

The following circular has been addressed to headmasters of High Schools :—

SIR,— Education Department, Wellington, 16th February, 1887.

I have the honour, by direction of the Minister of Education, to invite your consideration to a proposal for the institution of a scheme of general examination of secondary schools.

The Government and the University have both been often requested to institute such a scheme, but hitherto it has usually been considered that the expense involved would be greater than either the Government or the University was prepared to bear.

The scheme that I have now to submit is one that would probably involve no greater expenditure of labour than is required in the annual examinations conducted by headmasters in their several schools, and no other cost to the Government than payment for the necessary clerical work of correspondence, printing, and record.

The Education Department is prepared to undertake the task of acting as the medium of correspondence and co-operation among the headmasters or the schools if they are willing to act together as joint examiners of the higher forms in a number of schools. It does not appear practicable to make provision for the examination of all the forms in all the secondary schools, but it seems reasonable to believe that such provision may be made with respect to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Forms of the strongest schools, and to such forms in smaller schools as are doing the same work as any of these three forms.

In such subjects as classics and mathematics a programme of work for the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Forms respectively might be drawn up by representatives of the headmasters, three being appointed to prepare the programme for each subject. In some subjects of the "Modern Side" it might be sufficient to have a programme for a "First Stage" and a "Second Stage" prepared in a similar way.

Some of the schools could prepare pupils for examination up to the work of the Sixth Form, others to the Fifth, and some, perhaps, only to the Fourth. So also in subjects of the "Modern Side," some would send in candidates for the "First Stage" only, and others would send in candidates for both "stages;" and some schools could prepare pupils in all the subjects for which examination was provided, while others would find it advisable, or even necessary, to confine their attention to a certain limited range of subjects. Such limitation, in the case of smaller schools, might be advantageous.

The several subjects might be allotted to the several headmasters, year by year, according to some plan of selection and rotation to be hereafter defined, without giving the headmasters any more work to do than they now expend in examining their own schools, seeing that at present one man may have to examine his own school in several subjects, whereas on the plan proposed each man would examine several schools in one subject alone, and that only once in several years.

Of course the adhesion of any school to the scheme proposed would be a purely voluntary matter. The Department is quite prepared to begin with those schools that are ready to make the experiment during the last months of the present year, provided only that the number of such schools is not very small.

I should be very glad to receive as soon as possible an expression of your opinion first as to the feasibility of the scheme in general, and next as to certain details, which I will here number in succession.

(In detail.)

- (1.) Will you name three headmasters to whom you would be willing to confide the task of drawing up a scheme of examination for the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Forms in Latin, and three whom you would trust in the same way to prepare a syllabus for *each* of the other subjects for which a three years' programme is required, and also three for *each* of the subjects that ought to be divided into a "First Stage" and a "Second Stage" only?

In case of a fair degree of agreement in the proposals made by way of nomination, the Minister will do his best to give effect to any nomination supported by a majority of writers in reply to this letter. In case of marked want of agreement, I have no doubt he will feel himself at liberty to act entirely upon his own discretion. Please notice that I ask three names for each subject, so that a full reply to this part of my letter will indicate your opinion as to the subjects that ought to be embraced in the scheme. In answering this question please distinguish between the subjects for which there should, in your opinion, be three examinations, and those for which two would suffice.

- (2.) Please say whether you think all schools coming under the scheme ought to read the same books for examination in classics for any one form in any one year, or, rather, that the syllabus should give a list of books for each form, so arranged as to make certain books equivalent to certain other books for examination purposes. The former alternative would simplify examination, the latter would allow more freedom.
- (3.) I suppose that any school availing itself of the proposed machinery would not select the best pupils from any form, but would subject whole forms to the test. My own opinion certainly is that what is wanted is a *bona fide* form examination, and that, whether the highest class in a school is fit to stand the Sixth Form examination of the proposed syllabus in any subject, or fit only for the Fourth, the class as a whole should be entered for the appropriate examination. I should be glad to know your mind on this point.
- (4.) Do you think that, when a master of any school acts as examiner in a subject in any year, his school should stand out of the examination in that subject for that year? I should prefer to have this question answered in the negative by a clear profession of thorough mutual confidence on the part of the masters. Yet I can understand that high motives may inspire an affirmative answer.