

SUMMARY of RESULTS for the WHOLE DISTRICT.

Standard Classes.	Presented.	Absent.	Excepted.	Failed.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.	
						Years	months.
S 7 ... ..	12	...	...	...	...	...	...
S 6 ... ..	39	1	...	6	32	14	2
S 5 ... ..	112	4	7	10	91	13	4
S 4 ... ..	187	12	19	49	107	12	2
S 3 ... ..	256	18	21	35	182	10	4
S 2 ... ..	236	17	16	51	152	9	0
S 1 ... ..	220	7	7	31	176	8	7
P. ... ..	565	...	...	...	...	...	...
Totals ...	1,627	59	70	182	740	*	

\* Mean of average age, 11·3.

NELSON.

SIR,—

Nelson, 31st December, 1886.

I have the honour to submit to you my report for the year 1886 on the Nelson public schools. Seventy-nine schools have been examined, 4,991 scholars being on the rolls of these on examination day. Including four small schools that have not yet been examined, for reasons that will be given further on, the total number on the roll of this district at the end of the December quarter was 5,146. There were 4,692 scholars present at examination, the number of absentees being reduced to 299. Only 118 standard candidates were absent. In several important respects the new regulations issued by the Education Department, which came into force for the first time during the past year, and which tend to affect materially not only the method of recording results, but the results themselves, render comparison with the work of bygone years difficult, if not impossible. It is fortunate, however, that one of the tests by which the progress of our schools has been tried in former years—the proportion of passes to the number on the roll, the sole basis now allowed—is still available for comparison. The proportion of passes to the number on the roll was last year 49. This year it is slightly higher, being 49·9. Such a result, under the changed conditions, cannot but be regarded as very reassuring. For the regulation, which practically insists that, in order to succeed, a scholar must satisfy the examiner in every pass subject, has been carried out in this district with a strictness that, to some teachers and to many parents, may even seem to savour of harshness. But the fact should not be lost sight of that the difficulty of obtaining a pass has been considerably lessened by placing among the list of class subjects history for the four highest standards, and geography for the fourth. The diminution in the number of pass subjects almost necessarily implies the application of increased stringency to those that remain. The rule that has borne most hardly, and, as it turns out, most unequally, on our teachers, has been that which excepts those scholars only from having their failures recorded who have made less than half attendances during the three quarters preceding the quarter in which the examination takes place. The stringency of this rule will, indeed, go far to account for the large proportion of failures in some of our best schools. In these the list of the unsuccessful has been largely swollen by scholars the sum of whose attendance during the year amounted to little more than six months' schooling. A few, by reason of their superior age or quickness, have contrived to pass in spite of the disadvantage of bad attendance, but the majority, as might have been expected, have broken down. I can only regret that the rule adopted in several districts, including Nelson, according to which the minimum of attendance below which failure did not count was fixed at from 250 to 260 half-day attendances between one examination and another, is no longer in force. It was simple, reasonable, and had stood well several years' trial.

Although there is some danger of a report of this kind degenerating into a mere essay on the practical details of teaching, it seems convenient each year to give some notion, in general terms, of the way in which the several subjects included in the course of instruction prescribed for our public schools are being taught. It will, doubtless, be found necessary in some instances to qualify the broad statements thus made, but a careful reader will have no difficulty in finding out the exceptions by a reference to the detailed report of each school.

READING.—Last year it was found necessary to remind our teachers that this important matter was getting less than its fair share of attention. So much can no longer be truly affirmed with respect to the great majority of our schools. Seldom indeed does it happen that energetic steps are not at once taken to remedy any defect pointed out in a report. The improvement is most noticeable in the city schools, where really good reading, formerly confined almost entirely to Hardy Street Girls', is now very general. It may be fairly said of both town and country schools that the reading is now, as a rule, good, while in some instances it may even be termed excellent. Unusual pains have been taken this year to ascertain whether the scholars understand what they are reading; and they have stood the test, on the whole, satisfactorily, though a few schools still survive in which no attempt is made to explain the subject matter of the reading lesson. Our schools have been less successful, so far, with the art of reciting passages of verse. The difficulties of checking gabbling or sing-song are, however, much greater with recitation than with reading. The instances in which a piece of recitation can be listened to with any degree of pleasure are, indeed, at present very few.