

increase of five only on the December return for 1901, and of 240 on that of 1900. The average roll for last year was 15,254, the average attendance 12,580—82·5 per cent. Omitting the figures of the last quarter, in which an epidemic of measles and scarlet fever reduced the numbers, the percentage was 83·4. In 1901 the percentage of attendance was 83·7; in 1900, 82·9. In average attendance the Wellington District in 1901 was seventh on the list of the districts of the colony, six districts having a higher average and six a lower. Such a district as ours ought to occupy a much higher position. The number of children present at examination in Standards I. to VI. (inclusive) was 9,809, and of these, 8,725—a little over 88 per cent.—were promoted, an increase of 1 per cent. on the promotions made in the previous year. The percentage of passes in Standard VI.—the class examined by the Inspectors—was a little over 82, about the same as in the previous year. The slight increase in the total percentage is principally in those standards in which the head teacher exercises his right to promote. This right is exercised judiciously in most cases, though there are some teachers—mostly in country schools—whose anxiety to promote children outruns their discretion. We have not had any difficulty in dealing with such cases, for it is a general understanding that promotions are not made until after consultation with an Inspector, and a teacher invariably acts on the Inspector's advice.

We have this year classified the 140 schools examined as—satisfactory, ninety-six; fair, thirty-one; and inferior, thirteen. Of the inferior schools the larger number is in grades 1 and 2, but it does not necessarily follow that they now are under incompetent teachers. In most of them changes have been made during the year, and in others the conditions have been unfavourable. Many of the thirty-one schools classed as fair are under a sole teacher, working under unfavourable conditions during the year, and others have suffered from changes in the staff, but in all of these an improvement is desirable. Of the ninety-six schools classed as satisfactory many of them, more particularly the largest, show good work in all departments. In this class also there are several country schools whose teachers have been commended for the work of the past year:

Coming to the consideration of the various subjects of the syllabus, and speaking in general terms, we find that in the pass work the arithmetic and the spelling are good. We have, however, noticed an inclination on the part of many teachers to devote too much time, relatively speaking, to these subjects. Five hours per week is the maximum that can be given to arithmetic, while, as a matter of fact, we find it receives in some time-tables a nominal allowance of six hours, and even more. It is not only the excessive time that we object to, but the unwarrantable expenditure of energy and teaching-power so urgently needed for other and perhaps more important subjects. Arithmetic in primary schools, like Euclid in secondary schools, has been made a perfect fetish of. One would imagine that we still lived in that happy Arcadian period when the three R's constituted a syllabus, and not in a day when science, hand and eye training, and a dozen other subjects make such demands on our school time. Granting its indirect educational value, we still maintain that an altogether disproportionate part of the average child's school life is taken up with what, in nine cases out of ten, is merely utilitarian arithmetic. We sincerely hope that a new syllabus will see this subject relegated to its proper place. Composition we should like to see receiving more oral treatment, more especially oral treatment in the lower classes. Not sufficient use is made of object lessons in this respect. In our larger schools, where oral composition is begun in the lowest classes, really good results are obtained. Reading is satisfactory. We have in some cases recommended that silent reading be substituted for a great deal of the simultaneous reading that now prevails. Writing is the least satisfactory of the pass subjects, and during the year we have had to speak in strong terms of the writing in some of our schools. The usual excuse is the crowded syllabus, and to a certain extent this excuse is admissible, but in many cases sheer neglect and lack of systematic instruction are the main causes. Teachers have the choice of a variety of systems of handwriting—vertical, upright, or sloping. Experts, as usual, differ as to which is the most desirable. We accept any system provided it is a system, but we must say that the best results appear to us to be obtained by schools in which a slight forward slope has been adopted.

In the class subjects we consider that geography, as apart from physiography, is efficiently taught, and we are well satisfied with the results as a whole. Physiography, on the other hand, is not so satisfactory, and evidently requires more thorough blackboard demonstration. We notice few schools making any use of plasticine, or sand-modelling, in connection with this subject. Grammar is distinctly unsatisfactory, nor do we expect to find it anything else until more reasonable demands are made by the syllabus.

In elementary science chemistry is still the favourite subject in the majority of the schools, though a fair proportion take physiology and domestic economy (including practical cookery). The excellent results in chemistry are largely due to the improved accommodation with which our larger schools are now provided. A still more important factor, however, is the number of teachers taking advantage of the Victoria College chemistry lectures. Comparatively few schools take up physics, agricultural knowledge, or botany. This is a matter for regret, more especially with regard to agricultural knowledge, a subject of such vital importance to a young country whose population is mainly occupied in pastoral and agricultural pursuits.

Mr. Riley reports on drawing as follows: "This subject is in a stage of transition, as the first-grade drawing examination has ceased to exist. The course of work in freehand is now directed towards a study of nature and natural forms with elementary pattern forms, the girls' classes utilising this section of the work in lieu of scale and geometry. In geometrical work the application of forms to common requirements, combined with card or paper modelling, is being gradually adopted. Scale drawing is required to be done entirely from the object or from the surroundings of the school. Model drawing has practically remained upon the old lines. The changes cannot, however, be completed, nor a suggestive programme issued, until the intentions of the Education Department are known with regard to the syllabus. In the meantime every effort is being made to prepare the schools for the new methods, which will, as far as possible, correlate with the school-work upon the broadest lines."