

SOUTH CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

We have the honour to present the following report for the year 1902:—

During the year seventy-one public schools were in operation. After a brief period of existence the small school at Greenhills was closed early in the year. The Cannington School has fallen so low in attendance that it has been closed for the present. All the schools were examined, and visits of inspection were paid to all except two. The Roman Catholic schools were examined as usual in the middle of the year. There are five of these in our district, with a total roll number of 661 pupils, of whom 590 were present at our visit, and 354 passed in one or other of the standards, being a percentage of 85 of the number present in Standards I. to VI., and of 60 in Standard VI., the only class in which the passes are wholly determined by the Inspector.

The examination of pupil-teachers was held in the beginning of July, and the examination for scholarships in December, and reports of these examinations were submitted to the Board. The higher work of the Waimate, Temuka, and Geraldine District High Schools was examined at the time of our annual visit to these schools.

Meetings of householders in connection with the establishment of new schools were held at Kohika and Opuha, and the Board has resolved to erect a small school in each of these districts. A meeting was also held at Belfield to inquire into the advisability of shifting the present school buildings to a site that will be more convenient for the majority of the school-children, but the Board has not yet come to a decision on this matter.

The following is a summary of examination results for the whole district:—

Classes.				Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Passed.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
							Yrs. mos.
Standard VII.	...	...	...	163	134	...	14 10
" VI.	...	...	...	442	428	315	13 9
" V.	...	...	...	625	585	454	12 9
" IV.	...	...	...	629	603	496	11 9
" III.	...	...	...	600	581	514	10 9
" II.	...	...	...	580	567	541	9 9
" I.	...	...	...	531	508	480	8 10
Preparatory	...	...	...	1,501	1,367	...	6 11
Totals	...	...	...	5,071	4,773	2,800	11 2*

* Mean average of age.

The schools show for the year an increase of forty-seven in the roll number. The number of those that passed in standards is 2,800, a decrease of 108 from last year. Of 3,272 pupils in Standards I. to VI. present at our annual visit, 2,800 passed, a percentage of 85.5. The passes in Standards I. to V. were determined by the head teachers, except in those cases, happily few, in which we deemed it necessary to substitute our results for those of the head teachers. The passes in Standard VI. were determined by the Inspectors. The number of pupils examined in Standard VI. was 428, of whom 315 passed, giving a percentage of 73.5, as against 70 for last year. The group comprising the eight largest schools in our district presented approximately as many pupils in Standard VI. as did all the other schools taken together as a second group, and a similar grouping gave a like proportion last year; but whereas last year the percentage of passes in Standard VI. in the former group was 71 against 68 in the latter group, this year the corresponding percentages are 83 and 63. This is a gratifying improvement so far as the large schools are concerned, but a falling-off on the part of the smaller schools that, though unfortunate, was not unexpected in view of the unprecedented number of changes occurring in the management of such schools through resignations of teachers.

We have already referred to the fact that in a few cases we have been compelled to substitute the results of our examination for the head teacher's in Standards I. to V. This is a step which we take with great reluctance; and when we do take it it is a sure indication that we consider the teacher to have made a very grievous mistake in his classification. Frequently there are promotions made by the teachers that do not meet with our full approval, but it is only when these bulk largely in a schedule that we take the extreme step of substitution. In a greater number of schools this year than last we have given only a qualified approval of the teachers' passes; and we trust that teachers who have shown too great a leniency, a leniency that is prejudicial to the best interests of the pupils, will in the future insist on a satisfactory standard of proficiency being attained before granting promotion. To do otherwise is to pursue a shortsighted policy; neither pupil nor teacher is benefited thereby. The headmasters of the large schools show greater wisdom; they see that a pupil is sure of his ground before advancing him. Does not the higher percentage of passes in Standard VI. in the large schools point to a judicious thinning carried out in the standards leading up to the Sixth?

In most of the schools children's ailments of a more or less serious nature were prevalent at different times of the year, and it was exceptional to find a school with anything like the normal number of attendances recorded against the names of the pupils on the examination schedules. Much valuable time was lost to the classes as a whole through the closing of schools while the epidemics were at their height. Nor was this all; for the illness of individuals was not always