

ten of the larger schools. I had little or no time at my disposal for purposes of general inspection, except in a few schools, where the work of examination was light. My report therefore deals almost exclusively with the quality of the instruction in the various subjects of the syllabus.

As the results of my examinations agree very closely with those for the whole district, I do not consider it necessary to give them separately. The following tables for the years 1884 and 1885, show the number of pupils examined in each standard, the number of pupils who passed, the percentage of passes, and the average age of the pupils who passed :—

		1885.				1884.			
		Pre-sented.	Passed.	Per cent. of Passes.	Average Age.	Pre-sented.	Passed.	Per cent. of Passes.	Average Age.
					Yrs. ms.				Yrs. ms.
Standard I.	...	2,474	2,287	92·4	8 9	2,482	2,317	93	8 7
Standard II.	...	2,581	2,086	80·8	9 9	2,301	1,977	86	10 0
Standard III.	...	2,169	1,292	59·6	11 2	2,147	1,606	75	11 4
Standard IV.	...	1,512	918	60·7	12 3	1,378	956	69	12 7
Standard V.	...	794	455	57·3	13 4	587	398	68	13 4
Standard VI.	...	281	209	74·4	14 0	237	183	77	14 3
Total	...	9,811	7,247	73·9	...	9,132	7,437	81	...

A comparative examination of the two tables cannot but give rise to a feeling of disappointment. All along the line there has been a falling-off in the passes, varying from 0·6 per cent. in the First Standard to 15·4 per cent. in the Third; while over all the percentage has fallen from 81 to 73·9. I am not prepared to assign this decline in the results to any particular cause. I think it right, however, to say that it cannot be attributed to any attempt on the part of the Inspectors to exact too high a standard of proficiency. Indeed, from my knowledge of the systems of examination in other education districts of New Zealand I am certain that our tests are not severe. As a rule, poor results were easily traced to faulty instruction; and so many defects in teaching were disclosed by the examinations that, had not the tests been relaxed in several instances, the percentage of passes would undoubtedly have fallen considerably below 74 per cent. To the more serious of these defects I shall briefly refer under the heading of the various subjects of instruction.

*Reading.*—The reading in the schools of this district is far from satisfactory. A high percentage of passes was recorded; but this cannot be considered any criterion of excellence, for a pass was allowed for mere mechanical work of the lowest order. Had the intelligence test been at all rigidly applied, the list of failures would have been greatly increased. To fix a uniform and precise standard for intelligent reading is well-nigh impossible; yet surely one might reasonably expect that the words would be accurately pronounced, taken in small groups, and delivered with such natural expression as to show that the meaning of the passage read was fairly comprehended. In many schools the reading falls far short of this standard. In the lower classes the words are taken one by one, the “of” and the “the” being quite as much emphasised as the more important words in the sentence. The result, of course, is a sing-song, monotonous drawl, absolutely devoid of any trace of natural expression. No attempt is made to group the words, and phrase them as one does in speaking. To make my meaning quite definite, I take the following sentence from the reading-book in general use in Standard I.: “Jane has been for a week at the farm where her aunt lives.” In a great majority of schools we should certainly have this rendered, “Jane—has—been—for—a—week—at—the—farm—where—her—aunt—lives,” the pupil putting the same stress on “for,” “a,” “at,” “the,” as on “Jane,” “week,” “farm,” “aunt,” sometimes speaking very slowly and very deliberately, the finger pointing to each word in turn, more frequently rattling on with great fluency, but such fluency as might be expected of a parrot. Now, were the teacher to set a model to the class, phrasing the words somewhat after the following manner: “Jane—has been—for a week—at the farm—where her aunt lives,” he would have no difficulty in getting the pupils to imitate him, and a result at once much more satisfactory and pleasing would be attained. He need not experience any difficulty in the matter of emphasis. A fair appreciation of the sense of the passage will cause the pupil almost unconsciously to modulate his voice and stress the words aright. The reading would then have some claim to be called accurate and expressive, and this is about as far as I go in my demands for a pass, as well in the higher as in the lower classes. Indeed, even with this moderate standard, the percentage of passes, instead of being one of the highest, would certainly have been one of the lowest had not great leniency been shown. In the higher standards a more definite test of intelligence was applied, but little or no account was taken of it in marking the pass. Two—sometimes three—phrases, selected from the reading lessons, were written on the blackboard, and the pupils were asked to give the meaning of them in simple language. It was not surprising to find the results lamentably poor when the actual reading was so very weak. To many of our teachers, then, I feel compelled to say, Seek first to improve the reading of your pupils. Whatever else may suffer in our heavily-weighted syllabus, see to it that it is not reading. Remember that of all the products of school life, good reading is far and away the most useful; and when you have taught your pupils to read well, to read so that it is a pleasure to their hearers and a source of delight to themselves, you have endowed them with a means of self-improvement that will bear fruit a thousandfold in after life, and be to them a joy for ever.