

latter chooses to hold an individual examination. In any case the children are put into whatever classes the head-teacher directs. The important changes to note here are that the classification is no longer determined by examination, so that a child may be put back to a lower standard or retained in the same class, although he has passed the standard examination. Freedom to promote has always been granted, but now the head-teacher has almost absolute freedom of classification. By a further provision a child may take his English pass-subjects—reading, spelling, writing, and composition—with one class, and his arithmetic with another, the five subjects mentioned being all that are now required from Standards III., IV., V. To obtain a certificate for one or other of these classes a pass in reading is essential, but work equal to the requirements of the next lower standard may be accepted in two, but not more than two, of the other subjects. I may note here that when a child moves to another school it would be a help towards ready classification if his certificate were so framed as to show the subjects as well as the standard in which he had passed.

The examination basis on which a certificate is granted has, I consider, been placed too low. The system has not yet had a sufficiently long trial to enable one to fairly judge its merits. For some six years the examination of Standards I. and II. has been entirely in the hands of head-teachers, but with this difference: that their classification was final, and that certificates were granted on the strength of their examinations alone. In this district, abounding as it does in small schools—the last return shows forty-two having under fifteen pupils to each; that is the largest number recorded in any part of the colony, except in Auckland, which has forty-nine of this class in a district nearly five times as populous—the plan has not been a complete success. The inexperience of many young teachers renders them quite unfitted to classify their children well, and their conduct of those examinations has often been reluctantly undertaken, and consequently badly performed. Instead of maintaining a high standard of efficiency, the general tendency is to lower the examination to the intellectual level of the pupils presented, so that we have had continually to complain of children being allowed to pass the examination in Standards I. and II. too easily. This year in Standard I., of which the children, in all except the three large centres, were re-examined by us, we had to cancel the passes of thirty-six pupils, or 6 per cent. of the total number of passes, in spite of the fact that sample examination-papers had been previously supplied, and been very generally used. A comparison of the passes in the lower standards with those recorded last year bears out my contention, though I admit it does not prove it, as many other factors cannot here be taken into account. The passes in Standard I. as examined by Inspectors, are 12 per cent. lower than last year when examined by the teachers; those in Standard II., examined by the teachers as hitherto, but largely with sample examination-cards supplied by us, are 4 per cent. lower; but in Standard III., examined for the first time by the teachers, they are 10 per cent. higher. In the larger schools, where the head-teacher does not actually teach the classes that he has to examine, he has more of the character of an independent examiner, and in these I consider the system works more successfully. Clause 6 of the regulations already referred to gives power to the Inspector to re-examine individually, and at his discretion substitute his own results for the results shown on the class-lists presented by the head-teacher. Though such action on his part does not directly affect the classification, it may by keeping before the teachers a high standard of efficiency indirectly tend to check too hasty promotion. The share that head-teachers now take in the examination has, especially in the large schools, afforded me some relief; but the clerical work, which in this district has always been to us a heavy burden, has been somewhat increased this year by the necessity for entering or checking the entry of a figure to denote the pass in each subject, as well as that denoting the standard passed. This is perhaps a slight matter, though over nineteen thousand different entries in duplicate are here referred to. In spite of very plain directions, the varied methods of marking adopted by head-teachers, and of making the necessary entries, has been the chief source of trouble, and one which we hope will be diminished in the future.

The examination of Standard VI. pupils in pass-subjects is wisely left, as hitherto, in the hands of the Inspectors. I have, however, this year thought it advisable generally to examine in detail Standards IV., V., VI., as well as Standard I., in pass-subjects, and on this account head-teachers have usually refrained from previously testing the higher classes, though I should have much preferred them to do so. Reading and writing have as usual been well done, though in the latter subject the stricter requirements of which we gave notice two years ago have produced more failures. As a pass-subject, composition has this year shown a decided falling-off in the higher standards, and especially in Standard V., where a passage of poetry selected from the reading-book in use was not usually paraphrased better than one formerly taken at sight, but rather the reverse. This surely indicates insufficient training in the comprehension of the language and the matter of the reading-books. The failures in composition numbered one-fifth of the whole. Spelling showed a numerically worse result, though, except in Standard V., it was much better than last year. We propose next year to make the tests more comprehensive, especially in Standard III.

Arithmetic still is, as it has always been, the crucial subject, causing more labour, anxiety, and disappointment to both teachers and scholars than any other work. The power now granted to accept the work of a lower standard class in this subject should prove a boon to those who are not gifted with a strong faculty for computation. So far the liberty to classify according to subjects has been very rarely employed, but in the Inspector's marking a lower percentage has been treated as an equivalent to the work of a lower class in the same subject. The proportion of those who sent in unsatisfactory work in arithmetic was slightly lower this year—36 per cent.—the percentage of passes in this subject being as follows:—

			Standard VI.	Standard V.	Standard IV.	Standard III.
Year 1900	...	...	62	47	66	77
Year 1899	...	...	48	57	69	69