

show whether the child is or is not prepared for the work of the higher standard. Even though a pupil fail under examination to demonstrate fitness for promotion, if the head-teacher is convinced that he has capacity, physical and intellectual, for advanced work, it is clearly his duty to promote him; but in such a case, in fairness to the assistant teacher under whom he is placed, or to the school to which he may be removed, it is as clearly the head-teacher's duty to withhold the certificate that the pupil has passed the lower standard. This freedom of classification extends not merely to the standards, but to the subjects of the standards, with this restriction: that a pupil must be placed in the same class for reading, spelling and dictation, writing, and composition—that is to say, a pupil may be placed in the Fifth Standard class for the English pass-subjects, and in the Fourth or Sixth for arithmetic. Still further to secure freedom of classification, every pupil examined by the Inspector is to be examined in the class in which he has been taught—that is to say, in whatever standard class a pupil has been taught, in that standard work must he be examined by the Inspector, even although, a twelvemonth before, he was reported to have passed that standard. The promotion of the pupil now depends not on the results of one examination held by a comparative stranger, but on the average results of several examinations held by one of the pupil's own teachers. These seem liberal concessions, well designed to secure to head-teachers the most desiderated freedom of classification, to class-teachers highly advantageous working-conditions, and to pupils relief from that pressure under which they are said to have hitherto pursued their school course.

In every well-conducted school periodical examinations by the head-teacher, or by the head-teacher and assistants, have always been regarded as essential to discipline and progress. The new regulations take these for granted, and instruct the head-teachers to utilise them for determining promotion. In some schools these examinations seem to have been instituted for the first time under the new regulations, and their institution has been regarded as a hardship. In other schools promotion and pass seem to have been determined solely by an examination held immediately before the annual examination by the Inspector, and the new regulations have been credited with increasing rather than lessening the pressure. This course we regard as radically wrong, and in order to check it we shall ask for the papers and results of the periodical examinations.

With the pass examinations in the head-teachers' hands, we expected a marked diminution in the standard-pass percentage. Under the old *régime*, to do justice to the individual pupil we doubtless gave passes which did injustice to the class and to the teacher. Passes were given to pupils who just touched the minimum standard of requirement, and even to those whose position was doubtful, if their teacher reported them much better than they seemed; and probably we sometimes gave passes which a better acquaintance with the recipients would have led us to withhold. We fain would have disciplined irregular attenders by withholding the pass, but had not the power to do so if they reached the level of attainment required in the pass-subjects. It was the promotion of such imperfectly equipped pupils that brought pressure upon their classes, worry to their teachers, and hindrance to all. In several schools these pupils were most judiciously dealt with: passes were withheld, but the more promising pupils received tentative promotion, and the others were retained on probation in the lower class. In the majority of schools, however, passes were given and the pupils were promoted as under the old *régime*. We confess to a little disappointment with this result, but we cannot well blame the teachers. In many cases it is with great reluctance that we record "failure" against the names of pupils who are strangers to us; with still greater reluctance must our teachers do it in the case of pupils who are their friends. We have not parents and members of School Committees to whom to render account, but our teachers have; and, unfortunately, notwithstanding all that has been said and done, public opinion is still strongly in favour of "a good pass." As we have again and again demonstrated, the standard pass is nearly worthless as a gauge of proficiency.

In 1899 we reported that, so far as we could judge from the condition of the Otago District, freedom of classification might with advantage be granted to the teachers of New Zealand. The regulations conferring this freedom came into force in January, 1900. We have carefully watched their operation, and are convinced by the results that our report has been justified. The regulations have worked well. There has been little or no friction between Inspectors and teachers; and, even where the head-teacher has to the full exercised his power of classification, there has been little or no complaint from parents or School Committees. It is true that many of our teachers have not fully realised the value of the freedom conferred upon them, or, realising it, have not ventured fully on its exercise. Situated as many of them are, we cannot hold them blameworthy. We now advocate on their behalf, and on behalf of their pupils, a measure of freedom almost revolutionary—the total abolition of the pass. Even the name should disappear from school records: pupils should be promoted, and Sixth Standard pupils should receive leaving or merit certificates.

We are fully aware that in such relaxing of the firm grasp given by the standard pass there is risk of injustice to individual pupils, and of deterioration to individual schools; but the existence of such evil would be of but short duration, and ought not to be urged against a measure which makes for general welfare. In introducing similar reforms the Home Education Department anticipated such a risk. Teachers and Education Boards were warned that the measures were tentative, and that their permanence would depend on the faithful discharge of duty by all concerned. The following passage is quoted from the instructions to Inspectors: "My Lords cannot hide from themselves certain dangers which may obviously result from the present relaxation against which it may be necessary to guard. Amongst these is a tendency to specious rather than to sound and thorough work, the neglect of backward scholars, and the want of that stimulus to individual exertion, and that sense of individual responsibility, which rested upon each scholar, and frequently exercised a very salutary influence. My Lords must now trust largely to the local managers, who, they hope, will be anxious to discourage slipshod work, to counteract these tendencies; but it will