

case of men working 365 days and others 274 days under similar conditions, but the same results follow in the school workshop, for children in 274 days cannot do the work which it takes other children 365 days to do under similar working conditions. And the comparative efficiency of the schools named shows how much depends, in successful school-keeping, upon regularity of attendance in combination with methodical instruction. If the new Act dealing with school attendance is strictly enforced throughout the district the average efficiency of the schools will be raised, and I look forward with some hope to this being done during the coming year.

Regulation 5 of the standards of instruction requires an Inspector to include in his annual report information with respect to the number of children belonging to the preparatory or non-standard classes who are more than eight years old. The number of such children shows little or no diminution compared with previous years. With a roll-number of 6,735 pupils it is hardly creditable to find 550 of them over eight years of age in the preparatory classes. At Ormond and Ormondville the non-standard classes contain 18·8 and 17·6 per cent. respectively of children over eight years of age. At Norsewood the numbers reach 16·1 per cent., and at Napier and Kaikora the proportion is over 11 per cent. Gisborne, with 662 pupils, has 6·1 per cent. over eight years in the preparatory classes, whilst Port Ahuriri, with 342 pupils, has only 3·5 per cent. The wide differences in adjoining districts, like Napier and Port Ahuriri, are difficult to harmonize. It may be that the children at the latter school begin to attend much younger than they do at the former but, if so, it affords a good example of the advantages of early infant training in those cases where the children are placed under favourable conditions for instruction and training. I am by no means in favour of the adoption of an age clause in the passing of children through the standards, but it seems that if more encouragement were given for the attendance of young children at school, a full year might be gained in getting through the present standard requirements.

I have already stated that the school returns for the year show an increase of 352 names compared with the returns for the previous year. The following table gives in summary form the results of the examination in the Board schools only. For purposes of comparison the results are added for the corresponding period of 1893:—

Classes.	Presented.	Absent.	Examined	Failed.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
						Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI.	52					
Standard VI.	218	5	213	73	140	14 0
" V	430	9	421	122	299	13 2
" IV	687	34	653	155	498	12 4
" III.	934	42	892	185	707	11 1
" II.	933	56	877	125	752	10 0
" I.	951	46	905	137	768	9 0
Preparatory	2,530					
Totals	6,735	192	3,961	797	3,164	11 7
Totals for 1893	6,383	301	3,894	901	2,697	11 8

In addition to the schools represented in these returns, I examined the Meaneë and Waipawa Catholic schools, containing eighty-three and seventy-seven pupils respectively. Separate reports have been made on them, as in the case of the Board schools. The increase in the number of presentations in standards is only ten more than it was in the previous year. The passes show a large increase for the year, but it will be remembered the passes in 1893 were unusually low, owing to the epidemic of measles, followed by whooping-cough, that passed over the whole of the district. With those in the class above Standard VI. the passes represent 47·7 per cent. of the total number belonging to the schools, whilst the standard pupils, excluding all those who failed or were absent in the First Standard, are represented by 4,022 pupils, which is very nearly 60 per cent. of the number attending school.

These results may be set down as satisfactory, if we assume that the new conditions as to examination are as difficult as they were under the old regulations. From an educational point of view the past year was an important one. For the first time since the passing of the Education Act in 1877 a Conference of School Inspectors met in Wellington early in February, on the invitation of the Minister of Education, at which, with one exception, every Inspector in the colony was present. The Inspector-General presided at that Conference. The proceedings were subsequently published and, as the outcome of the recommendations made to the Minister of Education, a new code of standard regulations was issued. These contain changes of some importance in their bearing upon the examination and general efficiency of the schools. No. 6 of the regulations confers upon head teachers the duty of examining Standards I and II., to ascertain what pupils are fit to pass those standards respectively. As the new regulations did not come into force until July, only thirty-five schools have been examined under them, the remaining twenty-three schools having been examined under the old regulations in the first half of the school year. The "pass" results under the new system are necessarily incomplete, but they enable me, nevertheless, to estimate in some measure the effects which this concession to teachers is likely to have upon the future efficiency of the schools. In the twenty-three schools examined during the first half of the year there were 381 children in the two lowest standards. One hundred and fourteen of them, or 30 per