

were generally secured, within, of course, the very narrow limits to which the lessons were generally confined. Not all teachers, however, took agricultural science as the subject of the year; some took physics; and it is in this connection that the course of lessons given, if the work done may be dignified with such a name, is most open to criticism. In at least two schools "Huxley's Introduction to Macmillan's Science Primers" was adopted as the text-book, a book quite beyond the capacity of the primary scholar, and calculated for nothing so much as to disgust him with the whole subject. What is wanted by the primary scholar is something concrete, not abstract—a few simple, striking, and interesting facts from which principles may be deduced, such as are afforded in Paul Bert's "First Year of Science." In this way the peculiar charm of natural science becomes evident to the young student, who, there is some reason to hope, will endeavour to prosecute the subject further when he leaves school, perhaps to become a learner in nature's own university for the rest of his life. I may add that a plan not unlike this, and one almost as good, was adopted this year by the teacher of the Arahura School, who, dispensing with all text-books, took in succession the large wall-plates of "Johnston's Scientific Course," and gave a lesson on each diagram in the sheet. The success of this plan, both in the interest excited among the children and the satisfactory character of the answers on examination-day, was very marked.

In concluding this subject, however, I would give it as my deliberate conviction that elementary science will never take its proper place in our school work, never receive the attention its importance demands, or be taught in the systematic manner it ought to be, until the department maps out in detail a whole three years' course of science, as it has already done in the case of one branch of it, and publishes a text-book adapted to its syllabus.

**CLASS S7.**—The custom in this district has been that S7 shall do the same work as S6, but of course be subjected to a severer test in it at the annual examination. The plan seems to work well, and is certainly in harmony with the first principles of the educational art, which require that in order to be thorough there must be much recapitulation in the school work, a principle in which I sometimes think our syllabus is deficient. The thought, indeed, has often passed through my mind when assessing the examination-papers of some particular school, what an advantage it would be to these scholars if one could put the whole school back a class! Anyway, the year spent in S7 is certainly not a lost year to the scholars, and the work as at present arranged is quite sufficient to tax their best powers, as is seen in the fact that this year the mean percentage of passes in the standard is only 48.1. It is only right to say, however, that five of the nine schools presenting this class passed as many as 66.6 per cent. The total number of scholars in S7 was this year thirty-six.

**INFANT CLASS.**—At the bottom of the school, but not the less important on that account, stands the infant class, the numbers attending which would alone give it a claim to special prominence, as will appear when I say that in this education district the members of this class form very nearly one-third of the whole school-going population. My chief purpose in referring particularly to this section of the school this year is to ask the question, "What constitutes an infant in the eyes of the department? Who may properly attend the infant classes?" Attention has this year been specially directed to this point in consequence of a new Order in Council (Reg. 5) issued with the new syllabus, by which it is rendered imperative on all teachers, should they on examination-day have in their infant class any scholar above the age of eight years, to furnish a list of these to the Inspector, accompanied in each case with a written statement of the reason why such scholars are not presented in Standard I. The order has brought to light some rather startling facts. For instance, in the two largest schools of the district the combined infant classes show a muster-roll of 245 children, and of these no less than 69, or more than 28 per cent., are eight years old or more, a few of them, indeed, ten and even eleven years old. At this rate the number for the whole district would be 146; and the question naturally arises, Why are these so-called infants not presented for Standard I., the work for which is so very elementary? Who is to blame for this loss of time—the child, the parent, or the teacher? Various reasons are assigned by the teachers for the backwardness of these children and their consequent detention in the lowest class of the school, the chief being irregular attendance, whilst several of the children are described as hopelessly lazy. It is right that these cases of exceptional incapacity should be brought to light; but I do not think that anything would be gained, whatever the age of the children in question, by thrusting them forward into a higher class whilst they are incapable of doing that of the lowest in the school. Of one thing, I think, we may be sure, that every infant teacher would gladly be rid of all scholars above the normal age for an infant class, and certainly would not detain them in it unnecessarily. But it cannot be denied that the existence of many such cases in an infant class would justify inquiry as to the skill or industry of the teacher.

**DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL.**—Although the Rector's class at this school taken as a whole did not pass a satisfactory examination this year, it should be mentioned, on the other hand, that one member of the class, a scholarship-holder, succeeded in passing the Matriculation Examination of the New Zealand University.

**ATTENDANCE.**—As the efficiency of the schools depends so largely on the regular attendance of the scholars, it is undesirable to omit some reference to this important subject in the annual report. Last year I illustrated my remarks by the case of the Kumara School, where irregular attendance had long been the rule rather than the exception. Judging by the statistics of examination-day this year the attendance at this school would seem to be improved, as out of a roll-number almost identical with that of last year the number of absentees was reduced by one-half. Unfortunately, however, the statistics of attendance for the year demonstrate unmistakably that no improvement whatever has taken place in the daily attendance of this school, the ratio of attendance to roll-number being as low as 74 per cent., as against 75 per cent. last year. Surprise has been expressed that the Inspector should this year have given the school nearly as bad a report as he did the year before, but, in view of the fact mentioned, it becomes plain enough that had he this year given the