

			Percentage of Failures.
22 schools (equal to 12 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	0 to 5
31 schools (equal to 16 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	6 to 10
57 schools (equal to 30 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	11 to 20
40 schools (equal to 21 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	21 to 30
20 schools (equal to 10 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	31 to 40
13 schools (equal to 7 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	41 to 50
8 schools (equal to 4 per cent. of the total number)	...	...	51 to 62

On the whole, a percentage of failures that much exceeds twenty may be held to indicate an unsatisfactory condition of instruction, and one exceeding thirty very inefficient instruction. In the former category there are a good many schools, and in the latter no fewer than forty-one. But a just estimate of efficiency will not altogether accommodate itself to these hard and fast lines, since well-conducted and fairly-successful schools occasionally rank among those having a relatively high percentage of failures.

The average ages at which the several standards were passed compare very favourably with those of previous years. Standard I. was passed at a trifle over nine years, and Standard VI. at a trifle under fourteen, while the intervals between the ages of passing the several standards approximate closely to a year. We notice that in the Wellington District Standard I. was passed last year (1889) at an average age of eight years and six months. It is more to be wished than to be expected that the pupils of our schools will soon pass Standard I. at such an early age as that. But so long as the age does not exceed nine years there is really but little reason to complain of the progress made in the infant classes.

Persons interested in the public schools of the colony no doubt often wonder how far the passing of Standard IV. (the standard that would be the compulsory one if compulsory education were really enforced) fits a boy for the duties of citizenship and of life. To this mental query, those best acquainted with the working of our system will hardly be able to give a very favourable answer. Such a boy has no mastery of reading. He will be unable to read with ease, pleasure, or understanding a newspaper or magazine article, an average romance, or an ordinary biographical or historical work. Much less will he be able to read and understand discussions on the chief political and social questions of the day. He can hardly hope to add to his scanty store of knowledge without deliberate and continued study of reading. In fact, the key to knowledge, the power of reading with understanding, is not yet within his grasp. Such a boy will be able to indite a very simple letter, but he will hardly know how to divide his sentences or to spell any but the most common words, and he will be quite unable to explain any subject that is even moderately complex or abstruse. He will be much better equipped in arithmetic, which he should be able to apply with little difficulty to the making out of accounts, and to working all the ordinary calculations of practical life. He can write fairly but not quickly, and he can draw a little. He will have a fair general knowledge of the geography of our colony, and a more slight acquaintance with that of the Australian continent, but will know nothing of the Mother-country and the world at large, beyond the names and positions of the countries and capitals of the world, and the principal seas, gulfs, mountains, rivers, lakes, capes, straits, islands, and peninsulas on the map of the world. Of interesting and useful geographical knowledge he will thus have very little indeed, and he will go forth into the world without even a rudimentary acquaintance with the United Kingdom and the extra-Australian members of the great empire of which he is to become a citizen. His studies in history will have been chiefly of use in improving his power of reading, and perhaps in gaining him a slight glimpse into an ancient and obsolete social organization as unlike that of our own day as can well be. Besides all this, he should have learned a good deal about common objects, the more important and useful animals and plants, and such other topics as are treated of in object-lessons. But, mainly through faults of teaching, his training in observation will be of little value. A careful consideration of these attainments reveals several very grave defects. The mastery of reading is evidently much below what is indispensable for every social unit. The failure to gain it in a much higher degree is due to several causes, the chief being the growing ease of the reading-books that are now used in our schools, the inadequate amount of matter which the regulations prescribe to be read, and the needs of pupils who leave school on passing Standard IV. being but little considered in the framing of the standard course of instruction. For such boys a great deal of reading in the lower standards is most needful, and it would be well to provide for it even at the expense of all instruction in history, and by sacrificing some of the drawing of Standard IV. Higher proficiency in reading and understanding what is read would greatly favour the acquisition of a wider knowledge of spelling, and would in a still higher degree promote the power of expression through the art of composition. It is above all in geography that the course of instruction fails to meet the requirements of pupils of the class we are now considering. The capes, and straits, and islands, and peninsulas of the world, and much of the rest of the catalogue, might, with manifest advantage, give place to such a knowledge as can be gained of our own empire, in its central isles and distant scattered members, with perhaps a brief outline of Europe and the United States thrown in. So little real knowledge of history can be gained at this early age (twelve years, on the average) that it would, we think, be a distinct gain to discard it altogether, and devote the time thus set free to gaining a further training in purely English studies—in reading, spelling, and composition.

These changes, which we believe will commend themselves to most friends of education, could be made with a stroke of the Minister's pen, and they are of such a nature that they need not seriously interfere with the best arrangements for the instruction of children who can devote two or three additional years to their education at the public schools. It is as easy as it is common to expect of school children more than can be attained; and not very much can be fairly expected of boys and girls whose school training ends at a little over twelve years. But when every allowance