

have been pointed out and bewailed year after year in reports from all parts of the colony, it seems to be as rampant as ever. If the consequences fell only upon those who are defaulters in this respect it would be comparatively of minor importance; but the regular scholars lose no small portion of their time, the teachers and Committees suffer pecuniary loss, and the country does not receive full value for the liberal expenditure on primary education. The appointment of Truant Officers may to some extent mitigate the evil, and time will show how much benefit will accrue from the last amendment of the School Attendance Act. The withdrawal of the permission to employ the police as Truant Officers is one of the many mysterious arrangements quite unintelligible by the ordinary citizen; but I am convinced that until the police are charged with the duty of enforcing its regulations any School Attendance Act will be little better than an elaborate sham.

*Average Age.*—In the regulations that were superseded by those now in force it was provided that “Whenever a child more than eight years of age is presented in Class P the principal teacher shall give the Inspector a written explanation of the reason for not presenting the child in Standard I.” In the new regulations this has been omitted, and, instead, the last paragraph in Regulation II. reads, “The Inspector may require from the head teacher a written explanation in the case of any pupil whose age is much above the average age of the pupils in that class for that school or for that education district.” Under the former regulations these lists of children over eight years retained in the preparatory class were always supplied and reported upon. This year, as it was not demanded, only a few schools presented such a list.

The average age at which children in the district have passed the several standards is given in the table below. The aided schools have at present the effect of raising the average age of the higher and lowering that of the lower standards. The reason of this is evident. As a rule an aided or household school is not started until there are three or four children, or perhaps more, of school age. By this time the oldest is perhaps ten or eleven years of age, often older, and these, commencing at one of the lowest standards, are well advanced in years before they reach the Fifth and Sixth; but all the children below school age enter the school as soon as they reach that age (five years), and under the favourable conditions of absolutely regular attendance, together with, in the majority of cases, fairly good teaching, pass annually from class to class.

*Small Schools.*—The small aided schools in the Sounds County have, with very few exceptions, fully justified their existence by producing as good results as it is reasonable to expect. At sixteen of them I promoted every scholar examined, and in only one case, where the result was not so satisfactory, the teacher was not to be blamed, but greatly to be pitied. At a few of the small schools some of the class or additional subjects are omitted, such as history or science, but the majority take up, more or less successfully, every subject of the syllabus, excepting singing and drill.

The latest regulations for the examination and classification of the scholars in primary schools have now been under trial for two years, and, although the long-expected and desired relief from the unreasonable demands of an overloaded syllabus has not yet been granted, the teachers of the colony have been again called upon to present their annual balance-sheets independently of the inspectorial auditor, and to endeavour to satisfy the often unreasonable expectations of Committees and parents. After nearly a quarter of a century under the old system, parents and the public generally, who have accustomed themselves to the receipt of a more or less satisfactory annual dividend in the shape of a “percentage of passes,” are unwilling to accept the verdict of the teacher alone as to the result of the year’s work, which parents are often led to consider satisfactory or otherwise according to the success which may have attended their own children. Judging from last year’s reports from all parts of the colony, and from the local results this year, it seems probable that the craving for apparently good results has been fairly well satisfied; but how far that satisfaction is due to the exceedingly lenient nature of the regulations remains to be discovered hereafter. I am convinced, however, that no great gain to the cause of true education is possible under any system which compels the teachers of all schools, large and small alike, to attempt to satisfy the inordinate requirements of the existing syllabus, or to be regarded as “highly censurable” if they neglect any part of it. If the teachers are to be trusted with freedom of classification, and the experience in the Old Country is decidedly in favour of the supposition, they should be trusted entirely; and the Inspector’s examination should be confined to the Fifth and Sixth Standards, for the purpose of issuing certificates of “exemption” in the former and of “proficiency” in the latter. If, however, the teachers are to be trusted to that extent, there is no reason why even the issue of these certificates should be withheld from them, except that the mistrust of some parents and Committees would for a time give some trouble until a more lengthened experience of the real advantages of such a system should have entirely abolished the insensate desire for a “good percentage of passes.” It perhaps will always be desirable, in the interests of teachers of household and very small schools, to have the teachers’ classification confirmed (or otherwise) by the Inspector, seeing that such teachers are so immediately under the influence of parental pressure, and in the majority of cases would greatly prefer that this should be done. If such a change could be brought about the number of Inspectors might be considerably reduced, and more time could be devoted to the far more important portion of the duties peculiar to them as Inspectors as distinguished from examiners.

The admittedly unsatisfactory practice of judging the condition of a school by the results of a single examination has been often insisted upon, and every Inspector must have felt from time to time that in certain cases the outcome of his examination has not presented the condition of the school as favourably as his experience, gained by inspection, had led him to expect. If, however, the efficiency of a school is to be gauged chiefly by the Inspector’s knowledge of its working condition as observed at the visits of inspection, these visits should be more or less frequent, according to his experience of the circumstances of the school and the methods of teaching