

This table, a troublesome one to compile, is of no great worth, for it is a very inadequate expression of the actual condition of the schools. When it was proposed to hand over to the teachers the classification of their own schools we expected to see this return disappear ; but, for some reason known neither by the teachers nor by ourselves, the Department has considered it wise to retain the standard pass. It has simply taken it (Standard VI. excepted) from the Inspectors and passed it on to the teachers, who are entirely opposed to the change. Their attitude to it is expressed in the following resolution, which was passed at their last annual meeting : " That, in the opinion of this Council, the retention of the annual pass examination and the issue of pass certificates for standards tend to prevent that freedom of classification which is the aim and object of the new regulations." We may say that we are in sympathy with the resolution.

In our reports on the several schools we have generally been able to say that the headmasters' passes were justified ; but to bring some of them within this description we had to exercise pressure, many of the passes assigned by the teacher seeming to us to have been given too easily. A large number of teachers took advantage of the regulation that allows them to pass pupils that fail in two subjects. We are convinced that this regulation makes a pass too easy. Arithmetic and composition are the subjects in which our marking most frequently differed from that of the teacher, and in the latter subject his marking was, we are bound to say, not infrequently very faulty. We assured ourselves of this by reading the papers on which the pupils had been passed. Under the present regulations the efficiency of a school should in great measure be judged by the work of the Sixth Standard, the finished product of the school ; but unless teachers insist upon good work in the standards below it they must look in vain for good work in it. Our chief aim should be to educate the children, not to pass them through the standards.

EFFICIENCY-MARKS IN SUBJECTS.

Pass-subjects.—Reading, satisfactory ; spelling, good ; writing, satisfactory ; arithmetic, satisfactory ; composition, fair ; geography, fair ; drawing, good ; mean result, satisfactory.

Class-subjects.—Grammar, fair ; history, fair ; object-lessons and science, fair ; recitation, satisfactory ; mean result, fair.

Additional Subjects.—Drill and exercises, good ; singing, fair ; needlework, very good ; mean result, good.

In the pass and additional subjects the marks are the same as those of last year ; but in the class-subjects there is a decline in history and object-lessons and science, and this has caused a drop in the mean result, which is this year only fair. The lower marks are, no doubt, owing in some measure to the circumstance that the Dunedin and suburban and some other large schools are unrepresented in these results ; but we cannot help thinking that there is a casual connection between them and the very short working year of the schools. According to returns furnished by the teachers themselves, the average length of the working year in the schools represented is only 193 days. Exclusive of Saturdays and Sundays, the common year consists of 261 days. Allowing for a holiday of forty days, or eight weeks, we have a working year of 221 days—an excess of twenty-eight days, or nearly six weeks, over the time worked by the schools now under consideration. We leave it to others to translate this into terms of loss to the children in mental equipment and to the colony in money. Whatever the cause of the too short working year, it is plain that the time given to actual work is insufficient for the achievement of solid educational results ; and in future the Board should, we think, call for an explanation in every case in which the school has not been open a certain minimum number of days during the year. It would, we feel sure, be a mistake to be niggardly in respect of holidays ; but forty out of 260 days could not well be called niggardly. By most people it would undoubtedly be considered liberal, and few would regard themselves as overpressed by a working year of 220 days. The average child's school life is a short one—about eight years—and if he loses six weeks a year he loses in the aggregate a whole year of schooling, besides suffering morally and intellectually from frequent and prolonged breaks in his studies. These are surely very important considerations.

Of the subjects named above, six are described as " fair " and four as " satisfactory." We are dissatisfied with " fair " and not wholly satisfied with " satisfactory," for it means only that in the subjects so characterized the schools gained from 60 to 67 per cent. of the marks attainable, while " fair " represents a good deal of inferior work.

Indistinctness of utterance is still a prevalent fault in the reading of a large proportion of our schools, and it is a fault that will remain with us until teachers realise the necessity for training their pupils to use their vocal mechanism correctly, and for insisting on distinct utterance in all oral answering. The foundation of clear enunciation in reading is clear speaking, and it is foolish to attempt to teach reading without first laying the foundation on which it rests. To remedy a defect one must first realise it, and the defect of which we are writing is, we fear, not realised by many teachers, and it is certainly not realised by the pupils. In most country schools too little time is given to reading. It appears to be assumed that in this subject children can do little or nothing useful without working with their teacher. The teacher of a country school can devote to the reading of each class only about twenty minutes a day, and accordingly that is the daily time allotted to the most important subject of the school course. The assumption is as unwarranted as the time is inadequate ; for children, when they have been intelligently started in reading, can help themselves with surprisingly little aid from others, a fact attested by hundreds of homes. They are taught the elements by their mother ; they have books placed in their way ; they ask for and receive help now and again from one or other member of the household ; and in a year or two they can read easy books with ease and fluency ; and, moreover, they have learned to enjoy the exercise. If young children can do for themselves in this way, cannot older ones ? We hold that they can, and should. Of course, they need guidance and assistance, both of which should be given with the view to impart to the pupils power to help themselves more and more as they move upwards