

As to the tone and discipline of the schools, it is pleasing to report that almost without exception attention is paid to these important aspects of school work, and it is seldom that it is necessary to report acts of negligence or carelessness in the keeping of records or in training the children in manners and right conduct.

I have, &c.,

H. HILL,

Inspector of Schools.

The Chairman, Board of Education, Napier.

MARLBOROUGH.

SIR,—

Blenheim, 8th January, 1897.

I have the honour to present my sixth annual report on the schools under the control of the Marlborough Education Board.

At the end of the year 1895 there were 63 schools in the district. Four of these have since been closed and one has been opened, thus reducing the number to sixty. Several fresh applications for aid to small schools have recently been received, and the required assistance has been granted, so that there is no prospect of any decrease in the number of those small and (relatively) expensive schools.

The total number of scholars on the rolls at the date of examination was 2,185, a small increase upon last year's number.

There is again an increase in the scholars above Standard VI. and a decrease in the preparatory classes, the latter being now rather under 26 per cent. of the roll-number.

A statement of the number of scholars in the several standards, expressed as a percentage of the roll-number, is given below, and compared with the classification of the whole colony as given in the Minister's last annual report:—

	Above Standard VI.	Standard VI.	Standard V.	Standard IV.	Standard III.	Standard II.	Standard I.	Prepara- tory.
Marlborough, 1896	... 3.3	5.6	8.8	14.7	14.8	14.5	12.6	25.7
New Zealand, 1895	... 3.3	6.2	10.3	13.9	14.8	13.4	13.0	24.9

Of the preparatory classes, 87, or 15½ per cent., were over eight years of age; and the reasons assigned for their non-presentation in Standard I. were—late entrance, 37; irregular attendance, 18; delicate, 13; dull or weak intellect, 13; “unfit” or no reason, 6. I believe these excuses were in the majority of cases valid, though it is possible that “late entrance” in many cases means late entrance at that school without regard to the time previously spent at another. It is, however, satisfactory to notice the steady decrease of these laggards, who numbered 197 in 1894 and 92 in 1895.

The number of scholars in Standards III. to VI. inclusive is 914, or forty-four more than were examined in those standards last year. The number who passed is 651, or 71.2 per cent., and is eighty less than the number that passed in 1895. Taking these four standards separately we find that 80 per cent. passed in Standard VI.; 60 per cent. in Standard V.; 76 per cent. in Standard IV.; and 70 per cent. in Standard III. The corresponding percentages for the same standards in the whole colony, as gathered from the Minister's nineteenth annual report, are 84 per cent. in Standard VI.; 76 per cent. in Standard V.; 76 per cent. in Standard IV.; and 80 per cent. in Standard III. Taking all six standards, the number examined was 1,497, and 1,209, or 81 per cent., passed. This is about 3 per cent. lower than the average of the whole colony in 1895.

For the first time since my connection with this district I have to report a decided falling-off in the results of the examination. I say advisedly “the results of the examination,” as I am certain, from my intimate acquaintance with the management of most of our schools, that the scholastic dividend declared in the tables attached to this report, in the majority of cases, by no means represents the real educational profits on the year's transactions. Apart from the well-known fact that many valuable assets exist which cannot be appraised at a single examination, coupled with that other fact so well known to all who have had much to do with teaching, that collectively the children under the examination never come within 20 or 30 per cent. of their ordinary performance, several circumstances have interfered this year with the normal progress of the scholars at some of our largest schools. Moreover, it is impossible, in view of the facts recorded in Table IV. of this report, to doubt that many of the failures recorded this year (particularly in Standard V.) have been caused by the nature of the arithmetic tests employed. These questions are, as you know, prepared and issued by the department. In the preparation of so many sets of questions it is impossible to preserve, and it would be unreasonable to expect, absolute equality as regards difficulty; and there is no doubt that a few instances of great inequality in the same standards could be pointed out. This inequality would not make much difference in a district as a whole, since the schools that were fortunate enough to receive an easy paper would make up for the unfortunate ones. I have heard so many complaints about the difficulty of some of this year's arithmetic papers that I cannot altogether ignore them, though I doubt if a single question can be pointed out that could be condemned as being beyond the legitimate requirements of the Government syllabus. Doubtless it would be quite possible to frame a set of questions for Standards V. or VI. to which no exception could be taken on that score, but which would cause nine out of ten scholars to fail in the subject.

I am no advocate for a too-lenient interpretation of the Government syllabus. On the contrary, I have always held, and frequently expressed, the opinion that such a course is a mistake, and tends to perpetuate its chief defect—viz., the demanding indifferently from all schools the accomplishment of more than is possible in any but the largest and most fully equipped. As regards arithmetic, I should prefer a system of examination which, without lessening in the slightest degree the difficulties of the several stages of the subject, would yet give the intelligent scholar a fairer chance of showing the extent of his knowledge of the subject. This I think could be accomplished by setting a larger number of questions (say, seven) in each standard, out of which the