

PUPILS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The working average—which has been since 1893 the basis upon which the capitation grants are paid to Education Boards—shows for the year 1899 a further falling-off from the number previously reached. For the year 1897 the working average was 112,328; in 1898 it was 111,636; while last year it reached only 110,316, or 1,320 less than the year before. In the calculation of the working average for a given school are omitted all attendances on those half-days on which less than half the pupils on the roll are present; on the other hand, the strict average for any school is found by including all the half-days on which the school is open: the strict average for the twelve months ended the 31st December, 1899, was 108,405, or 1,851 less than for the previous year.

TABLE A.—SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND YEARLY INCREASE FROM 1877 TO 1899.

Year.	School Attendance.					Yearly Increase on			
	Number belonging at Beginning of Year.	Number belonging at End of Year.	Average Attendance.		Average Attendance expressed as Percentage of Roll-number.	Number belonging at Beginning of Year.	Number belonging at End of Year.	Average Attendance.	
			Fourth Quarter.	Whole Year.				Fourth Quarter.	Whole Year.
1877	..	55,688	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
1878	50,849	65,040	49,435	45,521	..	..	9,352	..	..
1879	59,707	75,566	57,301	53,067	73·8	8,858	10,526	7,866	7,546
1880	68,124	82,401	62,946	60,625	74·6	8,417	6,835	5,645	7,558
1881	74,359	83,560	63,009	61,822	74·2	6,235	1,159	63	1,197
1882	76,309	87,179	66,426	63,709	73·6	1,950	3,619	3,417	1,887
1883	79,416	92,476	70,077	67,373	74·0	3,107	5,297	3,651	3,664
1884	84,883	97,238	74,650	72,657	75·1	5,467	4,762	4,573	5,284
1885	90,670	102,407	80,183	78,327	76·6	5,787	5,169	5,533	5,670
1886	95,377	106,328	83,361	80,737	76·1	4,707	3,921	3,178	2,410
1887	99,206	110,919	87,386	85,637	77·0	3,829	4,591	4,025	4,900
1888	103,534	112,685	90,849	90,108	79·3	4,328	1,766	3,463	4,471
1889	104,919	115,456	94,308	93,374	80·3	1,385	2,771	3,459	3,266
1890	108,158	117,912	96,670	94,632	79·9	3,239	2,456	2,362	1,258
1891	110,665	119,523	96,264	97,058	80·3	2,507	1,611	[-406]	2,426
1892	112,279	122,620	100,917	99,070	80·6	1,614	3,097	4,653	2,012
1893	114,305	124,686	99,872	98,615	78·5	2,026	2,066	[-1,045]	[-455]
1894	116,819	127,300	106,151	103,490	80·6	2,514	2,614	6,279	4,875
1895	119,900	129,856	107,222	106,622	81·4	3,081	2,556	1,071	3,132
1896	122,425	131,037	109,253	108,976	82·1	2,525	1,181	2,031	2,354
1897	123,533	132,197	110,523	110,993	82·9	1,108	1,160	1,270	2,017
1898	123,892	131,621	107,904	110,256	82·4	359	[-576]	[-2,619]	[-737]
1899	123,207	131,315	107,066	108,405	81·2	[-685]	[-306]	[-838]	[-1,851]

The average of the weekly roll-numbers throughout the year was, however, only 242 less than for the year 1898, the figures being 133,540 for 1899 as against 133,782 for 1898.* Expressing the strict average attendance for the year as a percentage of the average weekly roll-numbers, we get 81·2 per cent. as representing the regularity of attendance during the year. This is lower than the corresponding figures for any year since 1894. In 1897 the average attendance reached 82·9 per cent. of the roll, and in 1898, when there was a considerable amount of sickness among children, 82·4 per cent. Table A shows the attendance for the twenty-two years that have elapsed since the passing of the Education Act.

It is not easy to assign with any degree of certainty the true causes of the great falling-off in average attendance as compared with the slight decrease in the roll-numbers. There does not appear to have been any unusual amount of sickness among children, or any general prevalence of bad weather during the year. Whatever may have been the cause, the increase in the amount of irregular attendance seems to call for attention on the part of all concerned; there is little doubt that to a certain extent it is preventable.

* The returns furnished to the Registrar-General appear to show that the number on the rolls of private schools, including Roman Catholic schools, increased during 1899 by 513 pupils; the number in public secondary schools increased by seventeen. Taking public primary and secondary schools, and private schools of all kinds, we have therefore a net increase of 288 on the rolls. Now, allowing for deaths of children under five, the number of births in the colony during 1893 and 1894 would make us expect an increased roll-number in 1899 of about three hundred children. The agreement between these figures is so close as to lead us to the conclusion that there is little or no increase in the number of children whose names do not appear on any school-roll. The leakage in the yearly average attendance is due, in short, not to the rolls, but to the irregular attendance.