

PREPARATORY CLASSES.—In the schools examined there were 3,091 children in the preparatory classes, or 34 per cent. of the pupils on the rolls. Of these 3,091 children, 778, or 25 per cent., were over eight years of age. Feilding School was responsible for far the greatest number—viz., sixty-six—but the majority either had not been at school for two years or had attended very badly. Hawera came next with thirty-six, twenty-four of whom had been under two years at school. Of the other large schools, the numbers at Terrace End and Campbell Street in Palmerston, at Ashurst, and at Waverley were unusually low. Of the whole 778 children over eight years of age, 479 had not been two years at the schools at which they were present on examination days, and thirty-five were Maoris. With regard to the work of these preparatory classes, in most of the large schools it was very good indeed, while in four large schools the teaching and the training of the little ones was of exceptional merit. We are pleased to be able to state that some of these infant departments are managed by pupil-teachers, or ex-pupil-teachers, who give great promise of becoming very successful infant-mistresses. In the smaller schools, the work naturally was not so far advanced as that in the larger schools, but in many of them the quality was quite as good as could be expected under the circumstances, while the general control and management, and the methods of teaching in vogue, were very good. We note with pleasure that throughout the district greater attention is being paid to singing, class-drill, and physical exercise in these classes, and the result on the whole of the school work is very satisfactory. The “phonic system” is almost universally adopted in this district now, and it is having an excellent effect upon the speech of the pupils, there being few indeed who cannot enunciate clearly and distinctly.

THE NEW SYLLABUS AND EXAMINATION REGULATIONS.—The revised regulations of the Education Department for the examination of schools came into force on the 1st July, 1894, and all the schools except eight taken before that date were examined in accordance with their provisions. The eight schools examined according to the previous syllabus were Waituna, Pemberton, Feilding, Colyton, Foxton, Hiwinui, Momohaki, and Kaponga, and the pupils counted as “excepted” at the examinations of these schools were in the annual returns necessarily classified as “failed.”

The chief changes made in the syllabus were, we are glad to say, in the direction of lightening the burden of the teachers’ work. The requirements in drawing were considerably curtailed in Standard IV and Standard VI., in Standard IV. geography was lightened, and was made a pass-subject instead of a class-subject, and grammar was moved from the pass-subjects to the class-subjects, the minimum requirements for passes in spelling and dictation were clearly defined.

A very radical change was embodied in Regulation 6, which authorises head teachers to determine the pupils fit to pass in Standard I. and Standard II., and on their examinations standard certificates are issued to pupils provided they have been present at the Inspector’s examination. This is the outcome of a resolution passed by the Conference of Inspectors recommending the abolition of the “pass” system in Standard I. and Standard II., but we are certainly of the opinion that it was never contemplated by members of the Conference that teachers should have the power to issue Government certificates to pupils taught and examined by themselves, even when the Inspector disagrees entirely with the passes. It seems to us that the final decision should lie with an outside and independent examiner who may act as a check upon undue leniency, and, upon what we have also found, undue severity. In large schools where the work is satisfactory the examination by the teacher effects a considerable saving of an Inspector’s time, but in large schools where the work is not satisfactory, and in small schools, there is little or no time saved. As an Inspector has to report upon the teacher’s classification he must subject large classes that may be unsatisfactory to a thorough examination, and in small schools he cannot arrive at an estimate of the value of the work without examining the individual pupils. On the whole, considering that last year for the first time the teachers had this duty placed upon them, the scheme may be said to have worked satisfactorily, there being comparatively few cases of passes being granted to pupils who were unfit. Moreover, teachers have frequently preferred that we should examine their classes, and thus relieve them of the responsibility and even odium which, in country districts, may be attached to the failure of pupils. Of course, we have sometimes found, even where the examination by the teacher has been most carefully conducted, that pupils who passed for the teacher failed for us, and *vice versa*, but such cases are merely incidental to any system of examination, and do not affect the general bearing of the examinations. Teachers should, however, remember that passes are granted and certificates issued in recognition of certain knowledge acquired by the pupils, and in granting passes should not be influenced by extraneous considerations such as age, absence on account of sickness, &c., which, however they may excite sympathy, do not justify the issue of standard certificates. One teacher stated that he passed on account of advanced age a boy whom he knew to be unable to do the work. Such a statement implies that failure necessitates detention in the same class for another year, whereas Regulation 4 distinctly states that the teacher may promote a child at will.

In reading, some teachers display a tendency to accept a lower standard of excellence than is warranted. On the necessity for good and intelligent reading the regulations speak very clearly, and we feel that teachers should carefully guard against being satisfied with mediocrity in this important subject.

INSTRUCTION We purpose now to offer a few remarks upon the quality of the work done in the various subjects of instruction, pointing out the chief merits and the chief defects found.

Reading.—The stress now laid upon expressive and intelligent reading is having an excellent effect, and at many schools the subject is treated in a very satisfactory manner. Speaking out well, with distinct enunciation, is far more common than it used to be, and this, coupled with the now almost universal practice of getting pupils to answer in sentences in oral work, has been the means of improving the conversation of the pupils when out of school. Many young teachers, especially young female teachers, are showing considerable aptitude in teaching reading. That pupils found great difficulty in reading anything approaching new matter was often made clear to us, especially