

SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR THE WHOLE DISTRICT.

Classes.	Presented.	Absent.	Excepted.	Failed.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
						Yrs. m.
Above Standard VI. ...	20	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	97	10	1	15	71	14 3
" V. ...	161	9	4	23	125	13 1
" IV. ...	206	21	5	39	141	12 2
" III. ...	209	8	6	16	179	11 4
" II. ...	193	6	2	16	169	9 9
" I. ...	225	7	4	30	184	8 10
Preparatory ...	602	...	...	...	...	...
Totals ...	1,713	61	22	139	869	11 7*

* Mean of average age.

WESTLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Hokitika, 2nd February, 1893.

I have the honour to present my second annual report on the work done in the Board's schools, and the state of education generally throughout Westland.

The number of schools in the district is now thirty-three, as against thirty-one last year, the increase being due to the opening of a small aided school at Cook's River, South Westland, and the reopening of another in the Otira Gorge, closed last year. On the other hand, judging, at least, by the statistics of examination-day, the number of children in attendance throughout the district has slightly decreased, the number on the roll on examination-day this year being 1,633, or fifteen less than last year. Not much importance, however, need be attached to this circumstance—first, because the decrease is very small; secondly, because it is considerably less than that of last year, which was thirty-seven; and thirdly, because the opening of two more schools, the buildings for which are now in hand, will more than efface the loss.

The year differs from the previous one in the circumstance that very few changes have occurred in the teaching-staff of the schools, the members of which have worked on perseveringly at their posts, and, as I am about to show, in most cases not without good results. The chief feature of the year, from a schoolmaster's point of view, has been the adoption in the actual work of the school of the revised syllabus of education, which came into force on the first day of the year. In virtue of this, several important changes have been made in the plan of the school work, intended to lighten somewhat the toil both of teacher and scholar. The chief changes effected are these:—

1. English grammar, a knowledge of which has hitherto been required for a "pass" in all standards above the Second, is now no longer so required except in Standard IV., whilst in the other standards it is now taught as a "class"-subject only. Remembering the important mental discipline furnished by the thorough study of grammar—how it is the best and necessary introduction to almost all departments of abstract thought, and almost the only training in clear and accurate thinking which most of our scholars will ever know—I cannot help viewing this change of plan with some misgiving, as impairing the value of the education hitherto implied in a "pass."

2. A second change made by the new syllabus is consequent on the first. English composition, which was formerly only an exercise included in grammar-work, is now made a separate and independent subject in the "pass" programme—a subject in which every scholar is expected to show some proficiency. On this topic I shall have something to say presently.

3. A change has also been made in the teaching of drawing, though not the change which many practical teachers desired, for not only is the subject still retained as a "pass"-subject, in which every child, whatever his natural inaptitude, must be made proficient, but it has received additional elaboration and development. From the First Standard upwards considerable knowledge of technical terms and a considerable facility in freehand drawing are now rendered imperative, whilst a large addition to this is required of the highest three standards in the shape of geometrical drawing for the Fourth Standard, scale drawing for the Fifth, and no less than two further varieties of the art for the Sixth Standard—viz., model drawing and solid geometry. Of course, there is nothing in all this that might not fairly be required in every public school, nor would any efficient teacher complain of the elaborate programme of prescribed work, such a programme being a help to him and not a hindrance; but the trouble is that all this is imposed as a "pass"-subject in which every child is required to be proficient, and that in a limited and short time, so that not only is the task in itself difficult of attainment, but the requirement has this additional disadvantage: that it obliges teacher and scholar to devote to the art of drawing an amount of time and attention quite disproportionate to the relative importance of the subject in a primary-school curriculum, and to the neglect of those essential subjects for instruction in which primary schools were originally established.

4. The only other change I need notice is in "class"-subjects; it is the new programme of geography for Standard IV. The amount of work involved in this is now very large, the topics being very numerous, and many of them by their nature very indefinite—e.g., the chief ports and trading centres of the world; in fact, as it stands, it is a programme difficult to carry out, and must, I think, remain so until the department itself prepares and publishes a text-book of geography specially adapted to the New Zealand syllabus.