

NORTH CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

Education Office, Christchurch, 29th January, 1898.

We have the honour to present the usual report on the schools of the North Canterbury district for the year 1897.

At the close of 1896 the schools of the district numbered 195, and since that time five more have been added, making the total 200. All of these were examined in due course, and to all but a very few—chiefly aided schools—the usual visits of inspection were paid.

In the schools examined there were presented 21,028 children, of whom 19,814 were present. In the standard classes—Standards I. to VI.—14,837 were enrolled, 298 had already passed the Sixth Standard, and 5,893 were included in the preparatory divisions. For the first time in a long series of years these numbers show a reduction, notwithstanding the continued increase in the number of schools in operation.

The number present and examined individually for standard passes in Standards I. to VI. totalled 14,339, and 12,003 of this number passed, the corresponding numbers for the preceding year being 14,602 and 12,212 respectively. The proportion of passes for the year is thus 57·1, if calculated on the total enrolment in the schools, and 80·9 on the basis of the standard-class enrolment. These proportions are practically the same as in the previous year, but it should be noted that the proportions then showed a drop of 1 per cent. on the basis of the roll-number, and 4 per cent. on the basis of the class-enrolment, so that the ground then lost has not been recovered.

The check thus shown in the progressive advance of the proportion of children reported as satisfying the standard requirements is not wholly a matter for regret, and may be readily accounted for on other grounds than any decrease in the general efficiency of teachers in the Board's service. Among influences affecting the result to a greater or less degree may be included some increase in the facility with which promotions are granted in the three lowest standards, and a corresponding increase of difficulty in the way of the weaker children at a later stage when they are thus confronted with the task of fulfilling requirements in advance of their mental capacities.

In making our reports on the examination of schools we have, at the risk of seeming antiquated, still adhered to one or two obsolete features prescribed in an earlier form of the regulations, as these features appeared to us to be abandoned on insufficient grounds. We refer primarily to the distinction among the failures of those who have not made a fair number of attendances (formerly classed as "excepted," and numbering for this year 284), and secondly to the retention of numerical estimates of the value of the several class-subjects. In the former case, without laying too much stress on the significance of the relation of passes and failures, while indeed we have had in the past frequent occasion to deprecate the references commonly made in this connection, the distinction seems to us a very reasonable one, and a source of useful information. In the latter, numerical estimates of class-subjects, though they may not pretend to be more than approximations, possess several advantages, among which the greater dignity with which they invest the subjects of the group, and the greater facility of comparisons which they afford, are probably not the least. The absence of some such estimates, the utility of which, by the way, was never questioned, so far as the subjects of the group under notice were concerned, has deprived the colony of a valuable means of comparison, and adds to the nebulous ideas of the position these subjects occupy in the schools of the various districts.

In the following tables, which are pregnant with information for those who care to study them, we have summarised the results in class-subjects in as simple a form as was possible in view of the important question, frequently mooted, how far schools of different types, in respect of the staff provided, may be expected to deal efficiently with subjects of this group.

CLASS-SUBJECTS : COMPARISON OF SCHOOL GROUPS (1).

Schools having Marks 50 per Cent. and over in	In District.	In Town Schools.	In Intermediate Schools.	In Single-handed Schools.
Five class-subjects ...	18	5	8	5
Four class-subjects ...	32	9	14	9
Three class-subjects ...	42	10	20	12
Two class-subjects ...	48	3	27	18
One class-subject ...	36	1	10	25
No class-subject ...	24	0	0	24
	200	28	79	93