

examination was less, falling from 130 to 115, and if Tarata (above referred to) be excluded from the calculation the absentees number only 100. The following table shows the summary of results for the district :—

Classes.			Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.	
						1896. Yrs. mos.	1895. Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI.	...	...	10	...	...	...	...
Standard VI.	...	...	85	82	46	14 2	14 4
" V.	...	...	200	188	91	13 7	13 10
" IV.	...	...	443	420	229	12 9	12 11
" III.	...	...	565	545	335	11 11	11 10
" II.	...	...	545	518	393	10 7	10 9
" I.	...	...	556	526	405	9 5	9 5
Preparatory	...	...	1,374	...	...	...	...
Totals	...	...	3,778	2,279	1,499	...	...

From the above table it will be seen that in Standards II., IV., V., VI. the average ages have fallen, and that in Standard III. there is a slight increase, since 1895.

Preparatory Classes.—Of the 3,778 pupils on the rolls at examination, 1,374, or 36 per cent., were in the preparatory classes. Though the number of pupils in the preparatory classes was exactly the same as in the previous year, the number over eight years of age showed a decrease, falling from 475, or 34 per cent., to 391, or 28 per cent. This shows that the tendency to keep back pupils in the infant classes did not exist to the same extent as in the previous year. This was my impression before the compilation of the above return, for in comparatively few cases were the reasons for non-presentation in Standard I. unsatisfactory.

The Examination of Standards I. and II.—During the past year I carried out the course adopted during the previous year, as explained in my last report. On the whole, the system of examination by the teacher has not worked satisfactorily, and again pupils who were unqualified were promoted. In one case where the teacher adhered to his results he afterwards admitted that he had been too lenient, for the work of the higher standard was found to be too heavy. Last year I cited a case where a teacher (not now in the service) passed every pupil in Standard II.; examined in Standard III. they failed utterly. For twelve months they had been struggling with work altogether beyond their powers, and after all their disheartening efforts had to remain in the same class, having a good knowledge of the work of neither standard. I should not like to see the system abolished altogether, for I believe that a good teacher's knowledge of the pupils' work during the year should be recognised in the granting of passes, but it would work more satisfactorily and would conduce to a higher standard of efficiency if an Inspector had the power to revise the passes. In arithmetic there frequently was great disparity between the teachers' results and mine, though the tests were of about equal difficulty.

Reading.—An improvement was noticeable during the year, though much still remains to be done. To Standards V. and VI. the "New Zealand Reader" was issued, and, though for examination the easier lessons were chosen, the results were disappointing, and pupils stumbled over words they could quite easily have read in the ordinary books. When throughout the year only one book is used the pupils remember the matter of the lessons and reading becomes to a certain extent prose recitation, and the introduction of the extra reading-book will conduce to better reading. I do not mean that the school reader will be better read, but the pupils will be able to read a book of equal difficulty but not so well known with more intelligence and fluency. I am afraid that some of our children never read any books other than those used in school, and, though they may know these sufficiently well to pass, there is no guarantee that they are good readers. The course of reading during school-hours cannot be widened to any great extent, for the syllabus is already sufficiently heavy, but much could be done by the establishment of libraries containing books of interest to boys and girls of school age. At some of the larger schools such are to be found, but in the country districts, where the need is most felt, so far as I know, there are none.

Spelling.—I cannot report favourably on this subject. Apart from the special tests, easy words in the general work were frequently misspelled. The inferiority is due chiefly to the two causes pointed out last year—want of thoroughness in correction and bad methods of instruction, the ear, not the eye, being appealed to.

Writing.—The lack of organization shown in using two or more sets of copy-books in the same class at the same time is not so common as formerly, and consequently better class-instruction is possible. I find, however, that in the lower classes of some schools systematic instruction in the principles of good writing is still neglected, and that pupils are allowed to "go on writing" instead of being shown *how* to write. The writing on the examination-papers was generally satisfactory, and the number of papers I could look upon as good samples of neatness and arrangement was considerably greater than in the previous year. I attach as much—I was going to say more—importance to this, the practical application of writing, as to the work done in the copy-books. The latter shows in some measure how the subject is taught, the former how far the teaching is successful. What I have said has a bearing on a still more practical side—the neatness, legibility, fluency, and symmetry of the writing of the children when they leave school; and I consider the majority of our ex-pupils should show at least very fair proficiency.