

Our desire to lay before the Board and School Committees reports as full and at the same time as concise as possible led us to adopt the above form of report. The preparation of these reports entails a large amount of labour; but we believe that to those who take an intelligent interest in the welfare of the schools they have given general satisfaction, and we know that in schools in which reproof, stimulation, or encouragement was necessary they are already beginning to tell effectively.

Information which in the past was sent to School Committees on the departmental form No. 22 is embodied in the new reports. It is our duty to record the number of children who pass the various standards, and the record has its own value; but columns 4 to 6, which contain this record, should be read in the light of the efficiency report contained in columns 8 to 23. For a full explanation of the relative bearings of these columns we refer you to our report for 1897; but, for the sake of those who may read this and cannot readily refer to that report, we repeat the concluding paragraph of the explanation: "With us the standard pass is a mere by-product of the examination; we judge the quality of the teaching by the efficiency marks gained in the subjects. Our test is a laborious one to Inspectors, but it is exact and fair. All the pupils taught by one teacher are regarded as constituting a working unit; they are credited with every mark they earn, and their efficiency mark is determined by the ratio of the mark attained to the total attainable. There is no question of pass or of failure, all the pupils being regarded as contributing to the general result—the strong according to their strength, and the weak according to theirs." Teachers sometimes direct our attention to pupils presented for examination under exceptional circumstances: pupils with mental weakness approaching imbecility; pupils neglected in their youth, and too old to be classed with little ones, their equals in attainments; pupils recently admitted, but unprepared for the standard work in which they must be presented. Those of them who have already passed a standard must be reckoned in columns 5 and 6, but we exclude, and feel fully justified in excluding, their exceptional results from the efficiency marks.

In this report every department of school life and work finds acknowledgment to a greater or less extent. The aim of our national system of education is development—intellectual, moral, and physical; and in estimating the total efficiency of a school we acknowledge this. The intellectual necessarily demands from us the lion's share of efficiency marks; but to the moral and the physical, under "order," "attention," "manners," "drill and exercises," we have assigned rather more than 20 per cent. of the total marks. In the departmental report form the actual efficiency of the classes in the pass-subjects was practically ignored, and no provision was made for the expression of the efficiency of each class severally in the class and additional subjects. From the information given on the departmental report form it was impossible to ascertain the efficiency of the work done by individual teachers in these important subjects. The term that expressed the average efficiency of all the classes gave to the efficient teacher undeserved discredit, and to the inefficient teacher undeserved credit. We could cite schools in which a weak spot has for years existed, apparently unsuspected by the members of the School Committees. The standard passes made by the pupils of the inefficient teachers were sufficient to allay suspicion; but the efficient teachers of higher standards knew well the amount of worry and extra labour the promotion of these defectively taught pupils caused them. The new form of report shows in every subject the efficiency mark of each teacher's class or group of classes. We must here say that a low general result is not necessarily an indication of weakness in the teacher. An accumulation of weaklings will occasionally form in the lower classes of a school, and, as it passes upwards through the school, it will prove almost a heartbreak to each teacher in succession. It is right that such weaklings should sooner or later be passed upwards; but, in fairness to the teacher, the efficiency mark of his weak class should be read in the light of the marks made by it in the previous examination. The repetition of a low general result is probably an indication of weakness in the teacher, and might suggest his being employed elsewhere in the school. The information given under Nos. 7, 27, 29, 30, and 31 shows conditions under which the work of the year has been done, and the modifying influence of these conditions on the efficiency marks should have full consideration from members of School Committees.

At the end of the year we were requested by the department to add to the usual report on passes a report on the class and additional subjects. We gladly received this request, regarding it as a step in the right direction. The descriptive terms adopted by the department differed slightly from those used in our reports to the Board and School Committees, and no indication was given of their values. The recasting of our results would have taken more time than we had at our disposal: we therefore reported in our own terms.

We have classified the schools according to the means of their general results. Fractions neglected, 5 per cent. of the schools were weak, 11 per cent. fair, 52 per cent. satisfactory, 29 per cent. good, and three schools were very good. A number of schools were within a fraction of a higher classification; but, as we had given the benefit of the fraction to the standard and to the average efficiency marks, we could not well give it again in estimating the general results. Under the circumstances we have already detailed, we consider that the condition of our schools is satisfactory; still, with a teaching staff such as Otago possesses, and with schools so conveniently located and so well equipped, a larger proportion of our schools should, we think, reach the level of "good."

The greatest of all hindrances is irregularity of attendance. We have again and again shown the evil effects of this on the pupil: loss during his absence of partially completed work, continued loss after return to school till the working habit is re-formed and the breaches in the continuity of the various subjects are repaired, paralysis of discouragement following the child's realisation that he has been left behind. Many parents deny themselves in order that their children may attend school regularly; but, since the teacher, to minimise the evil effects of irregular attendance, must give extra time and special attention to the irregulars, their self-denial is largely nugatory.