

teachers, if they were required to give a little assistance with the lower classes as a condition of their continuance in the schools.

The number of children more than eight years of age not presented in standards this year is 107. The reasons assigned for withholding them were Late entrance, 39, dull intellect, 29, irregularity of attendance, 22 ill-health, 2 at newly-started schools, 6, no explanation, 8 self-will, 1. If the truth were known, possibly the last-named explanation might be given to some of the cases set down under the first three.

In referring to the increase in the number of schools, it is perhaps advisable to remind the Board that nearly all the schools added to the list during the last four years are small aided schools, which seem to increase at the rate of five or six per annum. There is every reason to expect that this increase will be maintained for some years to come if the Board continues its present scale of payments to aided schools. Seeing, however, that they are maintained at a considerable loss to the Board, it is evident that their extension cannot be continued indefinitely (unless special provision be made for their support) without ultimate injury to the larger schools. When the physical features of the northern portion of the district are considered there can be no doubt as to the necessity for their existence, and a perusal of the tables will show that some of these little schools are in no respect behind, while a few of them are considerably in advance of many of the country schools in the more settled districts. Nearly all of them are doing useful work, and on the whole they are certainly deserving of the support they receive. In one respect, however the household schools in the Sounds differ from the Board schools as regards the conditions under which they are conducted, and that is in their almost entire immunity from visits of inspection," or, as they are sometimes called, "surprise" visits. That this is a distinct disadvantage no one at all conversant with school matters will venture to dispute nor is there anything necessarily derogatory to the character or the reputation of any of the teachers in thus pointing out the necessity for some kind of inspection. The visits of an Inspector are always welcome to an efficient and conscientious teacher, and even to those less efficient but equally conscientious ones who are anxious to have their defects pointed out and their merits recognised. The only cases where these visits would be unwelcome are those (if such there be) where the exigencies of a struggling settler's life may tempt to the neglect of the school by too frequently employing the time of the children about the work on the land. I have no official knowledge of any such irregularities, and the quality of the work done at the annual examinations convinces me that at the majority of them little or no time can have been lost during the year. If laxity of management exists at all, it can be only in a very few cases. Vague rumours have been heard as to the loose manner in which some remote schools are conducted, and, although unworthy of serious consideration, such rumours are sufficient to make it more than usually desirable that inspection visits should be as certain there as in the more settled districts. As you are aware, the children attending these schools are required to assemble at various centres on a certain day for examination purposes. Three or four schools are generally examined together at each centre, and no time is available for anything approaching to inspection. All who are familiar with travelling in the Sounds are aware how important it is to take advantage of fair weather as, owing to the violent and capricious nature of the winds in that locality, a day's delay may result in a week's detention, which would put those schools next to be examined to very great inconvenience, or might even necessitate the total abandonment of the examination for that year. These considerations prevent any attempt at combining the inspection with the visit for examination. The most that can be done is to examine the registers, and endeavour to ascertain if they have been correctly kept. Much more than this is, however, necessary, and the time has arrived when the increasing number of these schools demands more of the Inspector's attention than they have hitherto received. I shall therefore submit for your approval a proposal by which this may be accomplished without, I believe, any very serious expense to the Board.

This year is marked by an important change in the authorised method of reporting the results of the examination, and the change is one which I confidently hope is a step, if only a small one, in the direction of the total abolition of the individual pass system. In the future the expression "percentage of passes" will be officially unknown, and only the number examined and passed will be recorded. Of course it will still be possible for those teachers and Committees that have been in the habit of blazoning abroad the real or imaginary success of their schools to calculate the tabooed percentage for themselves, but to have it shut out from the official reports is of itself a distinct gain. In one portion of this report—viz., that referring to class and additional subjects—I have continued the use of a percentage in a modified form, as by its means varying degrees of merit in those subjects are more accurately expressed than they could be in any very short form of words. I have retained the scale of marks I have all along used for the class-subjects, by which 100 = excellent, 80, very good 60, good 40, fair; and 20, poor. The marks awarded to each school are based on the average performances of all the classes for which the particular subject is prescribed. Thus under the head of "comprehension" all the six standards are liable to examination, and to illustrate the mode of arriving at the final award for this subject we will take the case of a certain school having six standards represented. The marks for comprehension were thus distributed Standard I., 40, Standard II., 40 Standard III., 29 Standard IV., 40, Standard V., 60 Standard VI., 60 total, 260, which, divided by 6, gives the average 43 as the final award for this subject. At another school the marks awarded to grammar in the four higher standards were as follows 37 in Standard III., 67 in Standard IV., 26 in Standard V., and 0 in Standard VI.; these added together and divided by 4 give the average 32½, the bad work in the Sixth and Fifth thus reducing the good and fair results in the Fourth and Third Standards. This plan has been followed by me for many years, and meets the requirements of the regulations, which provide that "the Inspector shall consider whether the subject is attended to in all the classes for which it is prescribed."