

scholar should be allowed to select any (say) five, the correct working of which should entitle him to "full marks." In Standard IV. a "bill" should be compulsory. Each card could then be made to cover more ground, and scholars would have some slight choice, the exercise of which throughout the district would afford some indication of the thoroughness of the teaching, or of the direction in which weakness might be found.

Taking the fifteen Board's schools having the four upper standards examined, the following table shows the difference between this year's results and those of last year:—

Schools.	1895.		1896.	
	Examined.	Passed.	Examined.	Passed.
Blenheim Boys	118	101	123	88
Blenheim Girls	130	123	138	89
Canvastown	21	15	29	21
Deep Creek	16	16	12	12
Fairhall	23	16	20	7
Grovetown	67	53	67	47
Havelock	50	44	51	43
Havelock Suburban	20	19	18	15
Okaramio	33	20	26	21
Onamalutu	17	17	15	15
Picton	74	64	84	50
Renwick	31	26	32	28
Springlands	37	34	39	19
Tuamarina	32	24	34	33
Waitohi	32	27	29	27

From the above table it will be seen that the larger schools show an apparent falling-off in the results of these standards, which varies from 4 to as much as 43 per cent. The maximum was reached at the Springlands school, but the protracted illness of the head-teacher, who was unable to attend to her duties for several months, may be taken as a sufficient explanation of the falling-off in this case. Fairhall, which next to Springlands shows the greatest proportion of failures, also, no doubt, lost ground through the severe bereavement suffered by the teacher in the death of his wife after a long illness. The case of the Blenheim schools is not so readily to be accounted for. They certainly laboured under some disadvantage owing to their being closed for several weeks on account of the prevalence of diphtheria, and this, too, in the case of the girls' school very shortly before the examination. The ill-advised action of the School Committee in closing the girls' school, together with the circumstances preceding and following that action, no doubt exercised an undesirable influence upon the discipline and progress of the school. With regard to the Picton school again, it is quite impossible to believe that a school which has hitherto been so admirably taught in the upper standards can have deteriorated to anything like the extent which would be represented by a comparison of this year's results with those of previous years under the same management. Apart from any unusual difficulty which may have appeared in any of the examination papers, other circumstances occurred which no doubt interfered considerably with the success of the scholars. On the morning of the examination I was met at the door of the school-room by the head-teacher carrying out a scholar in some kind of fit, and almost at the same time two other scholars fainted in the presence of their astonished schoolmates. These events no doubt caused an unusual state of nervous excitement to prevail throughout the school, and possibly many of the scholars were sufficiently disturbed as to be unable to approach the consideration of a somewhat difficult arithmetic paper in the cool and collected mental attitude so necessary to success in this subject.

After making every allowance for the various extenuating circumstances referred to, it must still be admitted that the results of this year's examinations are not what might have been expected; and other causes must be sought for to explain the falling-off which is so plainly apparent in some of our generally most successful schools. I have reason to believe that in a few cases much valuable time is wasted in the early part of the school year. The very poor attendance of scholars for some weeks after the opening of a school is sometimes made the pretext for delaying the vigorous prosecution of the year's work until the attendance has reached its normal condition. This is a grave mistake, and tends to perpetuate and increase this serious hindrance to progress. Where such a practice prevails great injury is done to those scholars who do return punctually after the holidays, and naturally leads even these to regard a regular attendance during the early part of the first quarter as a matter of very little importance. As the time for the examination approaches, almost frantic efforts are made, and the school machinery is worked at the highest possible pressure, in the vain endeavour to recover the ground lost at the beginning of the year. It is about this time that the air is full of the complaints of indignant parents with regard to "keeping in," "home-lessons," &c., nor is it surprising that some of the more delicate constitutions occasionally give way under the strain. The requirements of the syllabus are admittedly full enough to demand the employment of every hour of the school year to the greatest possible advantage, and if the bogey "cram" finds entrance to any of our schools it is to such as are misconducted in the manner described.

The fact that the failures in the larger schools are, as a rule, relatively more numerous in Standards III. and IV. than in the two higher standards points to an entirely different cause. In my opinion, head-teachers of large schools are apt to devote an undue share of their time and attention to the scholars in the two upper standards (who are after all only a small minority) and leave the teaching of the lower standards almost entirely to their assistants, who, however willing and hardworking, are presumably less qualified and experienced than the head-teacher. The holding of periodical examinations of the lower standards is no doubt practised in