

Standard I.”; “to be transferred directly,” &c.; also some cases in which the teachers neglected to supply the information. Some, perhaps many, of the fifty-two under “late entrance” had attended other schools previously, but for how long is not known. The children in the preparatory classes amount to 28·8 per cent. of the roll-numbers: this is 2 per cent. less than the proportion for the whole colony in the previous year, and about 0·8 per cent. more than that for last year in this district.

The scholars in the class above Standard VI. have decreased by sixteen, and those in the preparatory class have increased by nineteen. The number of scholars in Standards I. to VI. this year was, 1,468, or two more than in the previous year, while the number of absentees was seventy-one, or an increase of seventeen. These last figures, though apparently trifling, have yet some significance, for though the absentees on the whole amount to no more than 4·8 per cent., the absence is not uniform, but varies from 3 per cent. in Standard I. to 7·4 per cent. in Standard V. Of course there is always a more or less plausible excuse for this absence, but it is rather unfortunate that in several small schools the absentees should be the only representatives of the higher standards. An epidemic of measles was responsible for some absentees.

The number of scholars actually examined in standards was fifteen less, and the number passed was nine more, than at the previous examination, giving on the whole an increase of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. In all the standards excepting Standard VI. there is a slight improvement in the proportion of passes to the number examined, ranging from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 per cent. In the sixth, however, there is a marked falling-off, for which I regret to say some of the larger schools are mainly responsible. It must not be assumed that in the smaller schools with one, or at the most two, teachers the failure of scholars to pass Standard VI. is necessarily to be regarded as reflecting upon the ability of the teachers, or the efficiency of the teaching of the school as a whole. The head-teacher might consider himself bound to aim at “the greatest good of the greatest number,” and when there is evidence of this in the general condition of the whole school I do not regard the partial or even the total failure of a small Sixth Standard class as a serious cause of complaint. Young teachers are more apt to err in the opposite direction, and to devote more time to the upper standards than they can well afford without injury to the great bulk of their scholars.

In an early edition of the Government’s standard regulations this principle was recognised and embodied in a note to the effect that in small schools the scholars in Standard VI. should be regarded more as “students,” and should receive only occasional assistance from the teacher. It is, however, an entirely different matter in the case of large schools when the staff is sufficient, and where no teacher has more than two classes to attend to. Here the failure of the upper standards, unless otherwise accounted for, must be taken to indicate a serious defect in the teaching and general management, which demands immediate correction.

The work in the pass-subjects of the four upper standards shows a small improvement in all subjects excepting composition and geography, ranging from 1 per cent. in reading and writing to 12 per cent. in arithmetic. Although, judging solely by the results of the examination, this is still the least satisfactory of the pass group (passing only 59 per cent. of the number examined), the improvement this year is decidedly encouraging, and justifies a hope that ere long it will assume a position more suitable to its importance. Out of fifty-four schools presenting scholars in these standards, nineteen—all small schools—have passed all examined in arithmetic, five passed between 78 and 90 per cent., seventeen passed between 50 and 75 per cent., and thirteen less than 50 per cent., and amongst these last will be found six of the larger Board schools.

In geography, which this year is the weakest of the pass-subjects, twenty schools passed all presented, six passed 75 per cent. or over, fourteen between 50 and 75 per cent., and fourteen less than 50 per cent. There is a slight falling-off (about 2 per cent.) in the number passing this year as compared with last year. Composition also was less satisfactory, there being about 5 per cent. fewer passes this year than there were last.

It is very gratifying to notice that the smaller schools, as a rule, come out so well in this analysis. Nor must it be assumed that this is on account of the low standards presented. Taking only schools presenting scholars in the three higher standards, there are fourteen that passed all the scholars presented, and, with the exception of one, these are all aided schools. The great advantage enjoyed by aided schools in the almost absolute regularity of attendance, together with the large amount of individual attention that can be given to the scholars, will fully account for their uniform success when they have the good fortune to be under the care of fairly efficient teachers; and, having regard to the small salaries they receive, I am sure that the Board has reason to be well satisfied with the results of its efforts to convey the benefits of the Education Act into the remote corners of the district.

Reading.—This subject is, generally speaking, well taught throughout the district, and the comprehension of the subject-matter of the lessons is in most cases good, and in some remarkably so. Although the First and Second Standards are examined in pass-subjects by the teacher, I invariably hear them read, in order to judge by subsequent oral examination as to their comprehension; and in very few cases have I felt disposed to differ from the teacher in my estimate of a pass in reading. The reading of the Second Standard at the Convent School was far superior to any of the same standard in this district. On the whole, this subject has much improved of late years. The aspirate is more generally respected than formerly, and another stumbling-block—the final *ng*—has been to a great extent overcome. In only a few schools is the nuisance of almost inaudible reading to be found.

Spelling and Dictation.—This troublesome subject is slowly improving, but, considering that the tests are confined to the (in the lower standards) very limited contents of the reading-book, a better result might be expected. It must not, however, be forgotten that in this, as in most other subjects, the work of the majority of scholars at an examination is never equal to their actual and ordinary capabilities.