

OTAGO.

SIR,—

Education Office, Dunedin, 24th February, 1903.

We have the honour to present our general report for the year 1902.

EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOLS IN TERMS OF STANDARD PASSES.

Classes.				Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Passed.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
Standard VII.	...	...	...	572	528	...	Yrs. mos. 14 2
" VI.	...	...	...	1,605	1,553	1,103	13 4
" V.	...	...	...	2,134	2,087	1,701	12 2
" IV.	...	...	...	2,420	2,372	2,003	11 8
" III.	...	...	...	2,576	2,533	2,143	10 6
" II.	...	...	...	2,269	2,234	2,036	9 7
" I.	...	...	...	2,088	2,069	1,966	8 8
Preparatory...	...	...	...	6,592	6,183	...	6 10
Totals	...	...	...	20,256	19,559	10,952	10 10*

* Mean of average age.

The bulk of the schools failed to comply with Regulation 81. The average length of the working year was 204 days.

In 1900 the roll number at the time of the annual examination was 20,506; in 1901 it had fallen to 20,191; but 1902 brought reaction, and the increase in number then begun gives promise of continuance. The increase of eighty-one shown in the Seventh Standard is due in part to the establishment of four additional district high schools. The attendance at some of these has more than justified the local demand for their establishment. The examinations in 1903 will doubtless show an increase of attendance, which, together with the increase in the preparatory class, should more than compensate for the number of ex-Sixth Standard pupils who accept the free places open to them in the high schools.

The increased Sixth Standard roll number has not given us satisfaction, and has doubtless resulted in keen disappointment to many families. To more than one-fourth of the pupils who presented themselves for examination we had to refuse the pass certificate, and in some schools the failures amounted to nearly 50 per cent. These failures were due in part to unnecessary interference with the ordinary school routine, and in part to injudicious pressure of pupils through the standards. In 1901 preparations for the reception of our Royal visitors had so seriously disorganized school-work that the City and Suburban Schools Conference asked for and obtained the concession that the Inspector's examination of the schools engaged in the preparation should be restricted to the pass subjects of the Sixth Standard. This was an acknowledgment that the pupils had not completed their standard course, and instead of increased promotion there should have been a decrease. It is not probable that a similar concession will be again required; but we have heard of minor interferences with school routine, in proportion quite as mischievous, and we are of opinion that they should not be permitted. If school-children are required to take part in any public entertainment or display, adequate preparation for it should be made in the ordinary course of school-work. If at any time, even in the last week of the school year, a departure from the ordinary routine is made, such departure should be shown in the school and class time-tables, which, being public documents, must be preserved for inspection.

Notwithstanding all that has been said and done against it, pressure through the standards still operates on our schools—pressure from School Committees, from parents, and even from class-teachers; and it is only the stronger and wiser head teachers who seem capable of resisting it. During the past year we have had it clearly in evidence that pupils had been promoted who were not fit for promotion, and that their promotion impeded not only their own progress, but that of their fellow-pupils, and seriously diminished the efficiency of the teacher's work. We feel that nothing short of the abolition of the annual pass examination and of pass certificates for all the standards except the Sixth will free the schools from what remains of the old pressure for pass results.

The average ages of those who in 1901 passed the Sixth and Fifth Standards were respectively thirteen years and ten months and twelve years and nine months. The average ages of the pupils in these classes at the examination in 1902 were thirteen years and four months and twelve years and two months. These averages, though not exactly the same in kind, are similar, and their disparity is to us a little disquieting. Under the regulations a pupil may be promoted on satisfying the requirements of three out of the five of his standard pass subjects and of two of his previous pass subjects. This is permissive, not mandatory. We are of opinion that such promotion should be made only in exceptional circumstances.

EFFICIENCY-MARKS IN SUBJECTS.

Pass Subjects.—Reading, satisfactory; dictation and spelling, good; writing, satisfactory; arithmetic, satisfactory; composition, fair; mean result, satisfactory.

Class Subjects.—* Geography, satisfactory; * drawing, satisfactory; grammar, fair; history, fair; science and object lessons, fair; recitation, satisfactory; mean result, satisfactory.

* Geography and drawing are pass subjects in the Sixth Standard.