

none of whom are expected to take up, standard work. This column will bring into comparison preparatory schools which were formerly shut out. I have stated, in a recent report on the schools in a neighbouring district—and the statement will bear repetition—that so high a percentage as 83 is but little in excess of what might reasonably be expected under certain conditions. A familiarity with the working of the standard system, the fruit of some years' practical experience; an approximate knowledge of the minimum required to secure a pass; and the plan of excluding from the records of failure all who have made less than 260 half-day attendances since the previous examination; these constitute conditions that should make the passing of four out of five of the scholars who attempt standard work almost a matter of course. If, year after year, a much larger proportion than this should fail to satisfy the minimum requirements of the regulations, it is pretty clear that, in these cases, except where some special drawback, such as widespread and long-continued sickness, can be alleged in extenuation, one of three things must be true: either the standards exact more than can be compassed by children of average ability within the year, or the Inspector's interpretation of the regulations is too strict, or the teacher does not understand his business. It must be clearly understood that repeated failure only is meant. Instances are not wanting of the best teachers in our service having what is known by them as "a bad year," when, it may be, the brightest and most regular scholars have left, or have been drafted off. But, with a thoroughly competent teacher, such a break-down rarely occurs twice running. Moreover, care is always taken in the detailed estimate of each school, which is intended not solely for the information of the Board and School Committees, but also, to a certain extent, for the protection of the teacher, to make ample allowance for any school to which, for any reason, the table of passes and failures, taken alone, would do scant justice.

A striking confirmation of my statement that, as the standards are interpreted in this district, the failures ought not, as a rule, to exceed one in five, is to be found in the fact that, year after year, no small proportion of our schools actually succeed in keeping the list of failures even below 10 per cent. And this is done, not only in some of the large town schools, which, it may be said, are specially favoured by the division of labour and the presumed superior quickness of the scholars, but in the remoter country schools, where everything appears adverse to success. It is hard, for instance, to see what special advantages, apart from the excellence of the teaching, are enjoyed by the children at Tadmore, 96 per cent. of whom, for two years running, succeeded in passing; and at Waimea West, where the obstacles from irregularity of attendance have been very serious, every scholar presented in standards has passed for two successive years. If an instance of a town school is wanted, why should it be almost a matter of course that at Westport boys' school from 97 to 99 per cent. should succeed in passing? These instances are far from exhausting the list of successful schools, but they will suffice to show that the difficulties of passing cannot be inherent in the nature of the work demanded.

A cheering feature in this year's work is the largely-increased number of scholars who have succeeded with the two highest standards, and the diminution in the number of failures. Two hundred and forty-two candidates have this year passed the Fifth Standard, as against 169 last year. The number of those who succeeded with the Sixth Standard has risen from ninety-eight to 133.

The fact that every year a large proportion of candidates break down when they come to the Fourth Standard requires some notice. It must be admitted that, even under the most lenient construction of the requirements of this standard, it forms the longest step in the ladder. Still, a glance at the record of passes will show that not a few of our teachers do contrive to get their pupils over this stumbling-block unscathed. This is done partly by taking great care not to enter their scholars for the lowest standard at too early an age, and by steadily resisting the ill-judged importunities of parents to push their scholars on. The normal age for passing the Fourth Standard is a little over twelve, but I find that no fewer than 264 of the 414 candidates for this standard are under twelve years, that ninety-seven are under eleven, and thirty-six under ten. To present children of only average capacity under such conditions is to invite failure. When it is found that an unduly large proportion of scholars who have attained their twelfth year, and who have attended with reasonable regularity, break down, the complaints of the almost impossibility of getting the average scholar through the Fourth Standard will deserve and receive greater attention.

The style of examination has on this occasion been altered in one respect. Less slate- and paper-work has been required from the lower classes, and freer use has been made of oral questioning, especially in such subjects as history and geography. The results have been such as to encourage a continuance of this method.

If the necessity of a system of exact measurement of work, such as is aimed at in the standards, be taken for granted, it seems to follow that nothing should be left undone that will enable teachers to know precisely what is expected from them. The discrepancies in the several education districts are not, I have reason to believe, actually very wide, but what is of supreme importance for a teacher to know is how the Inspector of his own district interprets the regulations from year to year. To meet this difficulty it has been my custom for some time to send to every head teacher, shortly after the examinations are over, several sets of the examination cards recently used. This has proved of service to teachers new to the work, and has assisted those who are more experienced in the rehearsals that they usually make before the official examination.

I subjoin what has always appeared to me by far the most important part of an Inspector's report—his detailed estimate of the state of each school. The rest is too apt to degenerate into a mere essay on education, of which the world has already more than enough.

This year not only have the reports on the several schools, as they were examined, been laid before the Board monthly, but, by the Board's direction, copies of such reports as each School Committee was interested in have been sent to them, with a request that the teachers concerned might have an opportunity of reading what had been written about their schools. Ample time and