

small household schools have not been examined this year. The number of children on the rolls at the dates of the examinations was 2,130, and if to these be added sixty-two, the roll-number of the schools not examined, the total number of children who have attended during the year will be 2,192. This is only seven more than were returned as presented for examination in 1896, although the number of schools in operation has increased by four. This year 1,412 scholars in standards were present at the examinations, as against 1,497 in 1896, a decrease of eighty-five, or about 5½ per cent. The decrease in the number passing was only eighteen, or about 1½ per cent. The classification shows a decrease in the presentations in the class above Standard VI., and in Standards VI., IV., II., and I., and a marked increase in those of the preparatory class and in Standards V. and III. The number of scholars in the preparatory class, returned as above eight years of age, is 118. Several teachers, however, neglected to give the ages of the children in this class, an omission which I did not discover until it was too late to obtain the information. The reasons given for the non-presentation of these scholars in Standard I. were: Irregular, 20; dull, 14; late entrance, 30; delicate health, 4; no reason given, or only "unfit," 38; confirmed truant-player, 1; and eight at a school under a new teacher who was not responsible, and could not account for the backward condition of this class. Although the number is probably less than the truth, it shows an increase of about 4 per cent. over last year's returns. The Blenheim School had fifty scholars above eight years of age in this class, out of 185, or 27 per cent., and Picton had twenty-three out of sixty-six, or 35 per cent. These particulars are given in compliance with the terms of the regulations, but inasmuch as the compulsory clauses of the Act can be applied only to children of seven years of age or upwards, and even then only when scholars live within two miles from the school, I do not consider that any neglect or incompetence is necessarily indicated by the presence of numerous children above eight years in these particular classes. A more important question is the length of time since admission, and without this information the mere age of the scholars has not much significance. Still, as the regulations demand that reasons should be given for the retention of scholars above eight years of age in the preparatory classes, those teachers who have neglected to supply the information have to that extent failed in their duty. As might be expected the ages of the scholars in the several standards at aided schools are, on the average, higher than those attending the larger and older schools, and the average age of scholars passing in this district in the four upper standards is consequently higher than the general average of the colony.

As regards the proportion of passes to presentations, Marlborough last year occupied a very low position compared with the other education districts, only three districts showing a lower percentage of passes. There is some improvement in this respect this year, but not more than is due to the fact that a large number of scholars who failed last year were (very properly) presented again in the same standards. In the absence of any regulations regarding holidays, the length of the school year varies considerably in different schools. Leaving out schools that have been recently started, the average number of times (half-days) that the schools throughout this district have been open between the last two examinations is 411. The aided schools average 418, and the Board schools 404. The aided schools at Te Weka and Kekerangu were open respectively 484 and 482 times. The longest school year at any Board school was 462 half-days, and the shortest was 318. These figures have a very important bearing upon the apparent results of the examinations. The length of the school year has been very much affected at several schools by the prevalence of infectious diseases which led to the temporary closing of such schools on the recommendation of the Health Officers. More important, however, than the length of the school year, is the regularity (or otherwise) of the attendance, and here there is still much to be desired. Year after year nearly every teacher complains of the irregularity with which children attend school, and in spite of the compulsory clauses, truant officers, and Inspector's reports, the evil still prevails.

The number of scholars in the district who failed this year was 231, and by adding a column to the examination schedules to show the attendance of each child since the previous examination, I have ascertained that 38 per cent. of this number had not attended so much as three-fourths of the time, and many of them very much less. In the Blenheim Girls' School there were in all forty-nine failures, and of these twenty-eight, or above 57 per cent., were due in a great measure to irregularity. At the Boys' School nearly half the failures might be set down to the same cause. But the ill effects of this irregularity (as has been pointed out year after year and repeated *ad nauseam*) are not confined to the irregular scholars themselves, but have a detrimental influence on the progress of the whole school, so that, probably, irregularity is responsible for many more failures than those with which it is credited above. The question naturally arises, Who is responsible directly or indirectly for this defect? and can anything be done to diminish it? It is clear that in its present shape at least, the School Attendance Act is not effective; but are other means sufficiently employed to check the evil? In my opinion at the present day there is, generally speaking, not sufficient intercourse between teachers and parents; that the former hold themselves too aloof from the latter, and thereby deprive themselves of a most powerful auxiliary in all matters relating to the discipline of the school—namely, the sympathy and co-operation of the parents. I believe that by the exercise of a little tact, the teacher might influence the parents of irregular scholars, not by merely sending a formal written notice of absence, but by personal interviews, and in a friendly and persuasive manner reasoning with them on the injurious effect of this irregularity, not only upon their own children, but upon the school generally. I am convinced that the establishment of more friendly relations between parents and teachers would do much to remove this, and many other causes of trouble and annoyance, for I have noticed that where the teachers are more "in touch" with parents this irregularity is almost unknown. Although not a panacea for all the evils that trouble the teacher, the employment of this method would at least tend to remove one feeling too generally entertained by the less prosperous classes, that the teachers regard them as altogether beneath their notice, an impression which naturally leads to indifference, if not actual hostility, to the wishes of the teacher. There is, however, another aspect of the subject which must not be entirely overlooked. Nearly all writers on school management agree in attributing great irregularity of attendance to some defect in the