

instance a poor result might be fair enough, but it would be destructive of all basis of comparison if it were classed as "fair." Probably the best plan of dealing with these subjects would be found in a union of the two practices, by which the numerical estimate should be accompanied or not, at the Inspector's discretion, by some brief remark by way of supplement. In a summarised return the difficulty does not occur, though it is not entirely absent from a summary such as is contained in Appendix I. (Departmental Form No. 24). In regard to the latter, we should also like to point out that we express with a good deal of diffidence a separate judgment of the "manners" of the children, for the simple reason that our opportunities for observation are in many cases too limited.

From the tabular summary of class-subjects given above it will at once be seen that in respect of geography (Standard II.), history, science, and object-lessons, a majority of the schools are included in the three upper grades, while in grammar and mental arithmetic the positions are reversed. The actual proportions in order of merit are: Geography, in 77 out of every hundred of schools; history, 61; science and object-lessons, 58; grammar, 31; and mental arithmetic, 20.

The relations of the subjects to each other are not materially different from those of the previous year, but an improvement in history is to be noted. In grammar more attention has been given in the upper classes to analysis and less to parsing, with, we consider, some advantage to the schools; but the whole subject still occupies an unsatisfactory position. If in this subject, as in others of the class group, the teacher were free to adopt an abridged programme—such as his time and opportunities would enable him to carry out with some degree of efficiency—the concession would be of moral and mental benefit to the district. In the English code the teacher has the option of drawing up his own scheme of grammar, and for his guidance several alternative schemes are presented to his choice, together with an abridged scheme for adoption in smaller schools. With the different examination conditions in New Zealand it would scarcely be practicable to go quite so far in the liberty accorded; but we do not see why a full scheme and an abridged scheme (not necessarily following in all respects the same lines) should not be presented to the teacher's choice, according to the opportunities he enjoys, or the direction in which his tastes and requirements lead him in specialisation. We quite appreciate the attitude of the Education Department in its reluctance to accept the programme proposed by us a little over a year ago, as any abridgment necessarily leaves out some desirable features which a number of schools might, and a few happily do, secure; but without something of the kind suggested there can be little satisfaction in the vast majority of cases to teacher, examiner, or pupil in connection with the subject.

STATISTICS OF CLASSIFICATION.

—		Standard IV. and upwards.	Standards I., II., and III.	Preparatory Division.	Mean of Average Age, Standards VI. to I.
					Yrs. mos.
1889	...	20.4	44.6	35.0	11 8
1890	...	22.4	44.8	32.3	11 8
1891	...	24.4	44.3	31.3	11 7
1892	...	26.1	43.9	30.0	11 6
1893	...	28.2	42.3	29.5	11 6
1894	...	30.1	41.2	28.7	11 5
1895	...	31.4	40.8	27.8	11 4
1896	...	32.3	40.1	27.6	11 4
1897	...	33.0	39.0	28.0	11 3
1898	...	33.7	37.9	28.3	11 3

It is a common subject of remark that the children in our schools now complete their standard course at too early an age, and men's minds are exercised over the question whether this is a matter requiring remedy; or, if not, what further provision is to be made for young people after quitting the elementary school. In this connection the above table of classification is significant in the evidence it presents of a gradual and sustained increase in the proportion of pupils included in the upper classes, the almost equally striking decrease in the preparatory division, and the gradual lowering of the mean average age. The amiable, if somewhat hasty, inference generally made is that as teachers have become more skilful in their school routine their efficiency has increased, and the pupils in consequence pass their standards more readily. There is, however, another very important fact which must not be overlooked—the fact that the standards themselves have changed. The upper grades have been made easier, so that, while the mental equipment of a successful Sixth Standard pupil may at the present time be a little better adjusted to the general needs than it was a few years ago, the application and general capacity essential to success stand on a somewhat lower plane. The schoolmaster would have the grades easier still, and proposes the introduction of a seventh standard, which would permit of a redistribution of the work included in the present programme, and more thorough preparation at the several stages. We think he is wrong. A needless subdivision would only be an embarrassment to the smaller schools, where the classes are already numerous enough, and more thorough preparation could just as readily be secured by recognising the advantage to many children of remaining in one or more of the standard classes for two years in succession. It is, no doubt, very difficult to get parents to see the advantage where their own children are concerned, and the teacher at present can scarcely afford to act upon a different view; but there really seems to be no other way of fitting a standard scheme to the varying capacities of the pupils, and an official recognition of the fact would help the teacher much.