., for certainly it is not due either to the gap being too great between Standard II. and Standard III. or to any severity in the test applied to the latter standard.

Of the 6,649 pupils presented in the six standards, 6,427, or 96·6 per cent., attended and were examined; 222 were absent; 1,139 failed; and 5,288 came up to the requirements and were promoted. We are well satisfied with the percentage present, especially as many of the absentees had already passed a standard during the year at some other school. Others were accounted for by the fact that some parents like their children to spend two years in Standard IV., and, as bearing out this, it may be seen that the number of absentees is highest in that class. As usual, the Boys' School and the Girls' School, Wanganui, were responsible for several absentees—29 out of a combined roll-number of 628. To this the three Palmerston schools present a marked contrast, where, out of 698 presented in standards, only 7 were absent. At 44 schools all the pupils presented in standards attended, and at 22 schools only one pupil was absent.

Percentages of passes are not now calculated for individual schools, and rightly so, for they are very misleading with regard to the quality of the work sent in, which might be excellent, or merely of such a kind as to barely meet the limit requirements for a pass. When calculated for the whole district, however, percentages are useful for purposes of comparison, so we have shown them in the first case upon the number presented in standards, in the second case upon the number examined in standards, the absentees being thrown out. In the following remarks the second calculations will be referred to.

The percentage of passes on the total number examined in all standards was 82·3, which is the highest ever obtained in this district, and is 4·2 higher than in 1896. We consider it very creditable, for in districts of this kind, with many small bush schools, we cannot at all reconcile very high percentages with the taking of a fair estimate of the requirements of the syllabus. It may be very nice for all concerned when an examiner can say that only about 10 per cent. of the pupils failed to satisfy him; but, nevertheless, we think, taking all circumstances into consideration, there cannot be much grounds for complaint when only eighteen pupils in every hundred fail to gain promotion. This remark, of course, refers merely to the number of passes: it is quite possible for the number to be quite satisfactory, but the quality inferior, hence the deceptiveness of percentages.

In the individual standards the percentages show an improvement for the year in every case, as follows: Standard VI., 12·5; Standard V., 11·2; Standard IV., 6·5; Standard III., 2; Standard II., 1·9; and Standard I., 1·8. The vast improvement in Standard VI. and Standard V. is no doubt partly due to the tests in arithmetic being much easier last year than any year since the department