

by a judicious selection of one set of figures and a prudent disregard of others, the admirers of any teacher can exalt his school into a position wholly unmerited, together with a conviction of the impossibility of contriving any set of tabulated statements which should place schools exactly in their true order of merit, has convinced me that the sooner their publication is discontinued the better it will be for all concerned. If thought absolutely necessary by the powers that be, they might, without the slightest diminution of any usefulness they may possess, be advantageously consigned to the deserved obscurity of official pigeon holes, and to the rarely-explored recesses of the Parliamentary Blue Books. I am not blind to the fact that in this and former reports I have introduced, perhaps, more of these tabulated statements than many other Inspectors; but I have done so, not because I have any great love for or value of such statistics, but in order to place the condition of our schools in every possible light, for the purpose of disarming hasty criticism and unfair comparison. Perhaps the nearest approach to a just comparison of the work of the several schools that can be formed from tables alone would be obtained by adding the mean percentage of "pass" and "class" subjects to the "additional marks." Table 7 shows the figures obtained by this method.

The change in the standard regulations has not caused any material alteration in the method of examination hitherto followed in this district. The class subjects were examined, at all but a few of the smallest schools, by written papers, and more prominence was given this year to the questioning of classes upon their comprehension of the subject matter of their reading lessons. The examination of the class subject by means of written papers seems to me to be preferable to an oral examination, when circumstances permit, for several reasons. It gives all the children in the class an equal chance and a better opportunity of showing their knowledge of the subject, and that in a manner the least trying to the nervous and timid, who would probably do themselves but scant justice at an oral examination before a comparative stranger. When the classes are large a more accurate judgment can be formed, both as to the amount of knowledge possessed and the method upon which it has been taught, and that, too, in a manner capable, if necessary, of satisfactory and incontrovertible demonstration. In large districts, where Inspectors have more schools under their charge than they can possibly do full justice to, the oral method, or any expedient by means of which time can be saved, is doubtless a necessity; but where time will allow it I consider the other plan to be more satisfactory to all concerned. The only alteration I propose to make with respect to the class subjects at the next examination is to give a much larger number of questions on each subject, leaving the selection of a certain limited number to the scholars themselves.

Tables Nos. 1 and 2, on a form prepared by the department, give (1) the summary of results for the whole district, and (2) the summary for each school. In the latter, the expressions "fair," "good," "satisfactory," "very good," and "excellent" may be regarded by admirers of percentages as approximately equivalent to 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 per cent. respectively. Table 3 gives the detailed results of each school, on the same lines as the general summary, but supplemented by the addition of a column showing the average percentage of marks gained by each standard class. This column I regard as the most important in the table, for, as the marks of all the scholars examined are taken into account, it affords perhaps the best of many imperfect indications of the amount of success that has attended the teachers' efforts during the past year, as far as the pass subjects alone are concerned. Table 4 has been already explained. Table 5 shows the number examined and passed in the several subjects in the whole district. Compared with the corresponding table in last year's report, and making a proportionate reduction for the shorter interval between the examinations of 1885 and 1886, it can be shown that there is an improvement in all the subjects except geography, amounting to 1 per cent. in arithmetic, 4 per cent. in spelling, 5 per cent. in reading, 9 per cent. in grammar, and 11 per cent. in writing. Geography shows no improvement, and is the least successfully taught pass subject in the district. Table 6 [not reprinted] contains the same information in the case of each school in the district. The average ages of scholars who passed the several standards were—Standard I., eight years nine months; Standard II., ten years; Standard III., eleven years six months; Standard IV., twelve years six months; Standard V., thirteen years; Standard VI., thirteen years eight months.

The form of examination reports supplied by the department provides in Parts II. and III. for one percentage on class subjects, and one number of additional marks for the whole school. Now, as in the former there are four subjects and in the latter six, for each of five or six standards, I thought it advisable to prepare for the information of teachers and Committees a table to show how the final totals were arrived at, and a copy of this was attached to each examination report. One of the printed forms used for this purpose is annexed. The highest possible number for the class subjects is, of course, 100, and for additional subjects 120.

A careful and intelligent consideration of the foregoing statistics will give some idea of the strong and weak points in our schools. Geography and arithmetic, though well taught at some schools, give on the whole the least satisfactory results, notwithstanding the very large, and in some instances undue, proportion of the school time that is devoted to the latter. I took the trouble to analyse several time tables in the schools in the northern portion of the district, to ascertain exactly how the time was distributed among the various subjects, and I found that in the Fourth Standard, which I selected for comparison as being represented in all schools, the mean time devoted to arithmetic at the seven schools referred to was rather over 25 per cent. of the whole school time. At one large school 36 per cent. of the time actually employed in teaching (that is, leaving out the 100 minutes per week which are spent in the playground) was devoted to this subject. Yet, of this class, out of forty-six examined only five gained more than half the possible number of marks. Geography, which is a class subject in the Fourth Standard, received 150 minutes a week at five of these schools, and 187 and 100 minutes respectively at Kumara and Hokitika, the percentage gained on this subject being 43 at the former and 39 at the latter. The large number of passes gained in writing is, no doubt, due to its receiving in some schools, not more attention than its importance demands, but more time than can be spared in the present crowded state of the syllabus without prejudice to