

The following is a general summary of results for the district as supplied in the annual return:—

Classes.	Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Passed.	Average Age of the Pupils in each Class.	
				1903.	1902.
				Yrs. mos.	Yrs. mos.
Standard VII.	157	145	...	14 10	14 9
" VI.	444	431	278	13 8	13 9
" V.	525	499	364	13 0	13 0
" IV.	703	673	533	12 2	12 0
" III.	733	698	568	11 3	11 1
" II.	614	570	505	9 11	9 11
" I.	654	612	496	8 10	8 11
Preparatory	1,751	1,499	...	6 11	6 11
Totals	5,581	5,127	2,744	11 4*	...
For 1902	5,698	5,401	2,931	...	11 4*

* Mean of average age.

Apparently a large proportion—over one-third—of those that have passed the Standard IV. examination leave school without passing Standard V., and fully one-sixth of the whole are never even presented for the exemption certificate. The number in Standards VI. and VII. had been steadily growing of late years, till it reached the maximum in 1902 of 676. This year it has fallen to 601. Standard II. is also lower by 79. The numbers in the preparatory and other classes show less variation.

Basing our opinion on the actual work presented to us, and exacting the same standard as in former years, we may roughly classify the schools in regard to efficiency as follows: Good, 20; satisfactory, 49; fair, 39; inferior, 2. The number that produced satisfactory work is much higher than usual, but not, we think, much higher than might be expected in such an unfortunate year. The two whose record was so poor as to warrant their being put in a separate category are both under fresh management, and improvement may with confidence be looked for.

We submit, as usual, a brief criticism upon the treatment which the different subjects receive.

Reading.—We found the reading good, as has been the case in former years, faults of pronunciation, except the clipping of the final “ing,” being less noticeable than hitherto. This failing was, however, apparent even in the recitation, to the preparation of which special attention had been given. Some teachers had evidently failed to notice our remarks concerning the reading of dictation tests, for glaring instances were noted of words purposely mispronounced, a practice that cannot fail in the long-run to prove mischievous. Spelling showed numerically worse results than before, only 70 per cent. of the pupils in the four higher standards being successful. In Standard VI. the dictation tests, taken from previously unseen books, with words from prepared Readers, were indifferently rendered by over a third of the candidates. In the new syllabus great importance is rightly attached to word-building, but, though two reading-books are prescribed for each standard, words from only one are required in the spelling tests. Although we may question the advisability of instituting this divorce of reading from spelling, we intend to examine next year strictly on the lines laid down.

Writing.—The writing has not greatly suffered from the bad attendance and is usually satisfactory, yet in some few cases the subject cannot be said to be really taught or efficiently supervised. The character of the writing throughout the school is a reflex of the discipline, good writing being unattainable without good discipline. Too little time is ordinarily given to systematic practice, and some are inclined to hurry the children into small writing, forgetful of the fact that the chief aim should be the formation of a fair-sized good round hand. In the preparatory classes the uniform ruling of slates, to which we called attention last year, is not yet universal; sometimes the ruling had obviously been done by the children themselves. Writing on the side of the pen is a common fault found even in sloping hands, and in the vertical style the letters are still too often crabbed.

Composition.—The suggestions given in our last report for the treatment of this subject have evidently borne some fruit, for in spite of the extra difficulties of the year improvement is noticeable both in the essays and the reproduction of stories. In Standard V., however, the paraphrasing of some verses from their own or lower standard Readers was particularly weak in those schools in which the explanation of the subject-matter of the reading lessons had not received sufficient attention. Some few teachers, perhaps through lack of appreciation, still show a tendency to neglect the reading and comprehension of verse. We acknowledge that the selections in the books are not always the most suitable for children, still the neglect of poetry cannot but stunt the development of literary taste and prevent the pupils from ever attaining to an appreciation of the chief beauties of our language. Some of the productions reviewed by us were so absurd as to be amusing. The lines,

Marbles storied with his praise,
Poor Gelert's bones protect,