

The new syllabus under which the schools were examined for the first time only came into full force at the beginning of July, so that all those schools that have their examination in the first half of the school-year have not yet been tested under the freer conditions of the new syllabus. The experience already gained, however, leads me to think that with due care the amended regulations will be productive of much good. The bestowal of more freedom upon the teachers in the choice of some of the standard work, and the wide discriminative powers granted to the Inspectors in the standard examinations, will tend to greater thoroughness in the schools, and to a better understanding between the great body of teachers and the inspectorate. A conference between the Board teachers and myself in the early part of the year has already had this effect. The new syllabus of instruction was discussed, and explanations were made regarding what was deemed to be a fair demand for a pass under the regulations. A circular-letter was subsequently issued from the Board's office, based upon the explanations made by me at the conference, and I am satisfied the result has been beneficial to all concerned. But, wide as the powers of Inspectors are, I could wish the further introduction into the regulations of a "permissive clause," allowing teachers, with the Inspector's approval and written consent, to keep in the same standard as the one last passed those children who, through natural dullness, irregular attendance, or some similar and reasonable cause, find it difficult to keep pace with the average of their class or standard. The examinations frequently bring under notice cases where unfortunate circumstances have tended to keep back in their studies certain pupils of the kind described, and who become disheartened and indifferent because of their inability to keep pace with their fellows. The operation of a "permissive clause" would allow an Inspector to consider cases such as these, by which means encouragement would be given to strong and weak pupils alike.

The average age of the children who pass the standards year by year shows little or very slight alteration; but the differences in the various districts are very marked. The average age when children pass the First Standard for the whole of the district is nine years and five months. At the last examinations the average age of Standard I. pupils in the Napier Main School was nine years and five months; at Gisborne it was eight years and eight months, at Hastings nine years and a half, at Port Ahuriri seven years and ten months, whilst Standard II. at the latter school was the same average age as the Napier Standard I. These wide differences in the case of four schools taken at random are a type of what one finds existing over the whole of the district. Some schools pass their children through the standards at a low average age, and there are others where the average is always high; nor does the cause appear to rest solely with teachers. Generally, the country schools pass the lower standards at a later age than the town schools, but the former overtake the latter before the completion of the full standard course. The new regulations require an Inspector to include in his annual report a statement of his opinion with respect to children presented for examination in the preparatory classes who are more than eight years of age. In some schools far too many children are so presented. Napier affords a notable example, where 121 pupils, or more than 10 per cent. of the whole, were examined as preparatory pupils, although at an age when they might fairly be expected to pass Standard I. At Gisborne, twenty-one children over the age of eight years were examined in the preparatory class, and at Port Ahuriri there were twelve. A careful analysis of the causes for the low presentations shows that bad health, natural dullness, inability of parents to provide boots or clothes, and irregular attendance of children are among the principal reasons stated by the teachers, but irregular attendance is urged as the chief cause of all. The results of the examinations in their effects upon irregular pupils support this view, as the standard failures are mostly made up of children who do not attend school at least 320 times within the school-year.

My separate reports on the work of each school will already have placed the Board in possession of information showing the progress of Education in particular districts. The preparatory classes in the majority of schools are doing well; indeed, there is no aspect of school-work more marked in its progressive and beneficial effects than what may be termed the "new training" of young children now so generally adopted. Musical drill, cutting-out, drawing, instruction in form, colour, and definition, are among the subjects now included in the school routine for infants, and, judging by the way the work is prepared, their introduction has made the preparation of subjects like reading, writing, and arithmetic more thorough and agreeable. It will appear from this that more work is attempted, often with very commendable results, by the preparatory classes than was the case a few years ago; and much of this success must be set down to the fact that more rational and intelligent methods are being brought to bear on the work of infant training. In the standard classes the widening of the requirements has not been followed by the adoption of more skilful methods of instruction, and a little inquiry often leads one to the opinion that too few of the teachers appreciate their profession, either as a science or as an art. A "pass" and a good percentage satisfies their wants, and is the sole end of their ambition. How many are there, I would venture to ask, who form the rank and file of the teaching profession that consider what particular faculties ought to be exercised in the preparation of particular subjects? And yet the success of teachers and pupils alike depends in the main upon such an inquiry being made. It is here, at the outset, one sees success and failure written in the case of two teachers, both equally industrious, and both desirous of doing well, but one adopts rational processes and the other does not. Some of the most earnest and deserving teachers I know in the district fail in the successful accomplishment of their work because they do not comprehend which part of the standard syllabus requires the application of the memoriter system of instruction, which the dogmatic, and which the truly inductive or intellectual. Those who take the trouble to analyse the standard requirements will find how much real success, as instructors and teachers, depends upon the proper application of these three instruments of instruction to their daily work, and many a hard-working (though unsuccessful) teacher would find his work lessened and his joys increased by studying to adopt right processes in the training of his pupils.