

in Westland was 573, or 32.2 per cent. of the roll-number, and Grey 415, or 32.7 per cent.; consequently in both districts nearly 68 per cent. of all the scholars were presented for examination in standards. The average for the whole colony in 1883 was only 50 per cent.

On comparing the results with the general return for New Zealand in the Minister's last annual report (Table J), it will be seen that Westland and Grey stand considerably above the average in all the standards, with the exception of the Sixth, in which Westland is about equal to, and Grey 22½ per cent. below, the average for the colony; but this inferiority is not general in the district. Several schools considerably exceeded the colonial average, notably the Hokitika school, which passed 96 per cent. and Kumara 89 per cent., while two small schools passed all that were presented. On the whole, therefore, and looking at the table of results only, the schools in these two counties may fairly be said to hold a respectable position amongst New Zealand elementary schools, at least so far as regards the subjects comprised in Regulation 7.

ELEMENTARY SCIENCE.—I have not, of late, encouraged the teaching of elementary science in any of the smaller schools in this district, being convinced that the ordinary subjects of Regulation 7 present abundantly sufficient work for the majority of teachers to overtake in the time, when the whole, or the greater part of it, has to be done by one person. This year only four schools took up the subject, as against six last year.

Vocal music is systematically taught at two schools only—namely, Kumara and Hokitika, and the tonic sol-fa system is employed at both. Several other schools exercise the younger children in singing by ear. Four or five schools have drawing as a portion of the routine, but a great want of suitable copies is complained of, and some solid models would be very acceptable to those who are desirous of keeping up this branch of instruction.

The unsettled condition of educational matters has hindered the school work in the two counties, chiefly by the partial stoppage of the supply of books and school necessities, the stock of which being exhausted could not be replenished. This refers more particularly to reading-books and copy-books.

In addition to the work already referred to, a considerable amount of instruction of a very valuable kind has been given to those scholars who had passed the Sixth Standard, but remained still in the schools. These numbered thirty-three in all, and those who were examined showed by the superior quality of their work that the additional time they had spent at school had been very profitably employed.

All the children unfit for presentation in Standard I. were examined in class, and, whilst I must admit that they have somewhat fallen off from the high state of efficiency which characterized the infant departments of our principal schools five or six years ago, when the staffs were much stronger than at present, yet the junior divisions of our larger schools are still under satisfactory training and instruction. At some of the smaller schools the children remain over long in this department, but that is by no means an unmixed evil, since their greater age on entering upon the standard racecourse enables them to carry weight with greater ease to themselves and satisfaction to their teachers.

An unusual press of business at the present time, consequent upon the subdivision of the district and my appointment as Secretary and Inspector to the new Westland District, will prevent me from entering very fully into the details of educational progress this year. I cannot, however, forbear saying that there is an evident falling-off in some schools in the character of the handwriting, and I shall be compelled to adopt a more stringent method of marking this subject to prevent further deterioration. The difficulty, before alluded to, of obtaining sufficient supplies of the required numbers of the copy-books may partly account for the inferiority noticed; but there is reason to believe that in some schools the importance of this branch of the work of an elementary course has scarcely been sufficiently recognized.

English composition, practically the most useful branch of elementary education, has received considerable and careful attention, and, although still far from being, as it ought to be and might be, the most efficiently taught subject of the syllabus, it shows signs of gradual and steady improvement; and by giving a larger proportion of marks to this portion of the grammar paper I hope to still further encourage the careful treatment of this most important section of the programme. I have also given more prominence to mental arithmetic during the last two years, not confining myself to questions under certain rules, by the use of which it is likely to degenerate into a mere mechanical operation, but putting questions that come under no particular rule, and the solution of which requires considerable mental effort and concentration.

I am sorry that I cannot give so good an account of the order and discipline throughout the district this year as I have been able to do in the past. In some schools, and those not the smallest, there has crept in a laxity in this respect which is much to be deplored, and which was the cause of considerable trouble and annoyance on examination-day. The general tone of such schools is necessarily lowered, and if proof were wanting it might be found in the fact that it was my disagreeable duty to dismiss several scholars from the examination for unfair conduct or for talking to one another while engaged with their work. Perhaps this falling-off in discipline may be partly traced to the circumstances referred to in the earlier portion of this report, or it may be another but milder manifestation of the "epidemic of rebellion," by which a neighbouring district is said to have been visited during the past year.

Three small schools in Westland have not been visited this year: that at Arawata, on account of the uncertainty of the means of communication; the Waitangi school, which was closed when I visited it to hold the examination, the teacher being ill at the time; Rangiriri, which had been closed some considerable time, owing to the resignation of the former teacher, was reopened while the examinations were in progress, and I did not consider it either necessary or desirable to examine it under the circumstances.