

It will be seen that the increases for 1913 is the largest for five years. Unfortunately the increase is mainly confined to the town schools, for, except in the case of the Manawatu line, our rural-school population is at best only stationary.

*Efficiency.*—Our estimate of the efficiency of the schools of the district in detail has already been placed before the Board in the form of examination and inspection reports. Summarizing these reports we have classified 153 schools as satisfactory to good, thirteen as fair, and three as inferior. This means that, compared with 1912, the percentage of really unsatisfactory schools has fallen from 12 per cent. to 9 per cent. The chief factor in this decrease has been the establishment by the Board of classes at the Training College and at Masterton for the instruction of uncertificated teachers. In arranging for the attendance at these classes special consideration was given to the case of inexperienced teachers in remote and isolated districts. These are, as a rule, teachers in charge of schools in Grades 0 and I, and we are pleased to be able to report a distinct improvement in the all-round work of such schools.

*Proficiency Certificates.*—There would appear to be considerable confusion in the public mind as to the tenure and privileges of free places in secondary schools, and recently the Board and its officials were subjected to some censure in a matter quite beyond their province or control. The qualifications for and the admission to free places in secondary schools are entirely governed by the Education Department's regulations, which provide for the granting of a free place, with certain minor restrictions, to a pupil who (a) is the holder of a Junior National, Board, or other scholarship approved by the Minister; (b) has "qualified" or passed with credit in the examination for such scholarships, or has passed the Department's special examination for free places; (c) not being over fifteen years of age on the 1st of December preceding the date of his admission to a free place, has obtained a certificate of proficiency as defined by regulations under the Act. It is practically obligatory on the part of a secondary school to provide accommodation for pupils qualifying under (a) and (b), but it has the option of refusing any pupil qualifying under (c) should there be accommodation available for him at a district high school or technical day school nearer his home. No difficulty has been experienced with regard to the male free-place holders, the Boys' College now being able to provide for them all; but trouble has arisen with the Girls' College, where accommodation is limited, and, as in 1912 the proficiency results were given out in each school at the close of the examinations, some of the girls from the schools which were examined last, owing to the lack of accommodation, were refused admission at the College. This, however, was not the fault of the Board, nor was it to be supposed that the standard of proficiency should be conformed to the seating accommodation that might happen to be available at the Girls' College. We wish to make this point quite clear, as an idea has got abroad that, in order to reduce the number of free-place holders, the proficiency examination was this year made more stringent than in previous years. The percentage of passes—62·7—distinctly shows that this was not the case, for, though these figures are lower than in 1912, they are only some 2 per cent. below the average for the last six years. The advent of the free-place system in the Dominion, and of what is practically its equivalent in the Old Country, was originally viewed with great suspicion by secondary authorities. It was thought that the secondary school would suffer, if not in scholarship, certainly in regard to "tone." It is therefore the more gratifying to find the headmasters of some of the most efficient grammar schools at Home bearing voluntary testimony to the contrary. In the Dominion, however, there is a tendency on the part of secondary authorities to harp (unnecessarily, we think) on the unfitness of a large proportion of our free pupils to take up secondary work. They maintain, moreover, that it does not "pay" the State to provide such pupils with free secondary instruction, and that the standard of requirements for the proficiency certificate should accordingly be raised. Now the four-years course of instruction in the average secondary school is practically dominated by the requirements of the University entrance examination. We are quite prepared to admit the unfitness of the average free pupil to enter on the rigid text-book and homework course which preparation for such an examination entails; and we are further prepared to admit that it may not pay the State or any one else to provide free instruction in such a course; but, fortunately, perhaps for the State, there are other means of secondary education available besides those provided by the secondary school proper. The district high schools and the technical schools, in addition to meeting the requirements of the Matriculation Examination, provide practical secondary education in rural, commercial, engineering, and trade pursuits generally. The benefit to the country's commercial and industrial activities of these institutions is being more appreciated every day. We hear no complaints of the unfitness of the free pupil to enter them, or that it does not pay the State to provide free instruction in them; and we should think it a matter for very grave concern if, in the sole interests of a rigid grammar-school course of questionable utility there should be such an increase in the requirements of the proficiency certificate as would materially affect the interests of that large proportion of free pupils who now avail themselves of the facilities for secondary instruction provided by district high schools and technical schools.

*Reading.*—The liberal supply of extra readers now available in all our schools and the excellent matter provided by the *School Journal* are proving most effective aids in the teaching of this important branch of English, and so far as accuracy, fluency, and general comprehension are concerned our efficiency mark is rarely less than satisfactory. On the other hand, while still defending our schools from the accusation of any general failing in pronunciation or accent, we have on occasions had to draw attention to lack of expression and slovenliness of enunciation and articulation. We must confess to having some sympathy with the general excuse put forth with regard to lack of expression—viz., that the pressure of other subjects and the congested classes allow to the teacher little opportunity for that individual and intensive treatment which is necessary to cultivate what is really an art. This excuse, however, cannot be accepted in the matter of enunciation. Carelessness or indifference on the part of the teacher is mainly respon-