

excluding the 47 pupils in the class above Standard VI., numbered 4,154, or 86·2 per cent. of those who were examined. The following table gives in summary form the complete returns for the year, and for comparison the results of the previous year are added :—

Classes.	Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Absent.	Failed.	Passed.	Percentage of passed to examined.	Average Age of those that passed.	Improved or otherwise, in Proportion of Passes.
							Yrs. mos.	
Above Standard VI.	47	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	316	313	3	65	248	79·2	14 1	Fallen.
" V. ...	547	536	11	126	410	76·5	13 3	Improved.
" IV. ...	876	854	22	141	713	83·4	12 6	Improved.
" III. ...	983	966	17	156	810	83·8	11 4	Improved.
" II. ...	1,047	1,028	19	108	920	90·0	10 1	Improved.
" I. ...	1,133	1,121	12	68	1,053	93·9	9 0	Improved.
Preparatory ...	2,633	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Totals for 1898	7,582	4,818	84	664	4,154	86·2	11 8	Improved 3 per cent.
Totals for 1897	7,297	4,559	82	762	3,797	83·2	11 7	...

Catholic Schools.

	442	310	6	114	196	63·3	...	...
Preparatory ...	126	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

The number of pupils actually examined by me in Board and Catholic schools was 8,024, exclusive of those belonging to the senior division at the Gisborne District High School, who were examined in December, at the same time as the candidates for Board scholarships.

Compared with the previous year the increase in the number of pupils in 1898 was 285, but the preparatory classes may be set down as the same for the whole time. It is interesting to observe that the number of pupils in Standards V. and VI. and the class above Standard VI. remains almost constant, the difference between 1897 and 1898 being represented by a single pupil. The increase of 285 pupils in the latter year is mainly in the two lowest classes, and in these the passes are in the hands of the teachers themselves. On the whole, however, I have no cause to complain at the standard adopted by most of the teachers; indeed, some of the pupils in the schools are as well advanced as many Standard II. pupils were ten or a dozen years ago. A free classification under judicious control is clearly beneficial to the average school, and I am inclined to think that the plan might be extended yet further, always assuming that the Inspector has the power to examine a school in detail if he has reason to think that honest work has not been done.

There is not the slightest doubt that the improved regularity for the year, although not so great as I had expected in certain schools, is having a beneficial effect upon the school work. It is a pity that an attendance officer should be necessary in the larger centres of population, but the fact remains that some parents in matters of government are only amenable to force. The school increase and regularity for the whole year show only normal growth such as might have been expected had no expenditure been incurred in the enforcement of attendance. Without an attendance officer the average regularity of pupils in the country schools is higher than in the towns.

During the course of my examination forty-two schools had no pupils away on examination-day, and twelve others had each only one. Such result, considering that the district extends more than 340 miles in length, is most creditable to both teachers and pupils, and it supplies evidence as to what is possible where the spirit of work and duty pervades homes and school-rooms alike.

My attention has been directed during the year to certain aspects of school work of supreme importance to the future of the children. As pointed out on many occasions already, there is a tendency among the great body of teachers to keep strictly to the letter of the syllabus of instructions in the preparation of their pupils. Now, the syllabus makes no reference to pupils below Standard I. beyond the fact that such children are known as forming the preparatory classes. Children may attend school from the age of five years, and the average age of passing Standard I. is nine years. Four years are thus spent in preparatory work. Under proper regulations, what might not those four years be made to produce? Some of the junior departments under the Board are doing remarkably good work considering how the lady teachers in charge are circumstanced in the matter of suitable arrangements and appliances. Thus, at Ormond and Waerenga-a-hika, in the Poverty Bay district, in addition to the maintenance of an intelligent infant department, the mistress in the former school gives instruction in hat-, mat-, and kit-making, and in the latter in basket- and mat-making. It is the more creditable because the hats, kits, and mats are made from the bark of the *Plagianthus betulinus* (native name, "whawaho")—the settlers' "ribbon-wood"—which is found in the bush not far from the school. The teachers take the girls to gather the bark, and everything is done by the pupils themselves. In this way the children are being taught to make their own hats, kits, baskets, and also table-mats suitable for home use. Kindergarten instruction beyond what is described here makes headway but slowly. Wairoa, Waipawa, Taradale, and Napier do something, but the aim of the schools generally is to prepare the pupils in reading, writing, and arithmetic, to which are added a little