

the most important in the whole year, as new subjects are then being treated for the first time, and the absence of individual members of a class is most to be regretted. The average for the colony, which, apparently, is steadily improving, was 82·9 per cent. for 1897, and this, the Minister of Education reports, is the highest yet reached. For this district the return was only 80·5, which compares very unfavourably with 87·4 per cent. in Otago.

At our annual examination 5,520 children were present, the absentees numbering 458. In twenty-two schools this year the examination results were very unsatisfactory. In eleven of these the teachers were newly appointed, and in some cases inexperienced. Seven others did badly for the second year in succession, and the teachers of two of these have since left the service. To account for the failure of the remaining four, which were unsuccessful for the first time, no satisfactory explanation presents itself.

A general summary of results for the whole district has been extracted from the annual return, and with the corresponding totals for 1897 is shown below.

Standard Classes.				Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
							Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI.	...	...	...	179	...	...	...
Standard VI.	...	...	...	453	444	336	14 2
" V.	...	...	...	639	610	447	12 11
" IV.	...	...	...	777	743	584	12 0
" III.	...	...	...	891	867	705	10 10
" II.	...	...	...	738	719	648	9 8
" I.	...	...	...	646	625	597	8 5
Preparatory ...	...	...	...	1,650	...	...	...
Totals, 1898	...	...	...	5,973	4,008	3,317	11 4*
Totals, 1897	...	...	...	6,054	4,179	3,358	11 4*

* Mean of average ages.

A comparison of these figures with those of the two previous years shows that head-teachers are passing children in the First and Second Standards more freely even than hitherto, possibly as a result of greater care in presenting only fit candidates for the First Standard examination.

In the Inspectors' pass examinations Standards III. and IV. were much more successful than hitherto, while the proportion of passes in Standard V. was the same as in 1897, but in Standard VI. it was slightly lower. The percentage of passes in all standards—82·5, the highest we have yet recorded—is over 2 per cent. higher than that of the previous year, and that without any lowering of the standard of efficiency, but rather the reverse. The proportion is still considerably below that recorded by the larger districts, and below the general average of the whole colony; but this may as fairly, we think, be attributed to irregular attendance and the strictness of the local Inspectors as to weakness in the teaching staff. We are astonished to find the idea still prevalent in certain quarters that the Inspectors' opinion of the success of any particular school is based entirely upon the number of passes. Our estimate of the efficiency of a class in any one subject depends on the average quality of the work of the class in that subject, or, to express it in figures, upon the average-mark of the class, and not upon the number of passes or the number of failures. A class of ten may, for example, all barely pass in arithmetic, or, say, five of them may just fail and the others get full marks. In the latter case the work of the class is of far higher average merit than in the former. It practically makes but little difference in the Inspector's judgment whether in a few doubtful cases the children pass or fail. In Otago, Inspectors—with whose general practice we have always agreed, though we have not gone so minutely into arithmetical calculations in all subjects—have, in their report for 1897, given very full explanations on this head, and we commend what they have written to the careful consideration of any who still feel unsatisfied. As they point out, it follows as a matter of course that in all well-taught schools the pass-results in subjects will be fairly high because the average marks will be high, but it does not follow that a class which passes well is a well-taught class. The pass examination, after all, only requires the minimum of attainment which determines whether the child is fit to pass on to higher levels of thought and to subjects requiring greater mental capacity. The teachers who make the mistake of treating the pass requirement as the maximum by limiting the scope of their work to the attainment of mere passes are doing the scholars a gross injustice which will produce bitter fruit in the following year. It is at best a penny-wise-pound-foolish policy, for the children's minds will, in consequence of their narrow training, be less developed and less capable of taking up new lines of thought. If the children attend with regularity, the discipline is efficient, and the course of training wide enough to cover the subject in all its branches, there need be no anxiety concerning the result of an examination which must necessarily be of a plain and straightforward character.

The introduction of systematic kindergarten instruction into the infant schools of Nelson City has done much to relieve the monotony of the work in this department, and we have no doubt that in time it will generally tend to improve the style of infant instruction throughout the district. The number of children over eight years of age, and yet considered unfit for presentation in Standard I., was 222. In most cases the reason given for withholding them from the standard examination appeared to us satisfactory. They may be roughly classed under the following heads: Shortness of school-life, 78; exceptional dullness or imbecility, 76; irregularity of attendance, 48; delicate health, 9. In eleven cases we can find no reasons given.