

The actual passes were 3,797, or 83·3 per cent. of the whole. The table below gives, in summary form, the complete results for the year, and for comparison the results of the year 1896 are added.

Classes.	Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Failed.	Absent.	Passed.	Percentage of passed to examined.	Average Age of those that passed.	Improved or otherwise, in Proportion of Passes.
							Yrs. mos.	
Above Standard VI.	32	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	320	319	49	1	270	84·6	14 1	Improved.
" V. ...	559	544	140	15	404	74·2	13 2	Improved.
" IV. ...	773	754	184	19	570	75·6	12 4	Fallen.
" III. ...	986	968	172	18	796	82·2	11 1	Improved.
" II. ...	986	965	106	21	859	89·0	9 11	Improved.
" I. ...	1,017	1,009	111	8	898	89·0	8 11	Fallen.
Preparatory ...	2,624	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Totals for 1897	7,297	4,559	762	82	3,797	83·2	11 7	Improved 1·7 per cent.
Totals for 1896	7,221	4,449	821	83	3,628	81·5	11 7	...

It will be observed from this table that the results generally show considerable improvement. Curiously, the total number attending school only shows an increase of 76 compared with the previous year, although the attendances at four more schools are included in the list; but in all other respects there is much that affords cause for satisfaction. With respect to the number examined in standards, there is an increase for the year of 110, whilst the failures have fallen from 821 to 762. The absentees from examination continue to diminish, and it is difficult to realise that in so extensive a district, where there are schools 300 miles apart, only 82 children were absent from the standard examinations. In 33 schools no pupils were absent, and in 14 others only one in each. The character of the weather appears to have little effect upon the attendance when the examinations are in progress, and were the average attendance for the district anything approaching the attendance on examination-days the compulsory clause would be dead, and the numerous devices and aids that are now employed to improve the school attendance, such as prizes and the employment of truant and school-attendance officers, would be unnecessary. And why is it that the attendance on examination-days and ordinary school-days varies as much as 15 per cent. for the whole district? I cannot help thinking that if the same efforts were made by parents and teachers to encourage attendance at school on ordinary occasions the results would be much better on the whole than they appear according to the returns. As pointed out many times, most Committees are very ready to throw the distasteful work upon others, but I am bound to say that the moral effect upon children would be perceptible immediately in every school were it made clear that teachers, parents, and Committees are working in harmony.

The new plan adopted by the Board of appointing two attendance officers for certain districts has not yet affected the regularity; but, although I have no faith in compulsion of any kind where the moral sentiment of the people is defective, still the plan is worth a trial, as 15 per cent. of the Board's possible income is lost annually from causes which certainly lie outside what may be set down as proper excuses for absence from school, such as sickness or physical weakness of some kind.

It is interesting to notice the constant increase in the number of standard children as compared with the preparatory classes. The earliest records I have of examination results are for the year 1878, when the first standard examinations were held under the Act of 1877, by which all the schools of the colony were brought under one system. Of 1,985 pupils who were returned as belonging to the schools for the December quarter of 1878, 459, or 23·1 per cent. of the whole, were in standards. No pupils were in the Sixth Standard, and only 11 were in the Fifth; in other words, 76·9 per cent. of the children were returned as belonging to the preparatory classes. For the year under notice, 64·1 per cent. of the children belonging to the schools were presented in standards, and the proportion of children in the preparatory classes had fallen to 35·9 per cent. These changes show a large improvement in the proportion of children who are now receiving a higher standard of education than was possible even a few years ago, but they do not represent fully the advance that has been made. It is in the character of education where the progress, in my judgment, has been most beneficial and effective.

My predecessor as Inspector in this district is still with us, and every influence of his could only operate upon the children for their good, but up to the year 1878 the teaching material was absent, and it is in this direction the schools have benefited most. I would now draw a contrast between the teachers of the old type and the new, not between those who possess a certificate and those who do not, but certainly in these days most of the teachers are themselves examples worthy of imitation by their pupils, and it is here that the education is worthy of encouragement and praise. That the teachers toil hard for the mental and in some measure for the physical training of their pupils I am well assured, but the moral aspect, which is the most permanent form of school influence in its direct bearing upon character, has become of prime importance in the schools. But with all the progress made it seems to me that the work done in the building of schools, training of teachers, raising the standard of attainment, and improving the moral tone and influence that go to form character are only preparatory to what yet remains to be done and is possible of being done for the future of the district. The schools are in the condition when a